

DATA LABEL: PUBLIC



BATHGATE LOCAL AREA COMMITTEE

HOUSING, CUSTOMER AND BUILDING SERVICES UPDATE

REPORT BY INTERIM 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 Services 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 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 N/A

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 2022	%	Feb 2022	%	Mar 2022	%	WL Target %
0-2 wks	3	33.3%	0	0%	5	33.3%	55%
2-4 wks	0	0%	2	25%	2	13.3%	30%
4+ wks	6	66.7%	6	75%	8	53.4%	15%
Total Lets	9	100%	8	100%	15	100%	100%

Property Void & Let Performance: Temporary Tenancies

Void Period	Jan 2022	%	Feb 2022	%	Mar 2022	%	WL Target %
0-2 wks	0	0 %	1	50%	1	14.3%	80%
2-4 wks	1	25%	1	50%	4	57.1%	15%
4+ wks	2	75%	0	0%	2	28.6%	5%
Total Lets	3	100%	2	100%	7	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 16 policy voids in the ward for this period, 3 more than the last reporting period.

Void period	Number of properties	PV reasons
<4 weeks	1	1 – asbestos removal
4 – 12 weeks	4	3 – upgrades 1 – issues with electric meter
13 – 16 weeks	5	2 – upgrades 1 – Police Investigation 1 – Leak 1 – Buyback
26+ weeks	6	2 – Wardens Offices 2 – held for decant 2 – upgrades

D2 Rent Arrears

Bathgate - Financial Summary

For the Bathgate ward the collection rate for the YTD in Q4 remains excellent at 98.3%. Bathgate has collected £8,500,643 vs a charge of £8,643,921.

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 234 Universal Credit (UC) households in arrears. Since then the number of UC households in arrears has increased by 9.0%.

The number of tenancies in arrears in this ward has increased by 9 since last year. Small debt cases (£300 or less), account for 55.1% of households.

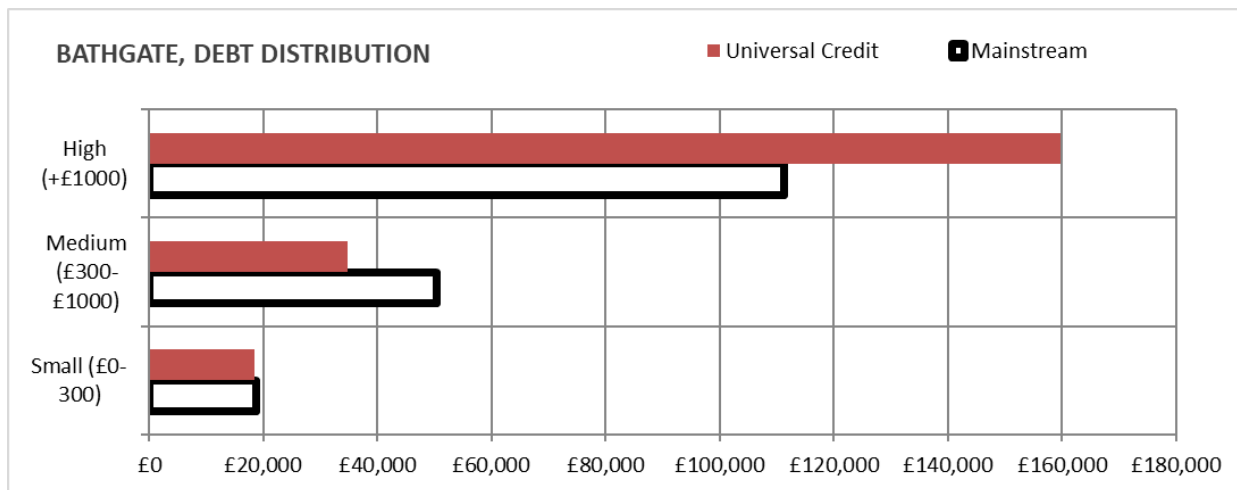
There are 98 serious arrears cases (+£1000 in arrears). These cases are 17.4% of all households in arrears in this area, containing 68.9% of the debt.

