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## **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 the 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 3 – 1<sup>st</sup> October to 31<sup>st</sup> December 2023.

##### **C. SUMMARY OF IMPLICATIONS**

|   |   |
|---|---|
| <b>I Council Values</b>   | Focusing on our customers' needs.<br>Being honest, open and accountable.<br>Providing equality of opportunities.<br>Making best use of our resources.<br>Working in partnership.  |
| <b>II Policy and Legal (including Strategic Environmental Assessment, Equality Issues, Health or Risk Assessment)</b> | Housing (Scotland) Act 2001<br>Housing (Scotland) Act 2010  |
| <b>III Implications for Scheme of Delegations to Officers</b>   | None  |
| <b>IV Impact on performance and performance Indicators</b>  | There is no impact  |
| <b>V Relevance to Single Outcome Agreement</b>  | There are positive impacts on the following SOA indicators:<br><br>SOA4 – we live in resilient, cohesive and safe communities<br><br>SOA8 – we make the most effective use of resources by minimising our impact on the built and natural environment |
| <b>VI Resources - (Financial, Staffing and Property)</b>  | None  |

**VII Consideration at Housing Services 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. Tables 1 and 2 provide details on letting performance.

**Table 1: Property Void & Let Performance: Mainstream Tenancies**

| <b>Void Period</b> | <b>Oct 2022</b> | <b>%</b>    | <b>Nov 2022</b> | <b>%</b>    | <b>Dec 2022</b> | <b>%</b>    | <b>WL Target %</b> |
|--------------------|-----------------|-------------|-----------------|-------------|-----------------|-------------|--------------------|
| 0-2 wks            | 2               | 20%         | 4               | 30.8%       | 2               | 33.3%       | 55%                |
| 2-4 wks            | 2               | 20%         | 0               | 0%          | 1               | 16.7%       | 30%                |
| 4+ wks             | 6               | 60%         | 9               | 69.2%       | 3               | 50%         | 15%                |
| <b>Total Lets</b>  | <b>10</b>       | <b>100%</b> | <b>13</b>       | <b>100%</b> | <b>6</b>        | <b>100%</b> | <b>100%</b>        |

**Table 2: Property Void & Let Performance: Temporary Tenancies**

| <b>Void Period</b> | <b>Oct 2022</b> | <b>%</b>    | <b>Nov 2022</b> | <b>%</b>    | <b>Dec 2022</b> | <b>%</b>    | <b>WL Target %</b> |
|--------------------|-----------------|-------------|-----------------|-------------|-----------------|-------------|--------------------|
| 0-2 wks            | 0               | 0%          | 0               | 0%          | 1               | 20%         | 55%                |
| 2-4 wks            | 1               | 25%         | 2               | 40%         | 1               | 20%         | 30%                |
| 4+ wks             | 3               | 75%         | 3               | 60%         | 3               | 60%         | 15%                |
| <b>Total Lets</b>  | <b>4</b>        | <b>100%</b> | <b>5</b>        | <b>100%</b> | <b>5</b>        | <b>100%</b> | <b>100%</b>        |

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 30 policy voids in the ward for this period, 7 more than the last reporting period.

**Table 3: Policy Voids**

| Void period   | Number of properties | PV reasons   |
|---------------|----------------------|--|
| <4 weeks      | 0                    |  |
| 4 – 12 weeks  | 13                   | 12 x upgrades<br>1 x flood damage                          |
| 13 – 16 weeks | 10                   | 10 x upgrades  |
| 26+ weeks     | 7                    | 2 x Wardens Offices<br>2 x held for decant<br>3 x upgrades |

## **D2. Bathgate - Financial Summary**

For the Bathgate ward the collection rate for the YTD in Q3 remains excellent at 97.7%. Bathgate has collected £6,738,301 vs a charge of £6,893,756.

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 322 Universal Credit (UC) households in arrears. Since then the number of UC households in arrears has increased by - 2.8%.

