

DATA LABEL: PUBLIC



## **LIVINGSTON SOUTH LOCAL AREA COMMITTEE**

### **HOUSING CUSTOMER AND BUILDING SERVICES**

#### **REPORT BY HEAD OF HOUSING, CUSTOMER AND BUILDING SERVICES**

##### **A. PURPOSE OF REPORT**

To provide the Local Area Committee with an overview of the service activities within the Livingston South Ward.

##### **B. RECOMMENDATION**

The Local Area Committee is asked to note Housing, Customer and Building Service activity as detailed in the ward report for the period Quarter 3 - 1<sup>st</sup> October 2020 to 31<sup>st</sup> December 2020.

##### **C. SUMMARY OF IMPLICATIONS**

<b>I Council Values</b>	Focusing on our customers' needs. Being honest, open and accountable. Providing equality of opportunities. Making best use of our resources. Working in partnership.
<b>II Policy and Legal (including Strategic Environmental Assessment, Equality Issues, Health or Risk Assessment)</b>	Housing (Scotland) Act 2001 Housing (Scotland) Act 2010
<b>III Implications for Scheme of Delegations to Officers</b>	None
<b>IV Impact on performance and performance Indicators</b>	There is no impact
<b>V Relevance to Single Outcome Agreement</b>	There are positive impact on the following SOA indicators:  SOA4 – we live in resilient, cohesive and safe communities  SOA8 – we make the most effective use of resources by minimising our impact on the built and natural environment
<b>VI Resources - (Financial, Staffing and Property)</b>	None

**VII Consideration at PDSP** Yes

**VIII Other consultations** N/A

## D. TERMS OF REPORT

### D1. Housing Performance Information

The purpose of this report is to provide the Local Area Committee with an overview of the activities of Housing, Customer and Building Services, specific to the Livingston South Ward.

#### Property Void & Let Performance: Mainstream Tenancies

Void Period	Oct 20	%	Nov 20	%	Dec 20	%	WL Target %
0-2 weeks	0	0%	0	0%	0	0%	55%
2-4 weeks	0	0%	0	0%	1	12.5%	30%
4+ weeks	5	100%	1	100%	7	87.5%	15%
<b>Total Lets</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>100%</b>

#### Property Void & Let Performance: Temporary Tenancies

Void Period	Oct 20	%	Nov 20	%	Dec 20	%	WL Target %
0-2 weeks	1	33.3%	0	0%	1	50%	55%
2-4 weeks	1	33.3%	2	100%	0	0%	30%
4+ weeks	1	33.4%	0	0%	1	50%	15%
<b>Total Lets</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>100%</b>

Delays in re-letting can occur for a variety of reasons. The type or location of the property, the completion of void work or the identification of additional works not visible during the initial inspection and time taken ensuring that vulnerable persons are supported through the viewing and sign up process. Some of our applicants have specific support requirements which require detailed planning and co-ordination by both social work and housing services prior to tenancy commencement.

There was 14 Mainstream Lets and 7 Temporary Tenancy Lets during the Quarter

## D2. Arrears Performance

For the Livingston South ward the collection rate for the YTD in Q3 remains excellent at 98.7%.

Livingston South has collected £4,382,676 vs a charge of £4,440,133.

The overall increased arrears in comparison to last year are as a result of Full Service Universal Credit being introduced in West Lothian from May 2018, along with other Welfare Benefit reforms and the current economic climate.

In the same week last year Livingston South ward had 89 Universal Credit (UC) households. Since then the number of UC households has increased by 251.7%.