The arrears position for Bathgate Q4 is £393,553. This is an increase of £57,295 on last year's position. The West Lothian overall position is currently £3,496,679.

Officers over the course of January and February 2021 assisted tenants through the Tenant Grant Fund. Tenants who were directly impacted by Covid 19 were assisted through this fund.

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

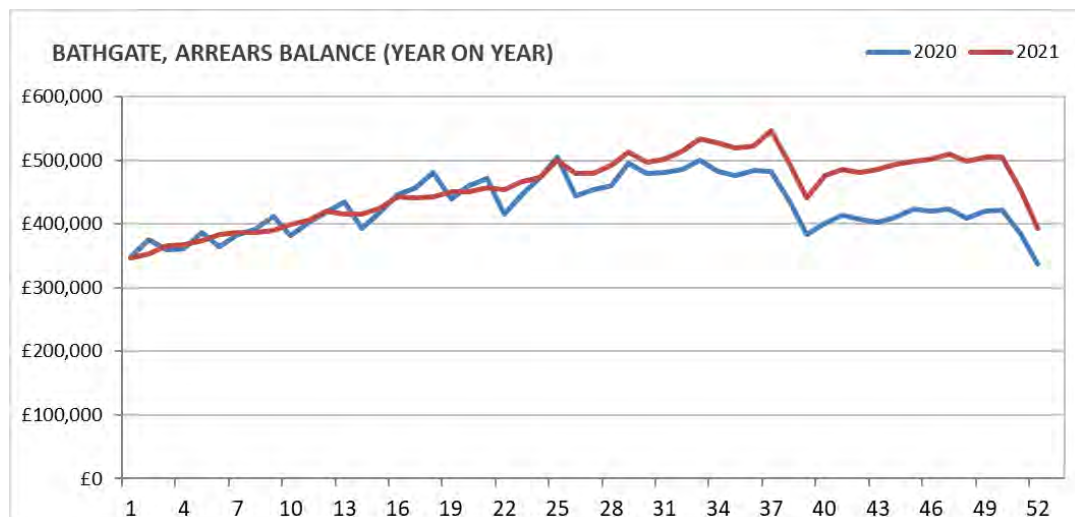


Arrears Banding	2020/21 (WK52)				2021/22 (WK52)			
	Mainstream		UC		Mainstream		UC	
	Balance	Cases	Balance	Cases	Balance	Cases	Balance	Cases
£0.01 to £99.99	£5,840	121	£1,972	42	£3,793	90	£2,736	50
£100.00 to £299.99	£16,763	89	£14,948	78	£14,924	87	£15,750	84
£300.00 to £499.99	£10,309	26	£10,598	28	£17,406	45	£11,415	29
£500.00 to £749.99	£20,404	34	£13,444	22	£17,354	28	£16,226	27
£750.00 to £999.99	£10,878	12	£12,806	15	£15,726	18	£7,127	8
£1000.00 to £1999.99	£21,512	15	£35,340	27	£28,215	18	£37,354	26
£2000+	£79,306	24	£82,137	22	£83,203	23	£122,325	31
Group Total	£165,013	321	£171,244	234	£180,620	309	£212,933	255
Movement					(+) £15,607	(-) 12	(+) £41,688	(+) 21

Overall Total
Overall Movement

£336,258 **555**

£393,553 **564**
(+) £57,295 **(+) 9**



D3. Bathgate Area Team Activity

Over the period officers in the team have had a blended working approach, working from home but also out in the ward areas on a duty basis or as required undertaking essential tasks, such as letting properties, supporting vulnerable customers and dealing with priority issues which have arisen. We continued to work 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 continues to be a weekly priority task for the team and officers 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.

Officers have also been working to support a number of tenants in the area alongside colleagues from other service areas and agencies, dealing with a range tenancy management issues and providing assistance and support to help tenants sustain their tenancies. This can range from being involved in complex care management cases alongside colleagues in social policy to being involved in assisting to resolve neighbour disputes with police and Safer Neighbourhood Team colleagues.

