

DATA LABEL: PUBLIC



**LIVINGSTON NORTH 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 North 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 4 1<sup>st</sup> January 2021 – 31<sup>st</sup> March 2021.

**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
<b>VII Consideration at PDSP</b>	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 North ward.

Housing staff have been working from home as a result of the Covid19 measures, however we have deployed a small number of officers who have been working alongside our central void team in order to ensure that our properties were being re let and ensuring that we were meeting our duty under homeless legislation in providing temporary accommodation.

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

Void Period	Jan 2021	%	Feb 2021	%	March 2021	%	WL Target %
0-2 weeks	0	0%	1	33.3%	0	0%	55%
2-4 weeks	1	50%	0	0%	0	0%	30%
4+ weeks	1	50%	2	66.7%	2	100%	15%
<b>Total Lets</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>100%</b>

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

Void Period	Jan 2021	%	Feb 2021	%	March 2021	%	WL Target %
0-2 weeks	2	40%	0	0%	4	80%	55%
2-4 weeks	2	40%	0	0%	0	0%	30%
4+ weeks	1	20%	0	0%	1	20%	15%
<b>Total Lets</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0%</b>	<b>5</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. Ensuring that vulnerable persons are appropriately supported through the viewing and sign up process can also add to timeframes. 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.

## D2. Livingston North - Financial Summary

For the Livingston North ward the collection rate for the YTD in Q4 remains excellent at 98.9%. Livingston North has collected £6,311,148 vs a charge of £6,384,478.

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 North ward had 140 Universal Credit (UC) households. Since then the number of UC households has increased by 155.7%.

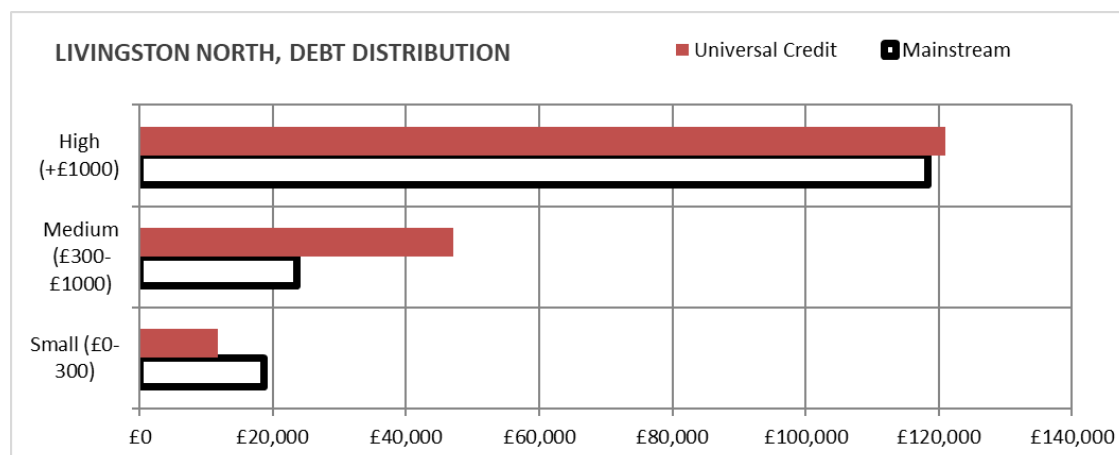
The number of tenancies in arrears in this ward has decreased by 7 since last year. Small debt cases (£300 or less), account for 51.8% of households.

There are 107 serious arrears cases (+£1000 in arrears). These cases are 22.7% of all households in arrears in this area, containing 70.3% of the debt.