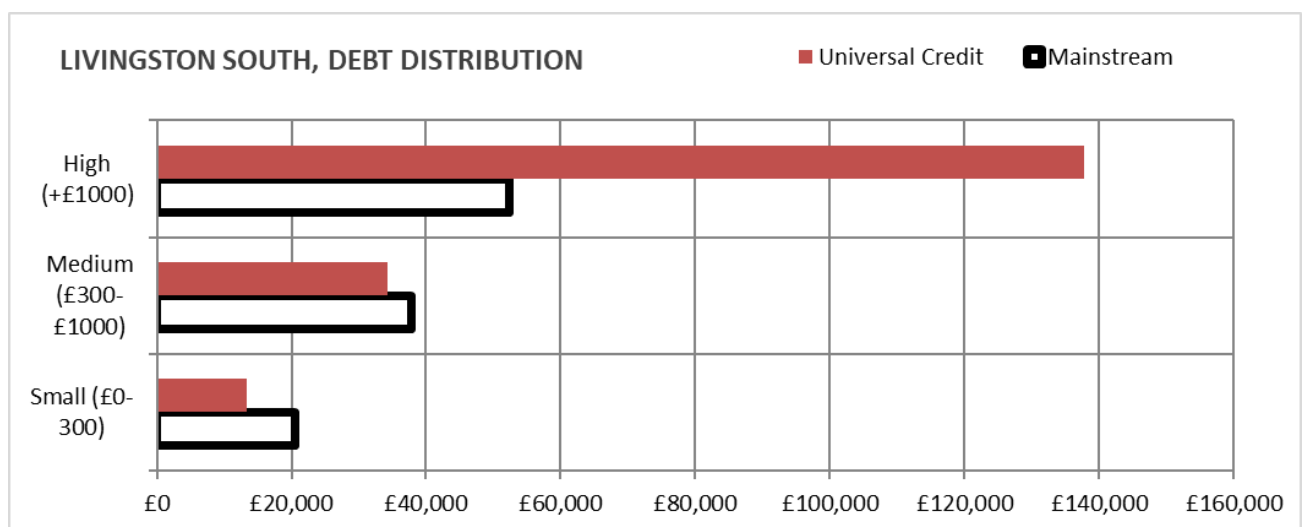
The number of tenancies in arrears in this ward has decreased by 72 since last year. Small debt cases (£300 or less), account for 56.2% of households.

There are 87 serious arrears cases (+£1000 in arrears). These cases are 17.1% of all households in arrears in this area, containing 64.2% of the debt.

The arrears position for Livingston South Q3 is £296,203. This is a decrease of -£54,707 on last year's position. The West Lothian overall position is currently £3,300,988.

During the course of this year we plan to focus on the following:

- Making best use of resources by considering communicating more with customers through SMS, email and telephone.
- Benchmarking with other local authorities to ensure we identify and consider implementing any best practice.
- Performance Monitoring and Reporting will be reviewed and where appropriate streamlined to ensure information is meaningful and robust to assist with improving rent arrears due.
- Promote Alternative payment methods, particularly the Tenant's Self Service Portal