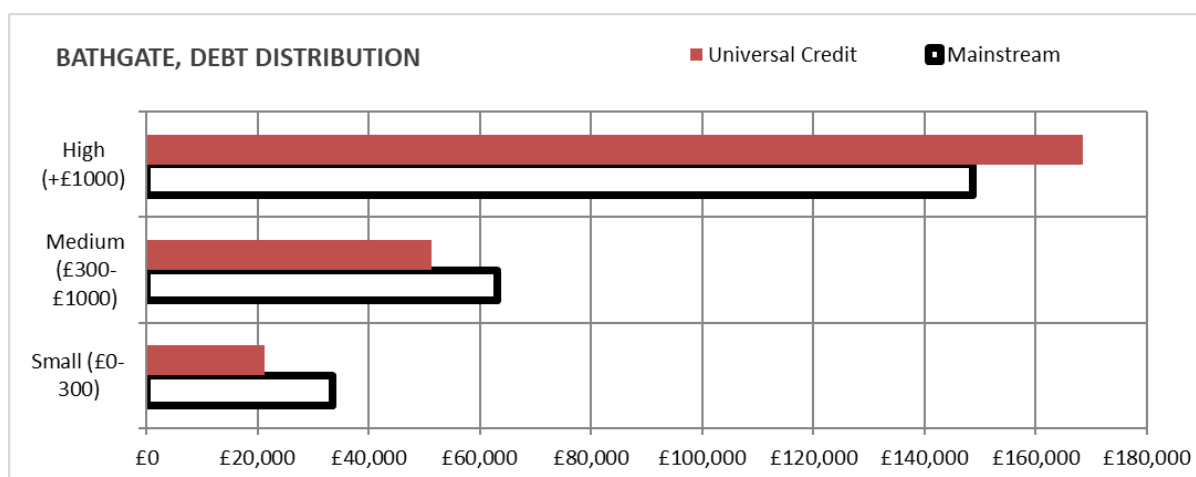
The number of tenancies in arrears in this ward has increased by 101 since last year. Small debt cases (£300 or less), account for 59.0% of households.

There are 123 serious arrears cases (+£1000 in arrears). These cases are 15.0% of all households in arrears in this area, containing 65.2% of the debt.

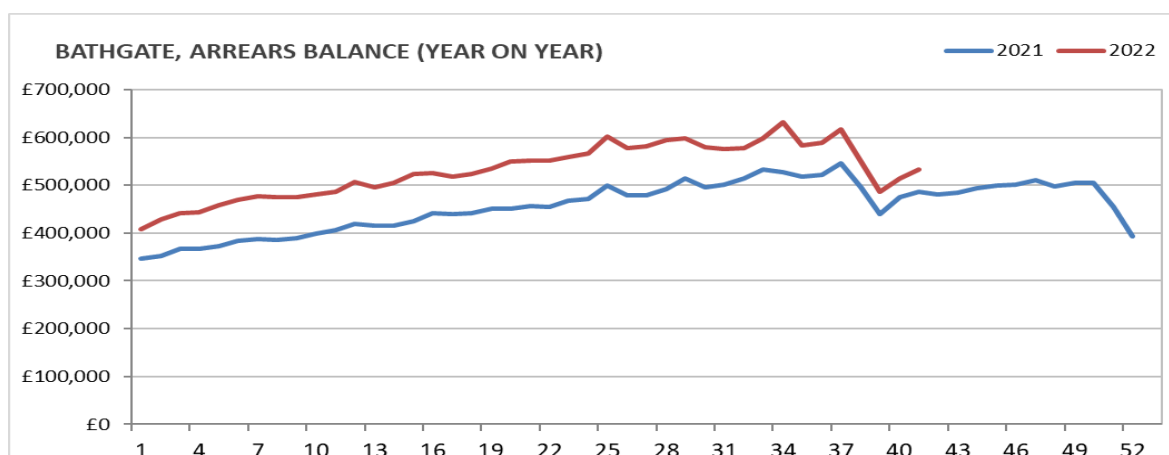
The arrears position for Bathgate Q3 is £486,478. This is an increase of £46,078 on last year's position. The West Lothian overall position is currently £4,305,323.

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

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

| Arrears Banding         | 2021/22 (WK39)  |            |                 |            | 2022/23 (WK39)  |            |                 |            |
|-------------------------|-----------------|------------|-----------------|------------|-----------------|------------|-----------------|------------|
|                         | Mainstream      |            | UC              |            | Mainstream      |            | UC              |            |
|                         | Balance         | Cases      | Balance         | Cases      | Balance         | Cases      | Balance         | Cases      |
| £0.01 to £99.99         | £8,897          | 165        | £3,687          | 72         | £10,757         | 195        | £3,237          | 65         |
| £100.00 to £299.99      | £19,076         | 103        | £18,185         | 95         | £22,829         | 133        | £18,029         | 91         |
| £300.00 to £499.99      | £14,074         | 38         | £15,002         | 40         | £21,130         | 53         | £21,549         | 55         |
| £500.00 to £749.99      | £19,994         | 32         | £21,592         | 35         | £25,978         | 43         | £19,196         | 32         |
| £750.00 to £999.99      | £10,922         | 13         | £13,726         | 16         | £16,022         | 19         | £10,488         | 12         |
| £1000.00 to £1999.99    | £37,465         | 27         | £43,771         | 30         | £55,443         | 41         | £35,318         | 25         |
| £2000+                  | £73,942         | 20         | £140,067        | 34         | £93,270         | 24         | £133,233        | 33         |
| <b>Group Total</b>      | <b>£184,370</b> | <b>398</b> | <b>£256,030</b> | <b>322</b> | <b>£245,428</b> | <b>508</b> | <b>£241,050</b> | <b>313</b> |
| <b>Movement</b>         |                 |            |                 |            | (+) £61,058     | (+) 110    | (-) £14,980     | (-) 9      |
| <b>Overall Total</b>    |                 |            | <b>£440,400</b> | <b>720</b> |                 |            | <b>£486,478</b> | <b>821</b> |
| <b>Overall Movement</b> |                 |            |                 |            |                 |            | (+) £46,078     | (+) 101    |

