

DATA LABEL: PUBLIC



FAULDHOUSE & BREICH VALLEY 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 Fauldhouse & Breich Valley 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 2022.

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 Fauldhouse & Breich Valley 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.

Table 1: Property Void & Let Performance: Mainstream Tenancies

Void Period	Jan 2022	%	Feb 2022	%	Mar 2022	%	WL Target %
0-2 wks	1	16.7%	2	50%	3	37.5%	55%
2-4 wks	0	0%	1	25%	0	0%	30%
4+ wks	5	83.3%	1	25%	5	62.5%	15%
Total Lets	6	100%	4	100%	8	100%	100%

Table 2: Property Void & Let Performance: Temporary Tenancies

Void Period	Jan 2022	%	Feb 2022	%	Mar 2022	%	WL Target %
0-2 wks	0	0%	0	0%	1	20%	55%
2-4 wks	0	0%	4	80%	3	60%	30%
4+ wks	1	100%	1	20%	1	20%	15%
Total Lets	1	100%	5	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 13 policy voids in the ward for this period, 7 more than last reporting period.

Table 3: Policy Voids

Void period	Number of properties	PV reasons
<4 weeks	2	1 – kitchen upgrade 1 – bathroom upgrade
4 – 12 weeks	6	1 – heating upgrade 2 – decants 3 – kitchen and/or bathroom upgrade
13 – 16 weeks	3	1 – legal dispute 2 – kitchen upgrades
26+ weeks	2	2 - decants

D2. Arrears

For the Fauldhouse and Breich Valley ward the collection rate for the Quarter 4 remains excellent at 97.6%. Fauldhouse and Breich Valley has collected £7,312,417 against a charge of £7,494,421.

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 Fauldhouse and Breich Valley ward had 308 Universal Credit (UC) households in arrears. Since then the number of UC households in arrears has increased by 18.8%.

The number of tenancies in arrears in this ward has increased by 52 since last year. Small debt cases (£300 or less), account for 42.6% of households.

There are 180 serious arrears cases (+£1000 in arrears). These cases are 28.2% of all households in arrears in this area, containing 77.9% of the debt.

The arrears position for Fauldhouse and Breich Valley in Quarter 4 is £652,229. This is an increase of £163,473 on last year's position. The West Lothian overall position is currently £3,496,679

Table 4: Distribution of Universal Credit

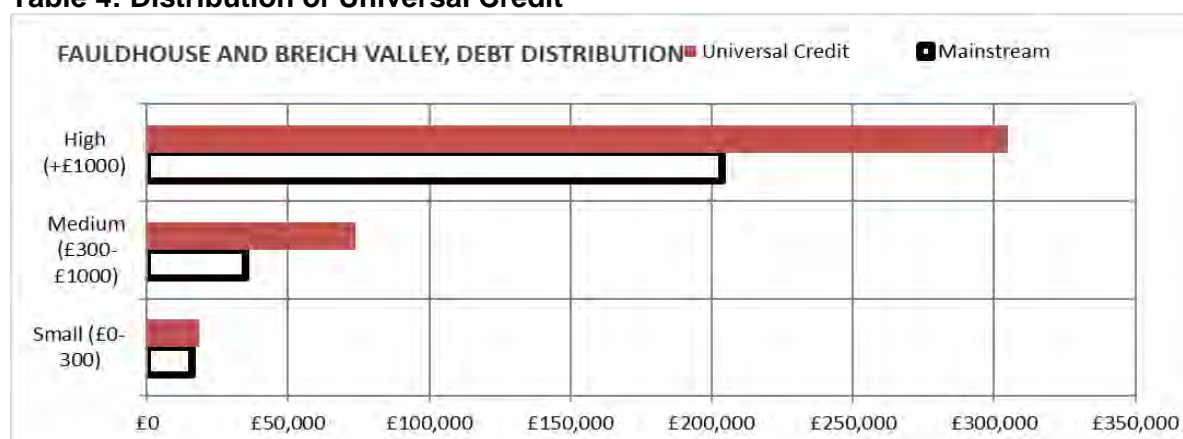
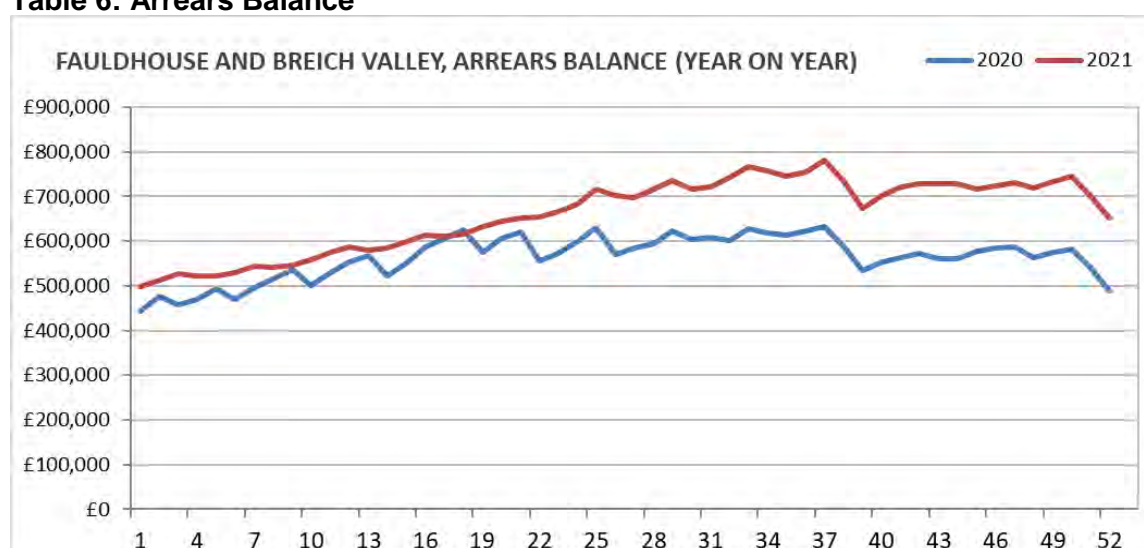