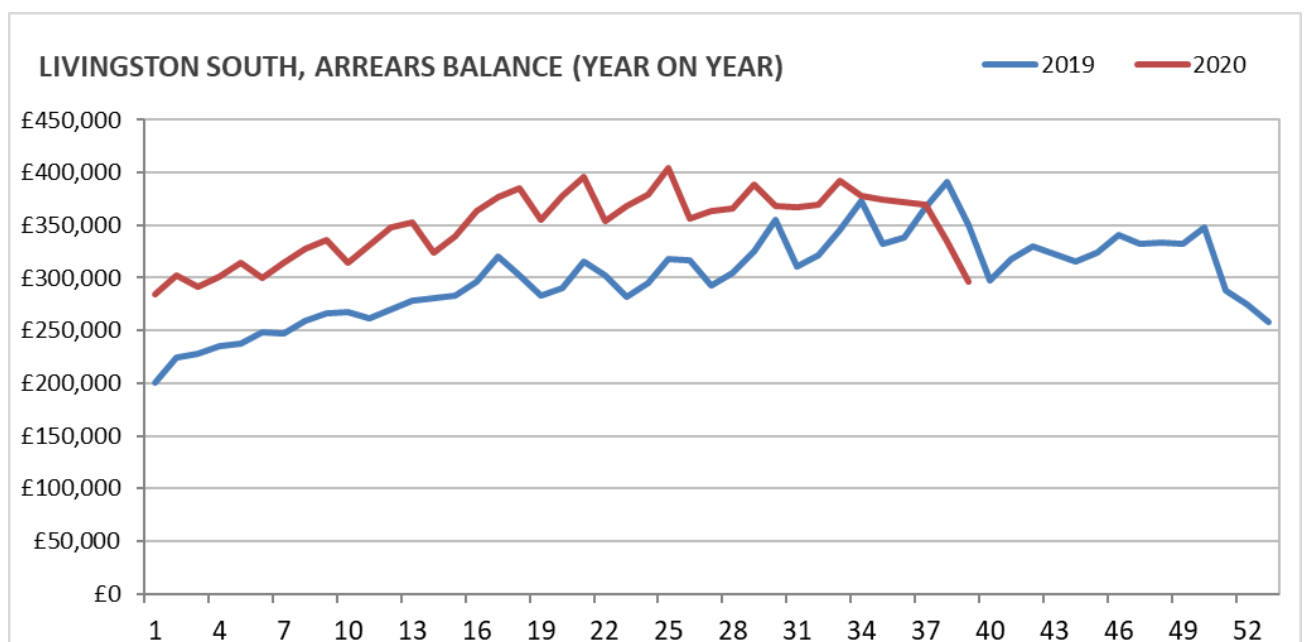


	2019/20 (WK39)				2020/21 (WK39)			
	Mainstream		UC		Mainstream		UC	
Arrears Banding	Balance	#	Balance	#	Balance	#	Balance	#
£0.01 to £99.99	£7,117	161	£224	5	£5,367	107	£2,175	38
£100.00 to £299.99	£30,774	166	£4,186	20	£15,211	83	£11,258	58
£300.00 to £499.99	£32,666	83	£5,079	12	£13,094	34	£12,784	33
£500.00 to £749.99	£17,436	29	£10,376	16	£13,607	22	£17,265	29
£750.00 to £999.99	£26,233	31	£8,195	9	£11,067	13	£4,253	5
£1000.00 to £1999.99	£23,358	17	£25,922	17	£22,858	16	£54,078	37
£2000+	£12,525	5	£28,815	10	£29,549	10	£83,636	24
<b>Group Total</b>	<b>£150,109</b>	<b>492</b>	<b>£82,796</b>	<b>89</b>	<b>£110,754</b>	<b>285</b>	<b>£185,449</b>	<b>224</b>
<b>Movement</b>					(-) £39,355	(-) 207	(+) £102,653	(+) 135

**Overall Total**  
**Overall Movement**

**£232,905**    **581**

**£296,203**    **509**  
(+) £63,297    (-) 72



### D3. Livingston Team Activity.

Officers in the team in Q3 have been working from home as a result of lockdown measures. Officers initially were making contacting with as many tenants as possible to officer advice and assistance to ensure that any support and guidance was given and signposting to other services such as Advice Shop and Foodbank.

The focus on rent arrears activity has continued to be a weekly priority task for the team and will continue to work with all our tenants in offering the support, advice and assistance. Such assistance includes referrals for money and debt advice, benefit health checks, completion of income and expenditure to help set up a sustainable payment plan and where appropriate, assist with applications for Discretionary Housing Payments. Officers have also been doing targetted work to encourage tenants to update their universal credit journals as many have not updated their housing costs in April following the rent increase meaning they are losing out on money they are entitled to.

