



ARMADALE AND BLACKRIDGE 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 Armadale and Blackridge 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 1st July– 30th September 2018.

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. 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 and Blackridge ward.

Property Void & Let Performance: Mainstream Tenancies

Void Period	July 2018	%	August 2018	%	Sept 2018	%	WL Target %
0-2 weeks	2	28.57%	3	50%	12	80%	55%
2-4 weeks	0	0%	2	33.33%	1	6.7%	30%
4+ weeks	5	71.4%	1	16.7%	2	13.3%	15%
Total Lets	7	100%	6	100%	15	100%	100%

Property Void & Let Performance: Temporary Tenancies

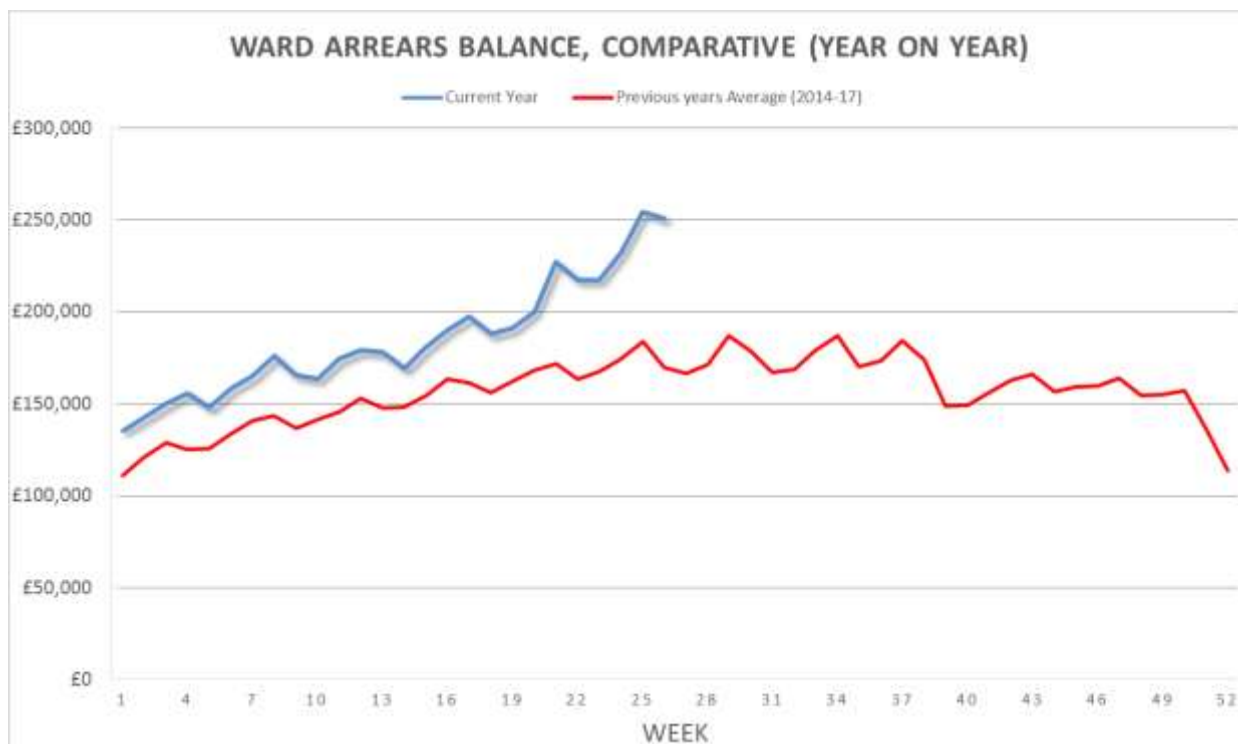
Void Period	July 2018	%	August 2018	%	Sept 2018	%	WL Target %
0-2 weeks	0	0%	2	33.3%	1	33.3%	55%
2-4 weeks	2	66.7%	2	33.3%	2	66.7%	30%
4+ weeks	1	33.3%	2	33.3%	0	0%	15%
Total Lets	3	100%	6	100%	3	100%	100%

Delays in re-letting can occur for a variety of reasons i.e. 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 is 43 policy voids in the ward - 4 awaiting demolition, 3 due to legal purposes, 2 being held for decant, and 34 due to undergoing major works i.e. electrical, structural, asbestos removal, upgrading work and Bathville.

Rent Arrears

For this ward the cumulative rental charge this year (debit) for the housing stock is £3,117,316 and £2,968,724 has been collected giving a strong collection rate of 95.2%.



Arrears Banding	2017/18 (WK26)		2018/19 (WK26)	
	Balance	Tenants In Arrears	Balance	Tenants In Arrears
£0.01 to £99.99	£8,360	184	£8,879	258
£100.00 to £299.99	£39,592	213	£41,143	225
£300.00 to £499.99	£37,000	96	£45,543	118
£500.00 to £749.99	£33,003	55	£45,007	74
£750.00 to £999.99	£25,806	30	£33,535	38
£1000.00 to £1999.99	£34,400	25	£49,832	37
£2000+	£12,120	5	£26,647	10
Total	£190,280	608	£250,587	760

The Ward arrears position for Q2 is £250,587. This is an increase of £60,307 on last year's position. The West Lothian overall position has increased by £593,408 from last year and on 01 October was £2,405,181.

