

DATA LABEL: PUBLIC



ARMADALE & BLACKRIDGE LOCAL AREA COMMITTEE

HOUSING CUSTOMER AND BUILDING SERVICES

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 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 2 - 1st July to 30th September 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 Housing Services PDSP	No
VIII Other consultations	None

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 council tenancies are being re-let as quickly as possible and that we are meeting our duty under homeless legislation, the Housing Team has continued to prioritise resources to complete the letting process for both temporary and mainstream properties.

Table 1: Property Void & Let Performance: Mainstream Tenancies

Void Period	July 2022	%	Aug 2022	%	Sept 2022	%	WL Target %
0-2 wks	0	0%	2	40%	2	33.3%	55%
2-4 wks	0	0%	0	0%	0	0%	30%
4+ wks	3	100%	3	60%	4	66.7%	15%
Total Lets	3	100%	5	100%	6	100%	100%

Table 2: Property Void & Let Performance: Temporary Tenancies

Void Period	July 2022	%	Aug 2022	%	Sept 2022	%	WL Target %
0-2 wks	0	0%	2	28.6%	0	0%	55%
2-4 wks	1	25%	2	28.6%	1	50%	30%
4+ wks	3	75%	3	42.8%	1	50%	15%
Total Lets	4	100%	7	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 31 policy voids in the ward for this period, 5 more than last reporting period.

Table 3: Policy Voids

Void period	Number of properties	PV reasons
<4 weeks	1	1 – Bathroom upgrade
4 – 12 weeks	6	1 – legal dispute 1 – kitchen & bathroom 1 – bathroom upgrade 1 – kitchen/heating upgrade 2 - buybacks
13 – 16 weeks	5	1 – woodworm 4 – property upgrades (kitchen, bathroom & heating)
26+ weeks	19	2 – buybacks 1 - heating upgrade 1 – H&S 1 – dampness 2 – structural 3 – held for decant 9 – Bathville

D2. Arrears

For the Armadale and Blackridge ward the collection rate for the year to date in Quarter 2 remains excellent at 94.1%. Armadale and Blackridge has collected £3,470,623 vs a charge of £3,687,981.

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 423 Universal Credit (UC) households in arrears. Since then the number of UC households in arrears has increased by 14.2%.

The number of tenancies in arrears in this ward has increased by 72 since last year. Small debt cases (£300 or less), account for 53.8% of households.

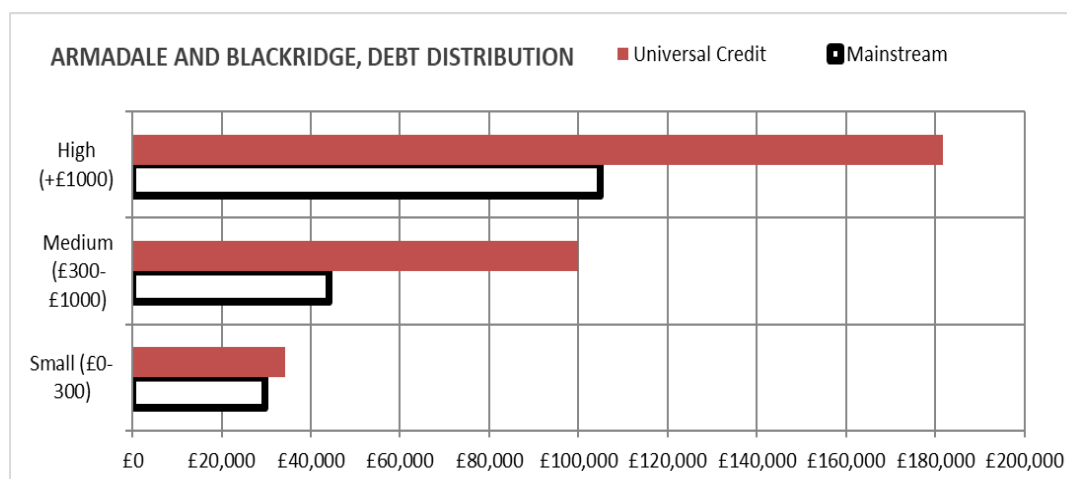
There are 123 serious arrears cases (+£1000 in arrears). These cases are 14.5% of all households in arrears in this area, containing 58.0% of the debt.

The arrears position for Armadale and Blackridge Quarter 2 is £494,634. This is an increase of £88,315 on last year's position. The West Lothian overall position is currently £4,780,804.

