

DATA LABEL: PUBLIC



BATHGATE LOCAL AREA COMMITTEE

HOUSING, CUSTOMER AND BUILDING SERVICES UPDATE

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 Bathgate 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 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 impacts 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 Bathgate 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 to prioritise 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 wks	2	28.57%	2	25%	2	28.57%	55%
2-4 wks	0	0%	0	0%	1	14.3%	30%
4+ wks	5	71.4%	6	75%	4	57.1%	15%
Total Lets	7	100%	8	100%	7	100%	100%

Property Void & Let Performance: Temporary Tenancies

Void Period	Jan 2021	%	Feb 2021	%	March 2021	%	WL Target %
0-2 wks	0	0%	0	0%	0	0%	80%
2-4 wks	0	0%	2	50%	0	0%	15%
4+ wks	2	100%	2	50%	2	100%	5%
Total Lets	2	100%	4	100%	2	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 10 policy voids in the ward for this period, a reduction of 5 from the last reporting period.

Void period	Number of properties	PV reasons
<4 weeks	2	Woodworm & held for legal purposes
4 – 12 weeks	1	Structural work
13 – 16 weeks	3	Structural work, woodworm & bathroom upgrade
26+ weeks	4	Health & Care Committee, surplus to long term requirements x 2 Being used as a decant x 2

D2 Rent Arrears

For the Bathgate ward the collection rate for the YTD in Q4 remains excellent at 99.0%. Bathgate has collected £8,238,964 vs a charge of £8,321,206.

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 Bathgate ward had 250 Universal Credit (UC) households. Since then the number of UC households has decreased by 6.4%.

The number of tenancies in arrears in this ward has decreased by 19 since last year. Small debt cases (£300 or less), account for 59.5% of households.

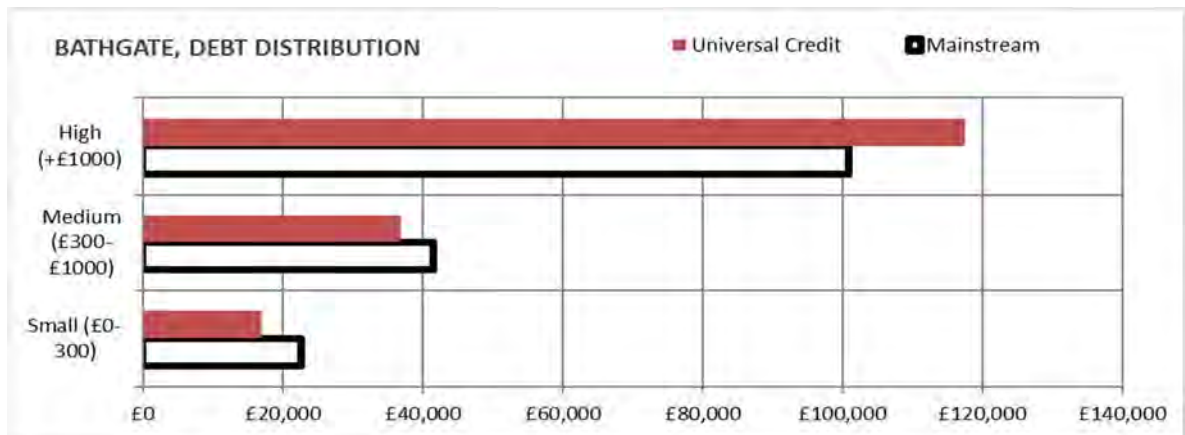
There are 88 serious arrears cases (+£1000 in arrears). These cases are 15.9% of all households in arrears in this area, containing 64.9% of the debt.

The arrears position for Bathgate Q4 is £336,258. This is an increase of £26,406 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 practise