Table 5: Arrears Banding

Arrears Banding	2020/21 (WK52)				2021/22 (WK52)			
	Mainstream		UC		Mainstream		UC	
	Balance	Cases	Balance	Cases	Balance	Cases	Balance	Cases
£0.01 to £99.99	£2,840	77	£2,140	45	£3,664	77	£2,103	45
£100.00 to £299.99	£13,866	77	£13,958	75	£12,499	66	£16,427	84
£300.00 to £499.99	£8,632	23	£15,446	40	£12,415	32	£16,941	44
£500.00 to £749.99	£15,588	25	£22,878	37	£9,288	14	£30,544	49
£750.00 to £999.99	£6,201	7	£15,445	18	£13,407	16	£26,535	31
£1000.00 to £1999.99	£59,106	42	£74,900	52	£49,567	34	£72,722	53
£2000+	£102,224	27	£135,531	41	£154,013	33	£232,103	60
Group Total	£208,457	278	£280,298	308	£254,854	272	£397,375	366
Movement					(+) £46,397	(-) 6	(+) £117,077	(+) 58
Overall Total			£488,755	586			£652,229	638
Overall Movement							(+) £163,473	(+) 52

Table 6: Arrears Balance

During the course of 2022/23 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 income recovery
- Promote alternative payment methods, particularly the Tenant's Self-service Portal

D3 Fauldhuse & Breich Valley Area Team Activity

Officers in the team continue to work from home as a result of Covid19 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 we 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 plan and where appropriate, assist with applications for Discretionary Housing Payments. Contact has also been made to tenants who may qualify for assistance with Tenants Grants Fund and there has been 30 successful cases totalling £34,000.09 as a result.

Officers have been providing assistance and support to tenants to help sustain their tenancies, working to resolve disputes between tenants and other tenancy and estate management issues.

During the period officers have been working closely with colleagues in Building Services, engaging with tenants to ensure that health and safety work has been completed to install the linked smoke detectors.

D4. Capital Programme and New Build Council Housing

Table 7: WLC completions 40

WLC New Build Activity	Site	No of units	Site Start	No. of Houses Handed Over	Site Completion
WLC	Mossend	69	Jul-21	0	TBC
RSL Build Activity	Site	No of units	Site Start	No. of Houses Handed Over	Site Completion
Almond Housing Association	Polbeth Farm, Polbeth	25	Aug - 20	0	March-22

Table 8: Refurbishment & Investment

Street	Contract	Update
20 – 27 Walker Road	Roof & roughcast replacement	Complete
92 – 106 Fallas Place	Roof & roughcast replacement	Ongoing – expected to be complete by June 2022
44 – 58 Fallas Place		First coat of render applied to the block. However, the second coat and roofing works have been delayed due to issues with the asbestos removal contractor
80 – 90 Fallas Place		Work expected to start June 2022 and due to be off site by August 2022 The remaining blocks of flats have owner occupiers who have previously failed to engage to participate in the programmed works. We are

		currently in the process of implementing a tenancy management scheme which will resolve these matters and progress the works 2023/24
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D5. Tenant Participation

Tenant Participation continued throughout Quarter 4 via digital means (Microsoft Teams). We have successfully hired our new Tenant Participation Officer who will start on the 19th April 2022, with their focus being digital and 'e-TP'.