**Table 6: Arrears Balance**

**D3. Bathgate 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 3, 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 been working to support a number of tenants in the area alongside colleagues from other service areas and agencies, dealing with a range of tenancy management issues and supporting 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 colleagues.

**D4. Capital Programme and New Build Council Housing****Table 7: New Build Activity****WLC completions 4****RSL completions 0**

| <b>WLC New Build Activity</b> | <b>Site</b>  | <b>No of units</b> | <b>Site Start</b> | <b>No. of Houses Handed Over</b> | <b>Site Completion</b> |
|-------------------------------|--|--------------------|-------------------|----------------------------------|------------------------|
| WLC                           | Standhill  | 22                 | Jan-20            | 4*                               | Mar-22                 |
| WLC                           | Hopetoun Street<br>(Conversion of former Newlands House) | 4                  | Apr-21            | 0                                | Mar-23                 |
| WLC                           | Marjoribanks Street                                      | 6                  | TBC               | 0                                | TBC                    |
| WLC                           | Mid Street   | 5                  | TBC               | 0                                | TBC                    |

\*(18 handed over in 2021/22)

## **D5. Tenant Participation Update**

To coincide with our new Tenant and Customer Partnership Strategy, we have reduced the number of tenant meetings from 72 a year to 38. This ensures that the information brought to the meetings is of value to both customers and officers.

We are still taking a hybrid approach to our TP meetings, with the majority of meetings being digital.

**Tenant Participation Development Working Group:** tenant panel members and TP officers meet monthly. This quarter, we focused on the new expenses process and funding for new tenant groups.

**Editorial panel:** We completed our review of the tenant's handbook and Landlord Report. We created another successful edition of the Winter tenant's news.

**Social Media:** We currently have 343 members on our TP Facebook page. We are seeing a steady increase of tenants joining the page after we developed a letter with our tenant's panel chair to welcome new members. This letter is sent to tenants who states they are interested in joining TP through their new tenant survey.

**Tenants Panel:** This quarter, our tenant members met with senior management and were provided with an update for each service area.

**TP Strategy:** This quarter has seen the launch of our new 5-year Tenant and Customer Participation strategy and action plan. This sets out our goals for TP over the next years and makes sure we have something to keep us on track to meeting our objectives.

