

DATA LABEL: PUBLIC



ARMADALE & BLACKRIDGE 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 Armadale & Blackridge 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 Armadale & Blackridge ward.

To ensure that our properties are being re-let and that we were meeting our duty under homeless legislation, the Housing Team has continued throughout the Covid19 pandemic prioritising resources to complete the letting process for both temporary and mainstream properties.

Property Void & Let Performance: Mainstream Tenancies

Void Period	Jan 2021	%	Feb 2021	%	March 2021	%	WL Target %
0-2 weeks	3	42.86%	2	33.3%	5	50%	55%
2-4 weeks	0	0%	1	16.7%	0	0%	30%
4+ weeks	4	57.1%	3	50%	5	50%	15%
Total Lets	7	100%	6	100%	10	100%	100%

Property Void & Let Performance: Temporary Tenancies

Void Period	Jan 2021	%	Feb 2021	%	March 2021	%	WL Target %
0-2 weeks	1	50%	0	0%	1	20%	55%
2-4 weeks	1	50%	2	66.7%	2	40%	30%
4+ weeks	0	0%	1	33.3%	2	40%	15%
Total Lets	2	100%	3	100%	5	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. 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.

There were 32 policy voids in the ward for this period, 4 less than last reporting period.

Void period	Number of properties	PV reasons
<4 weeks	5	1 bathroom upgrade 2 tampered meters 1 asbestos removal 1 woodworm / bathroom upgrade
4 – 12 weeks	5	1 flood 4 kitchen / bathroom upgrades / electrical issues
13 – 16 weeks	4	1 kitchen upgrade 1 electrical issue / bathroom upgrade 1 Bathville 1 held for decant
26+ weeks	18	2 structural issues; 12 Bathville; 3 held for decant 1 held for legal purposes

D2. Arrears

For the Armadale and Blackridge ward the collection rate for the YTD in Q4 remains excellent at 99.2%. Armadale and Blackridge has collected £6,312,855 vs a charge of £6,364,341.

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 Armadale and Blackridge ward had 298 Universal Credit (UC) households. Since then the number of UC households has decreased by 10.1%.

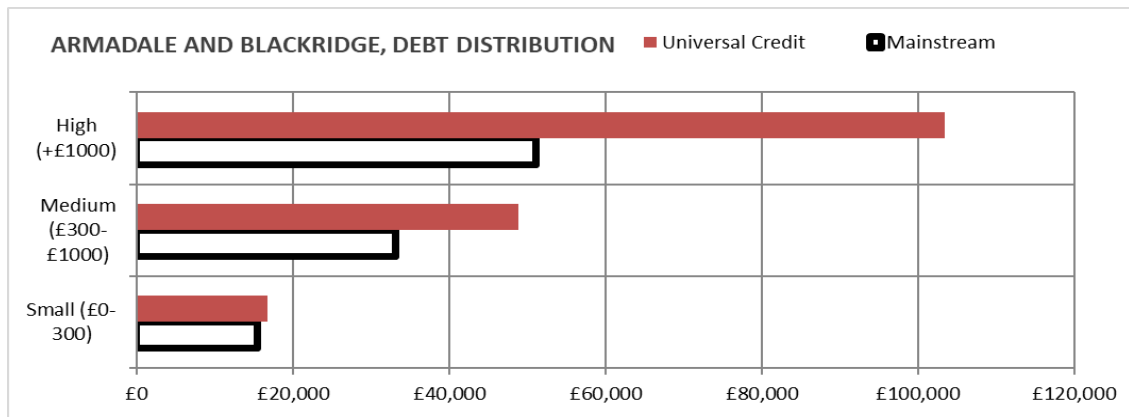
The number of tenancies in arrears in this ward has decreased by 57 since last year. Small debt cases (£300 or less), account for 54.4% of households.

There are 82 serious arrears cases (+£1000 in arrears). These cases are 16.3% of all households in arrears in this area, containing 57.5% of the debt.

The arrears position for Armadale and Blackridge Q4 is £268,774. This is an increase of £11,737 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