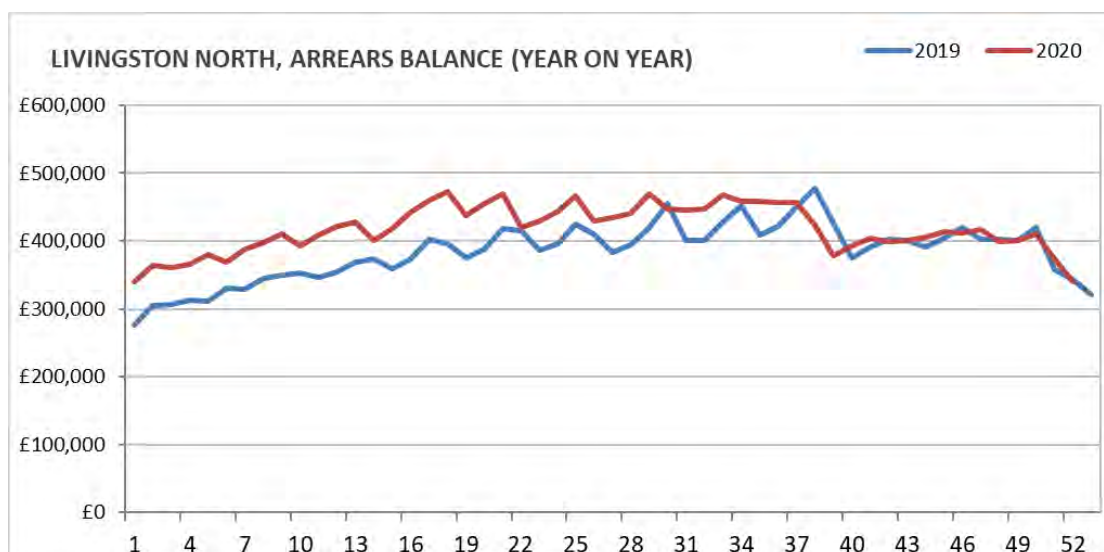
The arrears position for Livingston North Q4 is £340,589. This is an increase of -£2,439 on last year's position. The West Lothian overall position is currently £2,978,530.

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 (WK52)				2020/21 (WK52)			
	Mainstream		UC		Mainstream		UC	
Arrears Banding	Balance	Cases	Balance	Cases	Balance	Cases	Balance	Cases
£0.01 to £99.99	£5,129	114	£1,072	19	£3,162	83	£1,631	29
£100.00 to £299.99	£17,168	95	£4,904	26	£15,589	80	£10,202	52
£300.00 to £499.99	£17,242	43	£10,453	26	£6,093	16	£9,993	26
£500.00 to £749.99	£13,330	22	£11,552	18	£10,974	18	£20,149	33
£750.00 to £999.99	£15,508	18	£10,202	12	£6,497	7	£16,965	20
£1000.00 to £1999.99	£35,999	26	£41,967	30	£32,816	25	£53,140	39
£2000+	£60,459	20	£31,507	9	£85,474	24	£67,905	19
<b>Group Total</b>	<b>£164,835</b>	<b>338</b>	<b>£111,657</b>	<b>140</b>	<b>£160,604</b>	<b>253</b>	<b>£179,985</b>	<b>218</b>
<b>Movement</b>					(-) £4,231	(-) 85	(+) £68,329	(+) 78
<b>Overall Total</b>			<b>£276,491</b>	<b>478</b>			<b>£340,589</b>	<b>471</b>
<b>Overall Movement</b>							(+) £64,098	(-) 7



### D3 Livingston North Area Team Activity

Officers in the team have over the period in Q4 been working from home as a result of lockdown measures. Officers initially were contacting as many tenants as possible to offer 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 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 plans and, where appropriate, assist with applications for Discretionary Housing Payments. Officers have also been doing targeted 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 4 whilst we have continued in the main with home working for staff, we have required to mobilise more officers in order to progress requests for mutual exchanges and

other essential housing management tasks. This 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 adviser 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. Capital Programme and New Build Council 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	Appleton Parkway	10	Nov-16	10	Sep-17
WLC	Deans South Phase 1	54	Mar-17	54	Apr-19
WLC	Deans South Phase 2	29	Mar -21	0	Apr-22

#### **Deans South Update**

Planning permission has been granted for 29 units for phase two of the new council housing at Deans South. Tenders have been returned for the building project and a contractor has been appointed, with a site start agreed for May 2021. Some enabling site investigations and utilities investigation work commenced on site in April 2021.