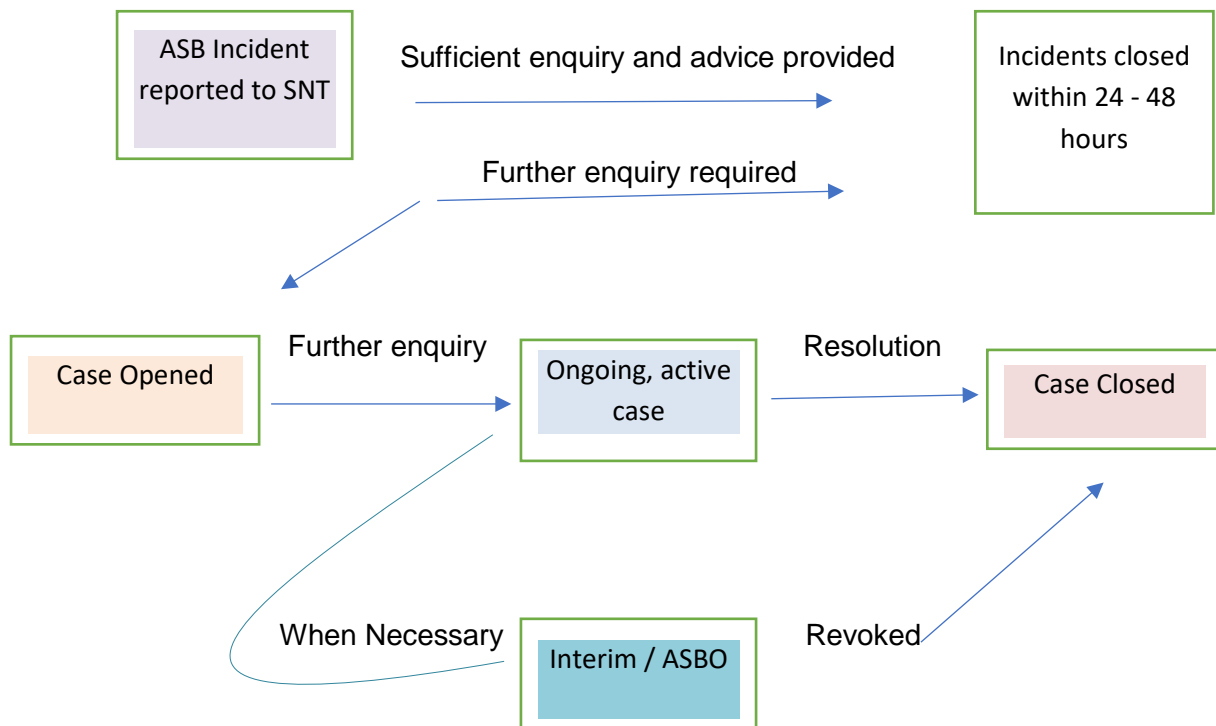
## **D6. Safer Neighbourhood Team**

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.

### **Bathgate Ward Data**

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.

### SNT Flowchart of Incident enquiries and Cases



### Bathgate Ward Data

**Table 8:** The following table sets out:

- details of the number of incidents reported. Not all incidents become a case.
- the number of new cases opened each month to allow for enquiry.
- the overall number of active cases ongoing where enquiries are still being undertaken.
- the number of cases resolved.

| <b>Cases and Incidents</b>       | <b>Apr</b> | <b>May</b> | <b>Jun</b> | <b>Jul</b> | <b>Aug</b> | <b>Sep</b> | <b>Oct</b> | <b>Nov</b> | <b>Dec</b> |
|----------------------------------|------------|------------|------------|------------|------------|------------|------------|------------|------------|
| Incidents reported to SNT        | 70         | 76         | 65         | 54         | 62         | 42         | 20         | 27         | 32         |
| Number of new cases              | 3          | 2          | 6          | 1          | 2          | 1          | 4          | 2          | 3          |
| Number of ongoing / active cases | 12         | 7          | 10         | 11         | 5          | 10         | 7          | 5          | 5          |
| Number of resolved cases         | 0          | 4          | 1          | 0          | 4          | 2          | 2          | 4          | 1          |

**Table 9:** The following table provides an overview of the types of incidents that are being reported to the SNT. Some of these will go on to require a case to be opened for further enquiry and investigation. There may a requirement for multi-agency working to reach a resolution for the complainer and to provide the correct support to parties involved.

| <b>Incident Categories</b>       | <b><i>Apr</i></b> | <b><i>May</i></b> | <b><i>Jun</i></b> | <b><i>Jul</i></b> | <b><i>Aug</i></b> | <b><i>Sep</i></b> | <b><i>Oct</i></b> | <b><i>Nov</i></b> | <b><i>Dec</i></b> |
|----------------------------------|-------------------|-------------------|-------------------|-------------------|-------------------|-------------------|-------------------|-------------------|-------------------|
| ASB Part 2 Complaint             | 12                | 20                | 18                | 28                | 15                | 15                | 11                | 20                | 17                |
| ASB Part 5 Noise Complaint       | 13                | 9                 | 4                 | 2                 | 4                 | 4                 | 3                 | 4                 | 9                 |
| Dog Barking                      | 0                 | 0                 | 0                 | 0                 | 0                 | 0                 | 0                 | 0                 | 0                 |
| ENV Health Complaint             | 0                 | 0                 | 0                 | 2                 | 1                 | 1                 | 1                 | 0                 | 0                 |
| Non ASB Noise Complaint          | 1                 | 0                 | 0                 | 0                 | 0                 | 2                 | 0                 | 0                 | 0                 |
| SST Section 3 Tenancy Management | 2                 | 2                 | 1                 | 1                 | 3                 | 3                 | 3                 | 3                 | 6                 |
| Youth Disorder                   | 1                 | 0                 | 0                 | 0                 | 0                 | 0                 | 2                 | 0                 | 0                 |
| Unauthorised Encampment          | 0                 | 0                 | 0                 | 0                 | 0                 | 0                 | 0                 | 0                 | 0                 |
| <b>Grand Total</b>               | 32                | 31                | 23                | 33                | 23                | 25                | 20                | 27                | 32                |