The customer experience team and tenant participation team have worked together to ensure the best possible service is delivered to our tenants. They have jointly implemented improvements and communications such as a spotlight on housing officers, the talking tenant's scheme - where tenants become tenant experts on our digital platforms, and our Next Generation of Tenant Participation Focus Group is soon to be launched.

With changes in the Performance and Change structure, the tenant participation team will sit within the Customers and Communications Team with Customer Experience, Communication, Complaints and Information. This will allow our tenant and customer-focused team to work together to provide a better service to our customers and tenants.

Tenants Panel

Tenant members continued to take part in monthly meetings with senior managers and the Interim Head of Service, discussing service improvements and developments and receiving updates from each service area. The tenants agreed to the meeting schedule for the year. They have been provided with the HRA and Capital Overview and have been involved in performance scrutiny over the quarter.

The tenants have had input in the Scottish Government New Deal for Tenants consultation and the Prevention Consultation.

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) update in March.

These meetings ensure that tenants' views are heard and offer another scrutinising service delivery method.

Tenant Participation Development Working Group (TPDWG)

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

The members are reviewing the whole 'look and feel' of Tenant Participation, which will be mirrored across all Tenant Participation communication and documentation. The 'look and feel' will be implemented to help modernise Tenant Participation and increase engagement.

Editorial Panel

This quarter the members have been involved in the collation of the Spring Tenants News. The members have also reviewed the tenant's handbook online to ensure it is still relevant and current. The handbook will be transferred into an interactive digital handbook for tenants. In addition, the members have been reviewing letters and policies throughout this quarter.

Tenant Participation Facebook Group

The Tenant Participation team continue to see a steady rise in the number of tenants engaging with Facebook posts. The members have recently reviewed what content should be shared on the Facebook page and how the 397 members would like to be involved in Tenant Participation. These discussions have resulted in implementing the tenant's talk scheme, where tenants become experts on our social media platforms. We share our surveys in digital form on the Facebook page for tenants to complete. We will soon be investigating how we can implement focus groups using the Facebook group.

Tenant Participation (TP) continued with all scheduled meetings via Microsoft Teams. The Customer Experience Team is taking forward the development activity for the new Tenant Participation Strategy and tenant members and staff have been encouraged to think about the new Strategy and how they would like to see it developed.

Tenant Participation Development Working Group members meet each month to ensure Tenant Participation remains high on Housing, Customer and Building Services' agenda. Members are working on the new schedules for the coming year, which include Learning and Development sessions, Performance Scrutiny and Editorial Panel.

The **Editorial Panel** helped produce the annual Landlord Report and the winter edition of Tenants News as well as reviewing several new leaflets and the Tenants Handbook which is found online.

The Service has introduced a new Communication Plan to improve on communications. Each service area has a dedicated **Communication Champion** who meets with others on a monthly basis to discuss any relevant information such as changes to policy, up and coming events/developments that is then fed back to their teams. All published communications are discussed and if required can be scheduled into the Editorial Panel Meeting for review. It is hoped this new approach will improve communication within the service and keep both staff and customers up to date and engaged.

The Learning and Development sessions continue with members of this group hearing about the Scottish Housing Improvement Plan (SHIP) and an overview of the continued work with New Build sites including procurement and planning procedures.

Senior managers met with members of the **Tenants Panel** to discuss changes to services and up and coming consultation which includes the TP Strategy and the Local Housing Plan. Senior managers explained the improvements they have made to the Complaints Process and the introduction of the Customer Application Stock Summary (CASS).

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. The working remit of the team is to engage with customers and work with partner services and agencies to reduce noise and antisocial behaviour (ASB) within our communities.

During the Covid restrictions, officers have been working a blended model carrying out some home working as well as office and community-based work for enquiries and to engage with customers. From home, officers have been providing a telephone service to 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 continue with our partnership working.

Partnership working involves the local housing team, council officers 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 colleagues from the voluntary organisations including West Lothian Youth Action Project, Mental Health advisory workers and private landlords in order to reduce antisocial behaviour and support members of our community who have been affected.