During Quarter 3 whilst we have continued in the main with home working for staff, we have required to mobilise more officers in order we could progress requests for mutual exchanges and other essential housing management tasks which has required a presence within the office/community,

whilst adhering to health and safety measures. This has been a challenging time for the service and we have worked with our Health & Safety advise and Trade Unions to ensure we have safe operating systems, risk assessments and personal protection equipment so that we are safe guarding our staff whilst undertaking key essential tasks at this time

#### D4. New Build Housing

<b>WLC New Build Activity</b>	<b>Site</b>	<b>No of units</b>	<b>Site Start</b>	<b>No. of Houses Handed Over</b>	<b>Site Completion</b>
WLC	Almond Link	20	Feb-16	20	Apr-17
WLC	Lammermuir	44	Jun-16	44	Jan-19
WLC	Almondvale Stadium	37	Aug-17	37	Oct-19
WLC	Eagle Brae	29	Jan-21	0	Mar-22
WLC	Old School Lane (Brucefield)	33	July-19	33	Nov-20
WLC	Wellhead, Murieston	42	2021/22	0	TBC
<b>RSL New Build Activity</b>	<b>Site</b>	<b>No of Units</b>	<b>Site Start</b>	<b>No of Units Handed Over</b>	<b>Site Completion</b>
West Lothian Housing Partnership	Kirk Lane	6	Sep-19	6	Mar-20
West Lothian Housing Partnership	Almondvale	146	Mar-19	0	Sept-21
Almond Housing Association	Cloverbank, Ladywell	12	Sep-19	12	Nov-20
Places for People	Quentin Court	18	Dec-18	0	June-21
Places for People	Brotherton Farm	23	Mar-19	23	July -20
Ark Housing Association	Crusader Rise	20	2021/22	0	TBC
Places for People	Wellhead, Murieston	28	TBC	0	TBC

## **D5. Tenant Participation Update October to December 2020**

During the Autumn months, the TP Team continued to carry out the schedule of meetings with tenants using online resources to ensure TP continues in all aspects of service delivery.

### **Tenants Panel**

Tenant members continued to take part in monthly meetings with senior managers and the Head of Service, discussing service improvements and developments as well as receiving updates from each service area on implementing the changes imposed by the pandemic to deliver services and changes to working protocols. Members have also been involved in performance scrutiny, questioning information and results over this period.

### **Capital & Repairs Working Group (CaRs)**

Managers from Building Services and the Strategy & Development Team met with tenant members to discuss major improvement works, update them on the various projects being carried out and share benchmark information. These meetings ensure that tenants views are taken onboard and offers another method of scrutinising service delivery.

### **Tenant Participation Development Working Group (TPDWG)**

Members meet to ensure TP stays high on the services agenda, looking at ways of engaging with more tenants. They have also been reviewing the current TP Strategy with an emphasise on digital engagement and inclusion. The TP Team have carried out a review of the roles and remit of each group and discussed this with members for their understanding and approval.

### **Editorial Panel**

With the use of Adobe Reader, members are now able to review publications and propose changes online prior to meeting. This was carried out with them in September/October for the services annual Landlord Report, detailing performance information from across the service relating to the Indicators contained in the Annual Return on the Charter; a requirement of the Scottish Housing Regulator.

### **Scottish Government Consultation**

Tenants were supported by staff from Housing Need and TP Team to complete a consultation document from the Scottish Government on the Modifying of Local Connection Referrals. This was completed, agreed and submitted online in just one meeting.

### **Review of website**

The TP Team commenced a review of the TP pages within the council's website which will be discussed and agreed with the Editorial Panel in the new year before changes are made to ensure they are current and relevant to the work we are carrying out.

### **TP Facebook Group**

The TP team continue to see a steady rise in the number of tenants following posts on the TP Facebook Group Page. The team post useful information from various sources such as Scottish Government, NHS and the Council's Corporate websites as well as queries from tenants and light-hearted quotes and phrases. The team are working with the Tenant Participation Development Working Group to ensure they have a method of communicating with fellow tenants.