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

Local New Build Update

WLC completions 141

RSL completions 28

WLC New Build Activity	Site	No of units	Site Start	No. of Houses Handed Over	Site Completion
WLC	Standhill	22	Jan-20	13	Mar-22
WLC	Hopetoun Street (Conversion of former Newlands House)	4	Apr-21	0	June-22
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	42	Mar-22

D5. Tenant Participation Update

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.

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 tenants 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 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 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 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.

TP 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.

D6. Safer Neighbourhood Team

Ward 8 – Bathgate - SNT 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.

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.

Bathgate Ward Data

Table 1: 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	105	59	105	95	42	84	59	54	35	66	49	67
Number of new cases	6	3	5	3	0	6	5	4	2	6	4	10
Number of Active Cases	12	10	23	17	11	7	11	11	14	9	9	14
Number of resolved cases	0	5	5	1	6	3	3	5	3	2	9	3

Table 2: The following table provides an overview of the types of incidents that are being reported to the SNT.

Incident Types	<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	66	31	61	58	24	31	25	28	20	29	23	17
ASB Part 5 Noise Complaint	25	17	34	30	12	34	18	20	11	24	14	10
Dog Barking	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	1	0	1

ENV Health Complaint	0	5	1	2	2	3	1	1	3	0	0	0
Non ASB Noise Complaint	7	1	4	2	0	0	2	0	0	3	5	0
SST Section 3 Tenancy Management	5	5	5	3	3	16	12	5	0	9	6	2
Youth Disorder	1	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	1	1
Unauthorised Encampment	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Grand Total	104	59	105	95	42	84	59	54	34	66	49	31

Table 3: 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	0	3*	1 Interim	1 Interim
All of West Lothian	12	12	7 plus 1 Interim	7 plus 1 Interim
Age of perpetrator	-	46yrs	36	37

West Lothian Ward Data

Table 4: The following table provides number of all active cases and total number of incidents for West Lothian

West Lothian	<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>
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

Ward Outcomes

A summary of some of the outcomes that officers managed to achieve throughout the period for Q4 – January, February and March 2022 are detailed below:

Warnings	Three warnings were issued by SNT officers after continued reports of aggressive behaviour from a tenant towards neighbours in the Boghall area were received. Letters were sent out to neighbours and a visit to a tenant with Police has been carried out. Since then, no further incidents have been reported following the joint visit with Police.
Letter drops	<p>A letter drop was carried out in Bathgate regarding complaints of shouting and arguing late at night, with no response.</p> <p>A letter drop was carried out in Boghall in response to complaints of shouting and fighting in a council tenancy with no response.</p> <p>A letter drop was carried out in central Bathgate in response to complaints of shouting and fighting in a council tenancy, with no response.</p> <p>SNT Officers received a report of regular noisy parties at a property in Bathgate. A letter drop was completed in the area and no further reports were received.</p>
Threatening Behaviour	A report of threatening and intimidating behaviour was received by SNT officers. A letter drop was completed and on ascertaining corroboration to the complaint, a second warning was issued. Police also investigated and secured evidence to caution and charge a perpetrator for a breach of the peace. No further incidents have been reported.
Legal consideration	Further reports of ongoing intimidation in Bathgate over parking and banging on the walls has resulted in the case being reviewed for legal. An advisory letter has been sent to the person responsible for the behaviour to try and stop it from continuing.
RSL tenant	Further calls were received by the Safer Neighbourhood Team from a Registered Social Landlord tenant regarding living noise from a neighbour. The complainer was advised this was not something SNT could deal with. The customer became verbally abusive and since then, counter complaints of harassment have been received from the neighbour.
Drug misuse	A call reporting ongoing issues with drug use was received and advice given on reporting this matter to Police Scotland for further enquiry.

E. CONCLUSION

This quarter has seen an increase in void properties, and officers continue to provide advice and assistance to customers on their housing options. The team have had a number of challenging situations to deal with over the period and are providing support and assistance to customers as best as possible continuing to take into account safe operating procedures.

Income management continues to be one of our main focuses of work as we worked towards the end of the financial year. Officers working hard to assist customers providing support and advice and assistance.

Officers within the overall service have been continuing to work and engaging with customers through tenant participation, capital programme and compliance works.

F. BACKGROUND REFERENCES

None

Appendices/Attachments:
None

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