

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 4 - 1st January 2021 to 31st March 2021.

C. SUMMARY OF IMPLICATIONS

I Council Values	Focusing on our customers' needs. Being honest, open and accountable. Providing equality of opportunities. Making best use of our resources. Working in partnership.
II Policy and Legal (including Strategic Environmental Assessment, Equality Issues, Health or Risk Assessment)	Housing (Scotland) Act 2001 Housing (Scotland) Act 2010
III Implications for Scheme of Delegations to Officers	None
IV Impact on performance and performance Indicators	There is no impact
V Relevance to Single Outcome Agreement	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
VI Resources - (Financial, Staffing and Property)	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	Jan 21	%	Feb 21	%	Mar 21	%	WL Target %
0-2 weeks	0	0%	1	25%	1	33.3%	55%
2-4 weeks	0	0%	0	0%	0	0%	30%
4+ weeks	4	100%	3	75%	2	66.7%	15%
Total Lets	4	100%	4	100%	3	100%	100%

Property Void & Let Performance: Temporary Tenancies

Void Period	Jan 21	%	Feb 21	%	Mar 21	%	WL Target %
0-2 weeks	0	0%	1	100%	0	0%	55%
2-4 weeks	4	100%	0	0%	1	33.3%	30%
4+ weeks	0	0%	0	0%	2	66.7%	15%
Total Lets	4	100%	1	100%	3	100%	100%

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 11 Mainstream Lets and 8 Temporary Tenancy Lets during the Quarter

D2. Arrears Performance – Financial Summary.

For the Livingston South ward the collection rate for the YTD in Q4 remains excellent at 99.1%. Livingston South has collected £5,717,164 vs a charge of £5,770,167.

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 186 Universal Credit (UC) households. Since then the number of UC households has increased by .0%.

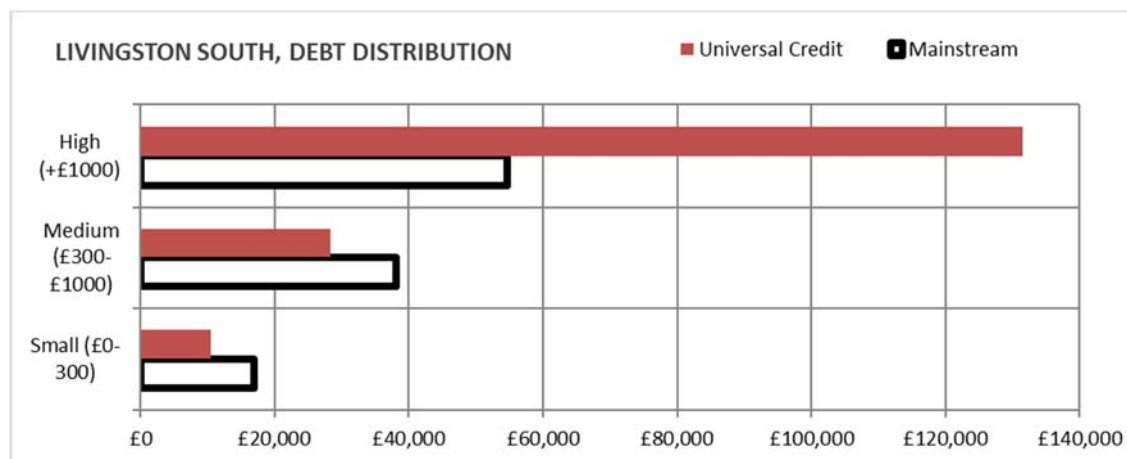
The number of tenancies in arrears in this ward has decreased by 14 since last year. Small debt cases (£300 or less), account for 51.8% of households.

There are 80 serious arrears cases (+£1000 in arrears). These cases are 19.3% of all households in arrears in this area, containing 66.5% of the debt.