### **Tenants Learning & Development Sessions**

Tenant sessions resumed in the latter part of 2020 with tenants joining us virtually to learn about the Scottish Housing Implementation Plan (SHIP) and a session on 'Land Assembly and New Build Terminology'. A new training schedule for 2021 has been developed and we hope to add to the topics that tenants can learn about as we progress.

### **TP Scrutiny sessions with other organisations**

Tenants and officers attended virtual meetings with tenants and officers from other local authorities and housing associations from across Scotland, to share and discuss engagement and scrutiny methods during Covid-19.

### **Tenant Information Services (TIS) Awards Ceremony**

In November, TP staff and tenants joined the first virtual online award ceremony with TIS. With over 150 people celebrating the success and hard work of all those who have carried out TP activity throughout the pandemic and before. Our own Tenant Inspectors were shortlisted for one of these awards for the work they do as Tenant Inspectors, but unfortunately were not successful in lifting the trophy this year.

## **D6. Safer Neighbourhood Team Update**

The Safer Neighbourhood Team (SNT) officers continue to work across the nine multi member ward areas as an integral part of the Community Safety Unit. In all the wards, partnership working involves the local housing team, council officer with the SNT and officers from Police Scotland and the Scottish Fire and Rescue Service all working together to tackle antisocial behaviour. When necessary, the partners will liaise with partners from the voluntary organisations including West Lothian Youth Action Project, Mental Health advisory workers and private landlords in order to reduce antisocial behaviour. The Safer Neighbourhood Team of 9 officers now work in two zones, the East and the West zones. All the officers now deal with noise nuisance calls as part of their working remit to reduce antisocial behaviour (ASB).

The outcome returns for Quarter 3 – October, November and December 2020 are from both teams in the West and East zones. Officers continue to add their details of enquiries/incidents and ASB cases onto the Open Housing system.

During Quarter 3, the Covid19 pandemic continued to have an impact on the service that officers were able to provide although constraints were lifted slightly and under Tier 3 restrictions. During October 2020, Service Recovery Plans enabled the Safer Neighbourhood Team Officers to be able to be mobilised within the communities again and have the ability to take formal legal action where necessary for some enquiries. Officers worked a blended model of working, carrying out some home working as well as office and community-based work for enquiries.

Within the communities and within agreed safety guidelines, SNT officers could speak to complainers and alleged perpetrators, gather witness statements and evidence for enquiries and be able to witness some antisocial behaviour. They were also able to (distantly) meet with Police and other partners for joint visits. Police Scotland contact is via 101 and the calls are triaged by their call centre. There is no direct contact number the SNT officers use however as they work in partnership shifts with Police Scotland access to Police Scotland for joint visits or information is not an issue as they are both based in the Civic Centre and actions/responses are working timeously.

From home, officers continued to provide a telephone service were able to telephone complainers and alleged perpetrators as well as corresponding with written letters and e-mails. They have

provided advice and assistance, telephone mediation, issued warning letters where there was evidence to do so and increase partnership working.

The outcomes that officers still managed to achieve throughout the lockdown measures are set out below:-

### **Joint Working**

SNT liaised with Police relating to ongoing antisocial behaviour complaints regarding an address in Dedridge.

### **Noise**

Noise complaints were received from home owners in Murieston reporting DIY noise from a property which had recently changed owners. The noise had been ongoing for 6 weeks and was happening late in the evening and all weekend. The Safer Neighbourhood Officer agreed to have speak with the new owner to try and ascertain if there was an end date in sight and to make them aware of the disturbance they were causing. After discussion with the new owner, no further reports of noise have been received. The case will be monitored.

### **General**

No other significant issues have been reported within the ward. Enquiries dealt with by way of general advice being given on how to report any future incidents. Minor neighbour disputes have been reported, following advice being given there have not been repeat reports for most enquiries.

## **E. CONCLUSION**

To note the contents of the report.

## **F. BACKGROUND REFERENCES**

None

Appendices/Attachments:

None

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Date: 11<sup>th</sup> February 2021