- 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

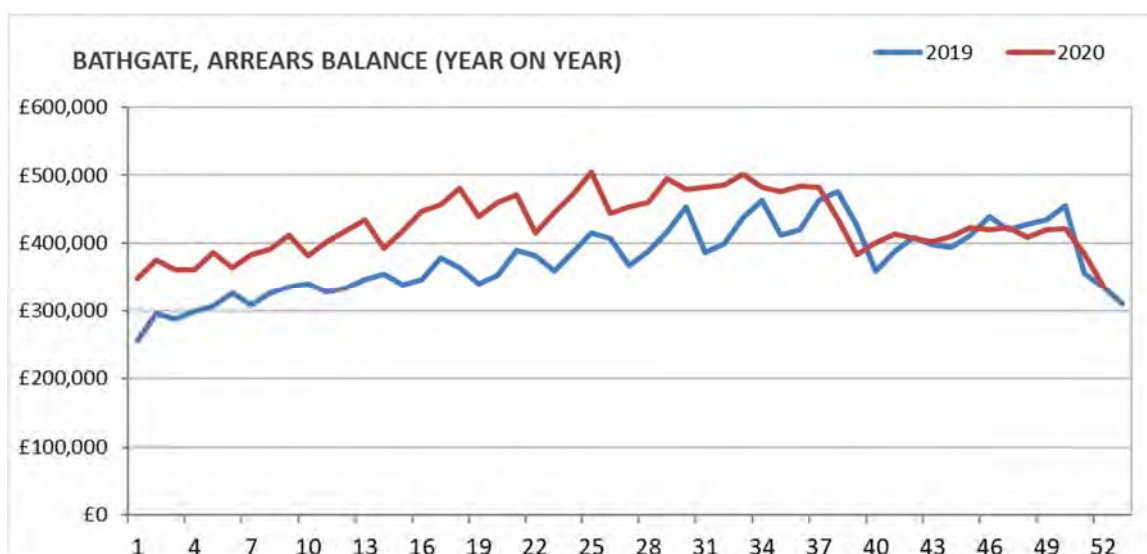


Arrears Banding	2019/20 (WK53)				2020/21 (WK52)			
	Mainstream		UC		Mainstream		UC	
	Balance	Cases	Balance	Cases	Balance	Cases	Balance	Cases
£0.01 to £99.99	£4,685	105	£1,656	35	£5,840	121	£1,972	42
£100.00 to £299.99	£18,390	99	£12,863	64	£16,763	89	£14,948	78
£300.00 to £499.99	£13,702	35	£13,913	36	£10,309	26	£10,598	28
£500.00 to £749.99	£19,216	31	£20,282	34	£20,404	34	£13,444	22
£750.00 to £999.99	£12,390	15	£21,490	25	£10,878	12	£12,806	15
£1000.00 to £1999.99	£36,359	26	£60,236	42	£21,512	15	£35,340	27
£2000+	£38,386	13	£36,285	14	£79,306	24	£82,137	22
Group Total	£143,127	324	£166,725	250	£165,013	321	£171,244	234
Movement					(+) £21,886	(-) 3	(+) £4,520	(-) 16

Overall Total
Overall Movement

£309,852 574

£336,258 555
(+) £26,406 (-) 19



D3. Bathgate 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. This has been a challenging time for the service and we have worked with our Health & Safety advisor 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.

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 2020 following the rent increase meaning they are losing out on money they are entitled to.

D4. Capital Programme and New Build Council Housing

Local New Build Update

WLC New Build Activity	Site	No of units	Site Start	No. of Houses Handed Over	Site Completion
WLC	Standhill	22	Jan-20	0	July-21
WLC	Hopetoun Street (Conversion of former Newlands House)	4	Apr-21	0	Sept-21
WLC	Marjoribanks Street	6	TBC	0	TBC
WLC	Mid Street	5	TBC	0	TBC
RSL Build Activity	Site	No of units	Site Start	No. of Houses Handed Over	Site Completion
West Lothian Housing Partnership	Jarvey Street	42	Mar-17	0	June-21

Street	Works	Update
Balbardie Avenue & Crescent	New roof coverings	Complete
Race Road and Glasgow Road	Roof & roughcast	Minor works to complete

D5. Tenant Participation Update

During the Winter months, the TP Team continue 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 continue 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 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 emphasis 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 consultations in January and February. The first from the Scottish Housing Regulator on the ESSH 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.

D6. Safer Neighbourhood Team

The outcome returns for Quarter 4 – January, February, March 2021. 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 where 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.

INCIDENTS			
No of All ASB Incidents	Jan	Feb	Mar
Bathgate	114	108	81
Count of Case/ Ward - new cases opened	Jan	Feb	Mar
Bathgate	5	4	3

Warnings

Further incidents of a council tenancy being targeted by locals, causing damage and trying to gain entry was received by the SNT. Whilst the tenant was a victim in most of the incidents they were also witnessed causing a disturbance. A warning has been issued due to their behaviour.

A 1st warning was issued to a tenant in the Wester Inch area of Bathgate for a disturbance in the street and since then, no further complaints have been received.

A 2nd and final warning has been issued to a tenant in central Bathgate for creating a disturbance and allowing visitors to do the same. This is being monitored and will be submitted to the Legal team for consideration of an ASBO should complaints continue.

A 1st warning was issued due to information received from Police Scotland when loud music was witnessed following a report by a neighbour. No further incidents have been reported since.

A serious incident was reported by neighbours of a perpetrator involving fire and general ASB. All authorities and relevant services are aware through the weekly TAC process and a 1st warning was issued as a result of the incident.

A 1st warning was served on tenants for incidents relating to shouting, swearing and fighting in the communal areas and repeated COVID breaches.

Letter Drop

Several instances of letter drops being carried out within the area advising customers of reporting mechanisms, should they experience incidents of noise nuisance, resulted in a warning being issued and engagement with a landlord. These have both had a positive effect.

There is 1 interim ASBO in the ward area.

E. CONCLUSION

Officers are now well adapted to working from home and have embraced new ways of working and continued to support vulnerable customers in our communities. In addition, officers have continued to provide advice and support on a range of issues such as anti-social behaviour, moving into new homes and financial issues.

Officers have continued to work with colleagues in other service areas to ensure that service delivery has continued as far as possible.

F. BACKGROUND REFERENCES

None

Appendices/Attachments:

None

Contact Person: Lorraine Donnelly, Housing Manager, Housing, Customer & Building Services

Email: Lorraine.donnelly@westlothian.gov.uk

Tel: 07767754008

Date: 14th June, 2021