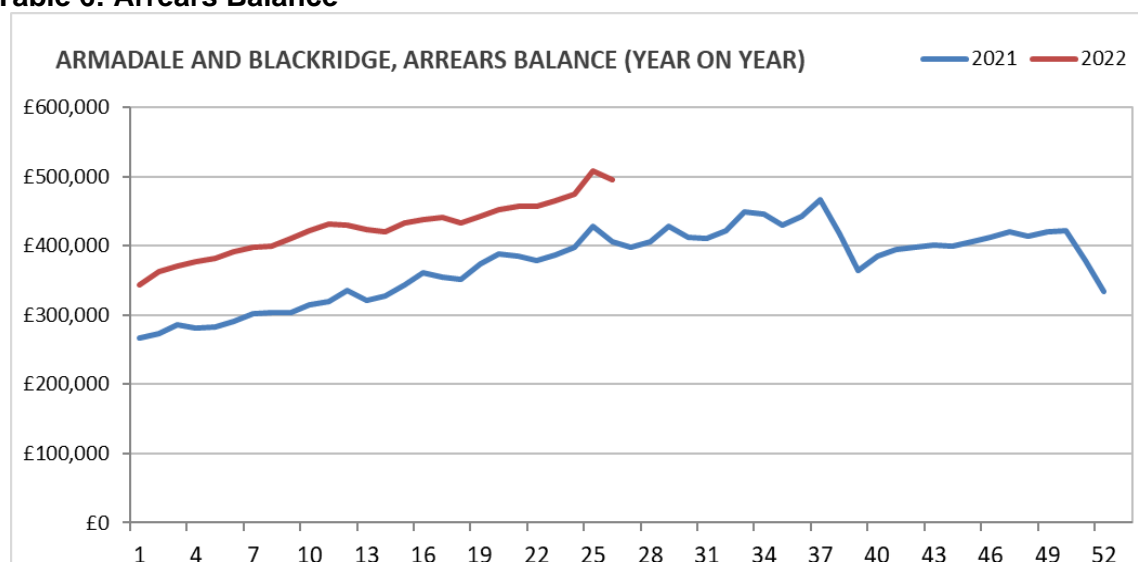
During the course of this year we plan to focus on the following:

- 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 income collection
- Promote alternative payment methods, particularly the Tenant's Self-service Portal and Pay Point.

Table 4: Debt Distribution**Table 5: Arrears Banding**

Arrears Banding	2021/22 (WK26)				2022/23 (WK26)			
	Mainstream		UC		Mainstream		UC	
	Balance	Cases	Balance	Cases	Balance	Cases	Balance	Cases
£0.01 to £99.99	£5,492	121	£3,078	59	£4,598	111	£3,630	67
£100.00 to £299.99	£22,103	118	£25,707	125	£25,047	128	£30,558	150
£300.00 to £499.99	£15,474	41	£27,749	71	£19,528	49	£36,579	93
£500.00 to £749.99	£13,527	22	£29,208	50	£14,261	23	£37,556	61
£750.00 to £999.99	£16,811	20	£29,154	34	£10,308	12	£25,841	30
£1000.00 to £1999.99	£26,773	19	£91,390	68	£34,253	24	£78,868	55
£2000+	£41,130	11	£58,724	16	£70,728	17	£102,879	27
Group Total	£141,311	352	£265,009	423	£178,723	364	£315,911	483
Movement					(+) £37,412	(+) 12	(+) £50,902	(+) 60
Overall Total			£406,319	775			£494,634	847
Overall Movement							(+) £88,315	(+) 72

Table 6: Arrears Balance**D3. Armadale Area Team Activity**

As part of office remobilisation procedures, officers in the Housing team have been working to the council's flexible / hybrid working arrangements since April 2022. The focus on rent arrears activity has continued to be a weekly priority task for the team and they will continue to work with all our tenants 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.

During Quarter 2, officers have continued to work closely with colleagues in Building Services, engaging with tenants to ensure that health and safety work has been completed and all necessary compliance work is undertaken in tenancies to ensure that these meet legislative requirements. As a result, we have identified a number of tenants requiring support.

Officers have also been continuing to arrange decants and liaise with tenants in Burns Avenue to support them in moving out of their tenancies and return again once the capital programme work has been completed. Regular meetings also continue to take place to plan ahead and review and learn from past decants.

D4. Capital Programme and New Build Council Housing

To date, the Council has had 47 new build completions and Registered Social Landlords (RSLs) have had 52 completions in the ward.