While there are 47 serious arrears cases (£1,000+) it should be noted 64% of cases are in the lower bands (£300 or less).

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

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 email and telephone

- Increase Direct Debit Take Up by targeted work for example tenants who currently pay by Standing Order
- 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
- Undertake a root and branch review of our arrears process to ensure we maximise rental income

Local Area Team Activity

Officers in the team have a number of tenancies under supervision for issues such as child & adult protection, anti-social behaviour and poor tenancy conditions. Our officers' work with a range of services and agencies to ensure tenants and residents are fully supported, tenancies are maintained and sustained as far as possible and appropriate action taken where necessary.

Rent arrears activity continues to be a weekly priority task for the team and will continue to work with all our tenants in offering support, advice and assistance. Such assistance includes referrals for money, energy 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.

Staff attended the Armadale Regeneration Fun Day in July and 4 names were passed on to the Tenant Participation team where tenants had identified an interest in becoming involved.

During the reporting period as well as ensuring normal service was maintained, the Housing team packed up the office in preparation for the move on 12th September, 2018 and subsequently set up the new office space in the Armadale Partnership Centre.

Capital Programme and New Build Council Housing

Capital Programme Update

Street	Works	Progress 2018/19	
Bathville flats	Major Refurbishment	1%	Phases 1 & 2 were completed within 2017/18. The issue with title deeds delaying Phases 4 and 5 is being addressed. A Bat survey is causing additional delays.
Bedlormie Drive, Ogilface Crescent	Roof and roughcast	0%	Awaiting the building warrant.
53 – 107 Lower Bathville	Roof and render repairs, chimney removal and all external repairs	21%	On site. No ongoing issues. Environmental works to follow on completion of upgrade works.
Park Road flats	Repairs to path surface	100%	Works were completed by ISS. Some local vandalism caused damage that has been rectified. Additional resurfacing works will be carried out by the environmental contractor ISS due to additional defects.
Park Road flats	Repairs to security gate magnetic locks and common entry door systems	75%	Repair works to the common gates and common doors are being carried out by Building Services.
Strathlogie	PV Panels	99%	The 2018/19 works are progressing well on site, following the roof renewal works.

Other information	Planned programmes, central heating, aids & adaptations and testing (legionella, electrical condition etc.)	All progressing well.	Planned maintenance at 34 Strathavon Terrace, Westfield - render only – job now completed. Farquhar Square, Blackridge – roofs only – completed 30/09/2018 with only snagging works ongoing.
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New Build Programme

Site	No of units	Site Start	No. of houses handed over	Site Completion
Mayfield, Armadale	22	August 2016	20	November 2018 (estimated)
Bathville Cross	3	April 2016	1	October 2018 (estimated)
Bathville Cross	12*	April 2016	0	2019/20 (estimated)

*Number of new build units reduced at Bathville will be replaced with buy backs in Armadale

The Nelson Park site for 26 units will not proceed. This will be replaced with buy backs in the Armadale and Blackridge ward.

Tenant Participation

Tenant Led Inspection – The latest Tenant Led Inspection into areas of Homelessness commenced in August with two experienced tenant inspectors and one new to the process. The team meet weekly to look at how relevant policy and procedures work as well as carrying out interviews with staff and customers. The final report will be presented to senior management in December with a full action plan developed soon afterwards.

'Al Nour' (meaning Light) - The new community group for Syrian Refugees has welcomed new families to West Lothian. The group was established to allow families an opportunity to meet in a safe and secure environment to become more confident in communicating in English allowing them to integrate into their communities and become more independent. The group have received Office Bearer training and have now elected office bearers and drawn up a workplan.

TIS Event - The TP Team and a member of the Tenants Panel were asked to take part in an event where they gave a presentation on West Lothian approach to scrutiny of the Housing Revenue Account which was received with great enthusiasm.

Street Environmental Site Visits - Members of the Capital Programme Working Group visited a few sites with the potential to have work carried out through the Street Environmental projects in the coming months.

Housing Networks - Continue to meet on the third Tuesday of the month at the Tenants Resource Centre in Whitburn. Members of the Network discuss with staff areas of HC&BS and look at performance information to ensure we are accountable for our results. Tenants who have shown an interest in joining an evening Network will be invited to the first meeting which will be held at the beginning of November.

Safer Neighbourhood Team

The Safer Neighbourhood Teams (SNT's) continue to work in two teams across the nine multi member ward areas as an integral part of the Community Safety Unit. In all the wards, partnership working involves the local housing team, youth worker, 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 mental health advisory workers and private landlords in order to reduce antisocial behaviour. The Safer Neighbourhood team of 9 officers now work in two zones, the East and the West zones. All the officers now deal with noise nuisance calls as part of their working remit.

SNT officers attended Armadale Regeneration Fun Day with a joint stall with Housing staff in July 2018.

Intensive work continues in Blackridge area in respect of youth disorder. Two surgeries were held in the village during July with no issues reported at either. One member of the community attended the surgery simply to say "thank you" for the good work and report the situation seemed much improved. Two surgeries took place in August with no attendees at either. Members of the local community continue to report the situation as being much improved. SNT continue to monitor this.

An anonymous complaint was received by a Councillor of youth parties at an address in Armadale. A letter drop was carried out to the area but no further complaints have been received.

There are 2 interim and 3 full ASBOs in the area.

E. CONCLUSION

To note the contents of the report.

F. BACKGROUND REFERENCES

None.

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