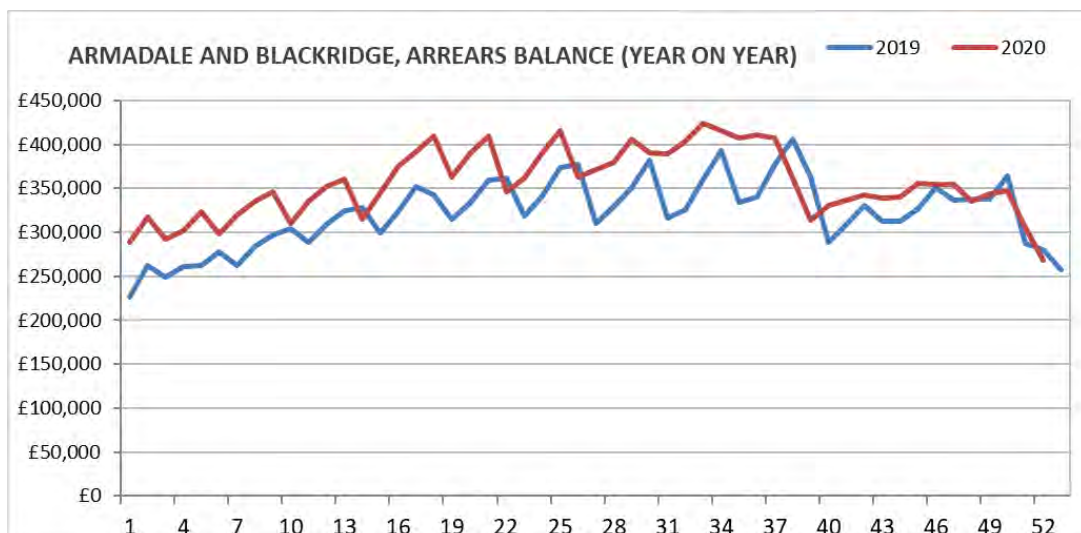


Arrears Banding	2019/20 (WK53)				2020/21 (WK52)			
	Mainstream		UC		Mainstream		UC	
	Balance	Cases	Balance	Cases	Balance	Cases	Balance	Cases
£0.01 to £99.99	£3,932	91	£1,459	30	£3,417	80	£2,905	59
£100.00 to £299.99	£12,931	71	£16,477	91	£11,968	64	£13,877	70
£300.00 to £499.99	£18,950	50	£16,881	45	£13,001	33	£13,979	35
£500.00 to £749.99	£15,181	25	£30,152	48	£15,201	26	£15,107	24
£750.00 to £999.99	£10,083	11	£23,527	27	£4,955	6	£19,821	23
£1000.00 to £1999.99	£14,403	11	£65,859	49	£22,061	16	£59,797	44
£2000+	£4,912	2	£22,289	8	£29,085	9	£43,599	13
Group Total	£80,392	261	£176,645	298	£99,689	234	£169,084	268
Movement					(+) £19,297	(-) 27	(-) £7,560	(-) 30

Overall Total
Overall Movement

£257,037 **559**

£268,774 **502**
(+) £11,737 (-) 57



D4 Armadale Area Team Activity

Officers in the team continue to work from home as a result of Covid 19 lockdown measures, to safeguard staff and tenants. However, essential housing management tasks are being prioritised and Duty Officers ensure that these are being completed timeously in accordance with health and safety measures, risk assessments and safe operating procedures.

D5. Capital Programme and New Build Council Housing

WLC New Build Activity	Site	No of units	Site Start	No. of houses handed over	Site Completion
WLC	Mayfield, Armadale	22	Aug-16	22	Nov-18
WLC	Bathville Cross Phase 2	3	Apr-16	3	Oct-18
WLC	Bathville Cross Phase 4	3	Apr-16	0	June-21
RSL Build Activity	Site	No of units	Site Start	No. of Houses Handed Over	Site Completion
Places for People	West Main Street	27	Jan-19	27	Oct-20
Cairn Housing Association	Craiginn Terrace, Blackridge	27	Apr -21	0	TBC

Refurbishment & Investment

Street	Contract	Site Start	Update
Anderson Avenue	Roof & roughcast replacement	17/08/2021	Additional works not initially anticipated and extra Covid related welfare units
Bedlormie	Roof, roughcast & window replacement	01/04/2020	Snagging only
Strathlogie	Heating, roof & roughcast replacement	21/09/2020	Delayed start / slippage

D6. 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 Housing, Strategy & Development Team (HSD) 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 HSD and the TP Team to complete two consultations 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.

D7. 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:-

Warning

A complaint was received re a neighbour behaving in a distressing and intimidating manner whilst under the influence of alcohol. Enquiries were carried out with Police Scotland and neighbours. A first warning was served and no further incidents have been reported.

A call from a customer to report noise nuisance resulted in a verbal warning being administered as the music was not loud enough to be above threshold despite voices being clear and loud.

An interim ASBO has been granted and is live in a case and all complainants have been informed.

Letter Drops

A letter drop was completed in response to complaints about loud music and banging, with no responses received so far.

A letter drop was completed in response to complaints of disturbances in the street and windows smashed. SNT officers are awaiting a response. Similarly, a letter drop was completed in response to a complaint of shouting and arguing but no responses have been received so far.

DATA showing demand and outcomes achieved for the Safer Neighbourhood team are detailed below:

INCIDENTS			
No of All ASB Incidents	Jan	Feb	Mar
Armada & Blackridge	49	42	30
Count of Case/ Ward - new cases opened	Jan	Feb	Mar
Armada & Blackridge	2	3	2

Number of ASBO's in Ward	Interim	ASBO's	Combined Total
Armada	1	1	2

E. CONCLUSION

Officers have experienced a challenging year and have worked hard to ensure that the service delivery to our customers has continued. In relation to our year end income management figure this is a great achievement from everyone involved.

In addition, officers have continued to provide advice and support on a range of issues such as anti-social behaviour, tenancy management, moving into new homes and financial issues.

F. BACKGROUND REFERENCES

None

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11th May 2021