Table 7: New Build Activity

WLC New Build Activity	Site	No of units	Site Start	No. of houses handed over	Site Completion
WLC	Bathville Cross Phase 4	3	Apr-16	3	June-22
RSL Build Activity	Site	No of units	Site Start	No. of Houses Handed Over	Site Completion

Cairn Housing Association	Craiginn Terrace, Blackridge	27	Apr -21	0	TBC
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Table 8: Refurbishment & Investment

Street	Contract	Site Start	Update
Anderson Avenue	Roof & roughcast replacement	17/08/2021	Ongoing land dispute delaying last remaining property. All other properties complete.
Bathville Phases 5	Regeneration	Phase 5 – October 2020	Scaffold was dropped to allow SGN works. Groundworks contractor has started on site, with North precast stair in place, new slabbing around properties in place and works progressing to the car park area.
Burns Avenue	Orlit Upgrade	November 2021	Work continuing in the area. Fourteen properties have been completed with tenants having returned. Three further properties nearing completion. Additional decant set up.
Drummond Place	Roof & Roughcasting	2020/2021	Scaffolding erected and work in progress to buyback properties. Expected to be completed during quarter 3. All other properties complete.
Strathlogie	Heating, roof & roughcast replacement	21/09/2020	Pilot scheme to 12 properties (storage batteries) who could not get solar panels. Recent communication sent to tenants.

D5. Tenant Participation

Tenant Participation continued throughout the quarter via digital methods and seen face to face meetings monthly. 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 communication. Such as:

Tenants Panel

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

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. 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. This group have worked with the Tenant Participation Team to review and agree the roles and remit of each working group. They have worked hard to produce a new 5 year Tenant and Customer Participation Strategy. The TPDWG completed their work on the animated video to increase engagement. This has now been launched and widely recognised by TPAS and TIS. This was an excellent piece of work.

Editorial Panel

This quarter the members have been involved in the collation of the Winter edition of Tenants News. The members continue to review the tenant's handbook online to ensure it is still relevant and current.

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 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, as part of their working remit to reduce noise and antisocial behaviour (ASB). Partnership working involves the local housing team, council officer within 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 voluntary organisations including West Lothian Youth Action Project, mental health advisory workers and private landlords in order to reduce antisocial behaviour.

Armada Ward Data

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

Table 9: Cases and Incidents

<i>Cases and Incidents</i>	<i>Apr</i>	<i>May</i>	<i>Jun</i>	<i>Jul</i>	<i>Aug</i>	<i>Sep</i>
Incidents reported to SNT	32	31	23	33	23	25
Number of active cases	11	5	4	5	5	5
Number of resolved cases	1	3	2	1	3	0

Table 10 provides an overview of the types of incidents that are being reported to the SNT

Incident Categories	<i>Apr</i>	<i>May</i>	<i>Jun</i>	<i>Jul</i>	<i>Aug</i>	<i>Sep</i>
ASB Part 2 Complaint	12	20	18	28	15	15
ASB Part 5 Noise Complaint	13	9	4	2	4	4
Dog Barking	0	0	0	0	0	0
ENV Health Complaint	0	0	0	2	1	1
Non ASB Noise Complaint	1	0	0	0	0	2
SST Section 3 Tenancy Management	2	2	1	1	3	3
Youth Disorder	1	0	0	0	0	0
Unauthorised Encampment	0	0	0	0	0	0
Grand Total	29	31	23	33	23	25

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

ASBO	<i>Q1</i>	<i>Q2</i>
Number of ASBO's current	<i>2</i>	<i>2</i>
All of West Lothian	<i>7 plus 1 Interim</i>	<i>8 plus 1 Interim</i>
Age of perpetrator	<i>26 and 52</i>	<i>27 and 53</i>

Table 12: 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>
Total Number of Active Cases	45	47	51	61	51	58
Total Number of Incidents	309	339	324	326	333	229

Examples of SNT work during quarter 2

Partnership working is essential in reaching outcomes. Various **letter drops** have been carried out in specific areas, these are used to assist SNT to gather further information from neighbourhoods when officers have difficulty obtaining independent corroboration and seek witnesses to come forward with information. An **Anti-social Behaviour Order (ASBO)** has been granted following issues regarding banging, loud music and shouting. **Mediation** is progressing with two council tenants following a dispute. **Warnings** have also been issued to residents for verbal abuse and threatening behaviour following a police incident as well as noise and fighting in temporary accommodation.

E. CONCLUSION

Housing staff have adapted well to working hybrid arrangements and further embraced new ways of working whilst continuing 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, financial issues and working with Building Services to ensure essential compliance work is progressed in tenants' homes to keep them safe.

F. BACKGROUND REFERENCES

None

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

Email; lorraine.donnelly@westlothian.gov.uk

Tel: 01506 284056 / 077677 54008

Julie Whitelaw

Interim Head of Housing, Customer and Building Services

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