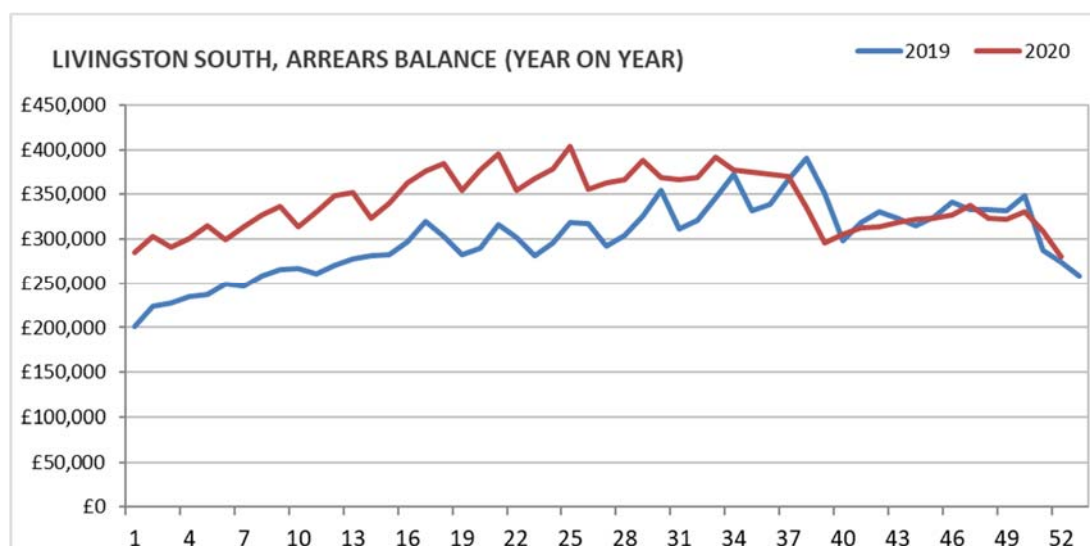
The arrears position for Livingston South Q4 is £280,062. This is an increase of £21,569 on last year's position. The West Lothian overall position is currently £2,978,530.

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



Arrears Banding	2019/20 (WK53)				2020/21 (WK52)			
	Mainstream		UC		Mainstream		UC	
	Balance	Cases	Balance	Cases	Balance	Cases	Balance	Cases
£0.01 to £99.99	£3,458	83	£945	18	£2,556	61	£1,377	32
£100.00 to £299.99	£14,533	75	£7,775	41	£14,320	75	£9,185	47
£300.00 to £499.99	£11,595	30	£14,364	37	£12,416	32	£8,627	23
£500.00 to £749.99	£10,752	18	£14,930	25	£13,786	23	£10,321	17
£750.00 to £999.99	£7,946	9	£10,359	12	£11,837	14	£9,436	11
£1000.00 to £1999.99	£31,900	21	£36,757	27	£18,167	13	£33,217	25
£2000+	£19,333	7	£73,846	26	£36,483	11	£98,333	31
Group Total	£99,518	243	£158,976	186	£109,565	229	£170,497	186
Movement					(+) £10,048	(-) 14	(+) £11,522	(+) 0
Overall Total			£258,493	429			£280,062	415
Overall Movement							(+) £21,569	(-) 14



D3. Livingston Team Activity.

Officers in the team in Q4 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 4 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

WLC New Build Activity	Site	No of units	Site Start	No. of Houses Handed Over	Site Completion
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	Apr-21	0	May-22
WLC	Brucefield	33	Jul-19	16	Dec-20
RSL New Build Activity	Site	No of Units	Site Start	No of Units Handed Over	Site Completion
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, Polbeth	23	Mar-19	23	Aug-20

D5. Tenant Participation Update Q 4 January – March 2021

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 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 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.

Noise

A joint visit with a Community PC to a noise complaint resulted in the issue being monitored by the SNT.

General

SNT provided advice to a customer who was reporting issues regarding problem tenancy issues with a new neighbour.

Warnings

A first warning was served on a private tenant in Dedridge, and the Landlord contacted, who was receptive to dealing with the complaint

E. CONCLUSION

To note the contents of the report.

F. BACKGROUND REFERENCES

None

Appendices/Attachments:

None

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