Community Safety and Safer Neighbourhood Team Officers have carried out patrols in areas identified as a 'Hot Spot' locations for deliberate fire-raising in the area. The aim is to identify people involved and provide corroboration to any wilful act. It is anticipated that as Community Safety Partners visit and patrol the areas identified as often as possible, this intervention, along with others undertaken, will act as a preventative action, thus preventing and reducing the unwanted behaviour and number of incidents overall.

Fauldhouse and Breich Valley Ward Data

Table 9: The following tables set out details of the number of new cases opened each month, overall number of active cases; number of cases resolved. Not all incidents become a case and officers will open a case where further investigations are necessary.

<i>Cases and Incidents</i>	<i>Apr</i>	<i>May</i>	<i>Jun</i>	<i>Jul</i>	<i>Aug</i>	<i>Sep</i>	<i>Oct</i>	<i>Nov</i>	<i>Dec</i>	<i>Jan</i>	<i>Feb</i>	<i>Mar</i>
Incidents Reported to SNT	75	52	47	47	75	34	36	34	40	30	17	36
Number of new cases	5	1	1	9	4	3	2	2	3	4	2	2
Number of Active Cases	11	8	7	15	13	3	8	9	9	9	9	5
Number of resolved cases	4	5	2	4	2	10	0	2	2	4	5	2

Table 10: The following table provides an overview of the types of incidents that are being reported to the SNT.

<i>Incident Types</i>	<i>Apr</i>	<i>May</i>	<i>Jun</i>	<i>Jul</i>	<i>Aug</i>	<i>Sep</i>	<i>Oct</i>	<i>Nov</i>	<i>Dec</i>	<i>Jan</i>	<i>Feb</i>	<i>Mar</i>
ASB Part 2 Complaint	53	23	26	25	36	21	21	15	19	13	8	17
ASB Part 5 Noise Complaint	10	19	14	11	26	10	9	17	16	12	3	11

Dog Barking	0	1	0	1	1	0	1	0	0	0	0	0
ENV Health Complaint	1	0	3	1	1	1	0	0	0	0	2	0
Non ASB Noise Complaint	3	3	0	8	11	2	1	0	1	1	0	3
SST Section 3 Tenancy Management	8	6	4	1	0	0	4	2	2	2	3	4
Youth Disorder	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	2	1	1
Unauthorised Encampment	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Grand Total	75	52	47	47	75	34	36	34	38	30	17	36

Table 11: The following table provides numbers of ASBO that are current in ward and compared to all of West Lothian

ASBO	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4
Number of ASBO's current	<i>0</i>	<i>0</i>	<i>1</i>	<i>1</i>
All of West Lothian	<i>12</i>	<i>12</i>	<i>7 plus 1 Interim</i>	<i>7 plus 1 Interim</i>
Age of perpetrator	<i>-</i>	<i>-</i>	<i>32</i>	<i>33</i>

West Lothian Ward Data

Table 12: The following table provides number of all active cases and total number of incidents for West Lothian

West Lothian	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec	Jan	Feb	Mar
Total Number of Active Cases	73	72	121	104	83	68	71	55	52	53	53	48
Total Number of Incidents	484	402	456	448	461	441	299	255	209	303	268	332

Outcomes

A summary of some of the outcomes that officers managed to achieve throughout Quarter 4 2022 are detailed below:

Letter Drop	A letter drop was carried out to inform neighbours of reporting processes to SNT as well as to remind a tenant that SNT were still active in the area after break in incidents in Fauldhouse regarding
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	loud shouting and reports of verbal abuse. Since the letter drop was completed, there have been no further incidents reported.
Warning	<p>Complaints of regular noise disturbances from a property in Longridge were received. SNT officers attended in response to a complaint of ongoing noise, witnessed this, and spoke to the tenant concerned at time. This was followed up with a first stage warning.</p> <p>Further contact was received from the complainer advising issues were continuing. SNT provided advice about continued reporting, and a letter drop was completed. There was no response received, however, no further complaints were reported and the case is now closed.</p>
Uncorroborated complaints despite enquiries	<p>A letter drop was carried out in Stoneyburn regarding a council tenant shouting abuse at a neighbour. No response was received.</p> <p>A further letter drop was carried out in Polbeth regarding complaints of doors slamming late at night. No response was received.</p>

E. CONCLUSION

Housing staff 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

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14th June 2022