The planning application for the supported housing for young people was refused in February 2021. Alternative options for the development are being considered.

The conclusion of missives for the sale of land at Deans South is progressing and is anticipated to be concluded soon. The titles across the site are complex and as a result there was a delay in obtaining an accurate disposition plan however this has now been agreed and conclusion of missives is being progressed.

#### **D5. Tenant Participation**

During the winter 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. Building Services provided an overview of Complaints, Processes & Analysis at the January meeting and the Central Void Team (CVT)

pilot in March; tenant representatives were very impressed with the way the CVT are processing void properties.

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 February/March for the spring edition of Tenants News, which will be solely published online on the council website in April 2021. The Editorial Panel have also been involved in reviewing letters and online information intended for tenants, with regard to the new Housing Allocations Policy

### **Consultations**

Tenants were supported by staff from Housing, Strategy & Development and the TP Team to complete two consultation in January and February. The first from the Scottish Housing Regulator on the EESSH" Indicators for the Annual Return on the Charter and the second on New Build Heat Standard Consultation. These were completed, agreed and submitted online during the course of the meetings.

### **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 Panel New Build Planning & Progress Meeting**

Housing, Strategy and Development met with the members of the Tenants Panel to provide an update on the progress and planning of current and future new build sites. The Panel will meet six monthly for updates on these projects.

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

A session was held in March on the Rapid Rehousing Transition Plan to update tenants on progress made against the plan and to discuss future planning. Further virtual sessions have been planned on various topics up to July this year.

### **Team Meetings**

Weekly Performance and Change (P&C) meetings have allowed team members an opportunity to meet via WebEx and catch up with colleagues and discuss workloads and priorities. As a close-knit team where work can cross over to various members, this catch up

time gives everyone an opportunity to find out what work is being carried out and where they may be able to assist.

## **D6. Safer Neighbourhood Council Officer Ward Information**

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 work in two zones, the East and the West zones whilst at the same time, cover all areas whilst on shift. 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 4 – January, February, March 2021 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 4, the Covid19 pandemic continued to have an impact on the service that officers were able to provide although constraints were lifted slightly during the restrictions. Since October 2020, when Service Recovery Plans enabled the Safer Neighbourhood Team Officers to be able to be mobilised again, SNT officers have had the ability to take formal legal action where necessary for some enquiries. Officers have continued to work a blended model of working, carrying out some home working as well as office and community-based work for enquiries.

Within 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.

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: -

### **Warnings**

A counter complaint was received regarding noise from a tenant who was previously served a 2<sup>nd</sup> Stage warning. Further advice was provided on reporting any further issues.

A joint visit was carried out with a Community PC for an intervention with a family who are a WLC tenant. The visit went well with the family taking on board the warnings and advice.

### **Mediation**

Mediation has been offered in relation to a neighbourhood dispute at Knightsridge regarding a parking dispute.

## **Advice**

Advice was given on reporting ongoing issues to the Police re a neighbour parking their car on a pavement and advice was given to another complainer relating to congregating youths causing damage.

## **E. CONCLUSION**

This has been a challenging period where officers have been adapting to working from home, embracing new ways of working and change.

Officers have been providing advice and assistance to tenants and customers and working with colleagues in other services areas to ensure that service delivery continued as far as possible.

## **F. BACKGROUND REFERENCES**

None

Contact Person: Sandy Ross, Housing Manager, Housing, Customer and Building Services

Email; Sandy.ross@[westlothian.gov.uk](mailto:Sandy.ross@westlothian.gov.uk)

Tel: 01506 283973

Date: 7<sup>th</sup> May 2021