**Table 10:** The following table provides numbers of ASBO that are current in ward and compared to all of West Lothian.

| <b>ASBO</b>              | <b><i>Q1</i></b>               | <b><i>Q2</i></b>               | <b><i>Q3</i></b> |
|--------------------------|--------------------------------|--------------------------------|------------------|
| Number of ASBO's current | <b><i>0</i></b>                | <b><i>0</i></b>                | <b><i>0</i></b>  |
| All of West Lothian      | <b><i>7 plus 1 Interim</i></b> | <b><i>8 plus 1 Interim</i></b> | <b><i>6</i></b>  |
| Age of perpetrator       | <b><i>-</i></b>                | <b><i>-</i></b>                | <b><i>-</i></b>  |



## West Lothian Ward Data

**Table 11:** The following table provides number of all active cases and total number of incidents for the whole of 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> |
|------------------------------|------------|------------|------------|------------|------------|------------|------------|------------|------------|
| Total Number of Active Cases | 45         | 47         | 51         | 61         | 51         | 58         | 38         | 27         | 39         |
| Total Number of Incidents    | 309        | 340        | 324        | 327        | 333        | 231        | 181        | 210        | 227        |

## Outcomes

A summary of some of the outcomes that officers managed to achieve throughout the period for Q3 – October, November and December 2022-23 are detailed below:

|                    |   |
|--------------------|---|
| Letter Drop        | A Letter drop was carried out in Bathgate due to a council tenant and partner shouting and arguing in the street. No further complaints have been received since as the partner has bail conditions to stay away from the street  |
| Mediation attempt  | SNT attempted to facilitate a mediation meeting as arranged with parties at an agreed date and time. Unfortunately, one of the persons did not attend. No further incidents have been reported and thus the case has been closed.   |
| Noise enquiries    | <p>SNT received a request from DASAT to assist a female tenant who is experiencing noise from her downstairs neighbour. SNT officers telephoned and visited her. Recordings of the noise were listened to. During the following days SNT visited another neighbour who corroborated the complaints. SNT will carry out follow up enquiries, visiting the alleged perpetrator.</p> <p>Further liaison with DASAT took place and SNT learned that incidents have greatly reduced. The case was left open over the festive period, but as no further incidents reported, the case has been closed.</p> |
| Non ASB assistance | A resident had been pestered by young children by knocking on her door and ringing her door bell then running away. Whilst seemingly just kids play, the female has become increasingly annoyed and spoke to the SNT for assistance. SNT have viewed doorbell footage and discussed an action plan with the tenant. The exact identity of the children is not known and SNT plan to do a door to door intervention and speak to parents.  |

|               |  |
|---------------|--|
|               | Following the door to door interventions the nuisance behaviour by local children has greatly reduced.   |
| Join working  | SNT received a complaint from a customer in the Bathgate area which was also reported to Police Scotland regarding the behaviour of an 8-year-old child. After speaking to the customer, the SNT officer looked into the incident reported with Police. This has been referred to Social Services by police. The customer was spoken to and informed on how SNT were proceeding but the customer was unhappy that an ASB warning not being given to their neighbour. It was reiterated that as the complaint involves a child, Social Services were best placed to investigate. The housing office is also looking into other tenancy issues reported. |
| Joint Visits  | Joint Visit was organised with housing officer regarding joint housing and ASB issues caused at 2 addresses in Bathgate.   |
| Advice        | SNT made a call to a client in Bathgate regarding an ongoing neighbour dispute on behalf of her daughter. Advised on reporting ASB issues to SNT and what would fall under tenancy management. Both parties offered and refused mediation. No further action.  |
| Closed case   | A case was closed in Bathgate as the perpetrator has been sentenced with the tenancy being terminated. An Interim ASBO helped complainants report behaviours and this was part of the charges brought against the perpetrator.   |
| Joint working | An ASB complaint was received with regards to a private let. Checks made with Police and details then passed to the Landlord for their information.  |
| Warning       | A 1 <sup>st</sup> warning was issued by SNT after neighbour corroboration of general ASB from tenant and tenants' visitors in Bathgate. Information also obtained from the Police which assisted the enquiry.  |

**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 tenant's homes to keep them safe.

**F. BACKGROUND REFERENCES**

None

Appendices/Attachments:  
None

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**Julie Whitelaw**  
**Interim Head of Housing, Customer and Building Services**  
**6<sup>th</sup> March 2023**