

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 Services activity as detailed in the ward report for the period Quarter 4 - 1st January to 31st March 2023.

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	Jan 2023	%	Feb 2023	%	Mar 2023	%	WL Target %
0-2 wks	0	0%	2	100%	3	60%	55%
2-4 wks	0	0%	0	0%	0	0%	30%
4+ wks	0	0%	0	0%	2	40%	15%
Total Lets	0	0%	2	100%	5	100%	100%

Table 2: Property Void & Let Performance: Temporary Tenancies

Void Period	Jan 2023	%	Feb 2023	%	Mar 2023	%	WL Target %
0-2 wks	0	0%	3	50%	0	0%	55%
2-4 wks	0	0%	0	0%	0	0%	30%
4+ wks	2	100%	3	50%	1	100%	15%
Total Lets	2	100%	6	100%	1	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 are 55 policy voids in the ward for this period, 16 more than last reporting period.

Table 3: Policy Voids

Void period	Number of properties	PV reasons
<4 weeks	5	5 – property upgrades (heating, kitchen & bathroom)
4 – 12 weeks	5	1 – health & safety issue 4 – property upgrades (heating, kitchen & bathroom)
13 – 16 weeks	16	1 – flood 1 – structural 2 – woodworm/dampness 5 – buybacks 7 – property upgrades
26+ weeks	29	1 – legal issue 2 – flood 2 – property upgrades 2 – health & Safety issue 3 - buybacks 9 – held for decants 10 – capital programme

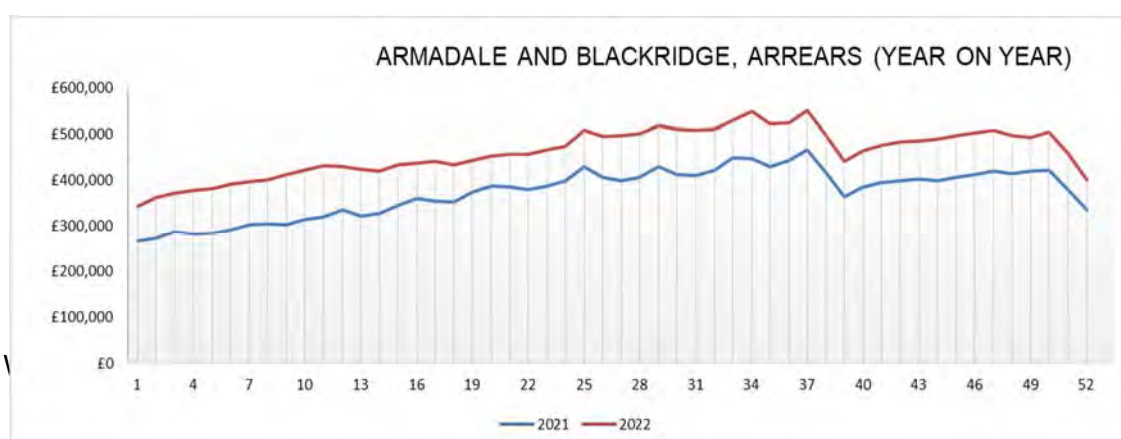
D2. Financial Summary

Overall Position

For the Armadale and Blackridge ward the collection rate for the year to date in Quarter 4 remains excellent at 97.8%. Armadale and Blackridge has collected £6,692,078 in income vs a charge of £6,839,165.

West Lothian overall arrears is currently £3,824,264. Of this, the arrears position for Armadale and Blackridge in Quarter 4 is £400,147. This is an increase of £65,660 on last year.

Table 4: Rent Arrears Comparison



- Regularly keeping tenants up-to-date about their account balance by utilising various channels of communication such as SMS, email, phone calls, and in-person visits
- Offering advice and guidance around Universal Credit, including reminding tenants of the importance of updating their online journal following any annual rent increase to ensure they do not accumulate arrears
- Supporting tenants when they apply for Discretionary Housing Payment (DHP) where there is a Universal Credit shortfall
- Referring tenants to services that can provide money and debt advice to prevent high arrears balances and maximise their income.

Table 5: Case Distribution

Arrears Banding	2021/22 (WK52)				2022/23 (WK52)			
	Mainstream		UC		Mainstream		UC	
	Balance	Cases	Balance	Cases	Balance	Cases	Balance	Cases
£0.01 to £199.99	£8,265	91	£11,031	119	£8,315	102	£13,916	138
£200.00 to £499.99	£16,443	53	£29,268	90	£16,330	49	£37,636	113
£500.00 to £999.99	£17,042	26	£44,561	64	£21,091	31	£36,859	54
£1000.00 to £1499.99	£13,843	11	£28,517	24	£16,303	13	£33,545	27
£1500.00 to £2249.99	£14,144	8	£28,397	16	£22,900	12	£34,508	19
£2250+	£51,660	11	£71,315	20	£61,155	13	£97,589	25
Group Total	£121,397	200	£213,090	333	£146,094	220	£254,053	376
Movement					(+) £24,697	(+) 20	(+) £40,963	(+) 43
Overall Total			£334,487	533			£400,147	596
Overall Movement							(+) £65,660	(+) 63

The total number of tenancies in arrears in this ward has changed, increasing by 63 since last year.

For our low debt cases, which are managed through early intervention by our Community Housing Officers (CHO), the number of cases has changed, increasing by 49 since last year. These cases (£500 or less), account for 67.45% of households and 19.04% of the debt.

For our high debt cases which are managed through early intervention by our CHOs, the number of cases has changed, increasing by 7 since last year. These cases (£1500+), account for 6.38% of households and 39.67% of the debt.

Of the households in arrears 63.1% are in receipt of universal credit and 36.9% are not in receipt of universal credit. The number of households in arrears who do not receive universal credit increased by 20. The number who do, increased by 43.

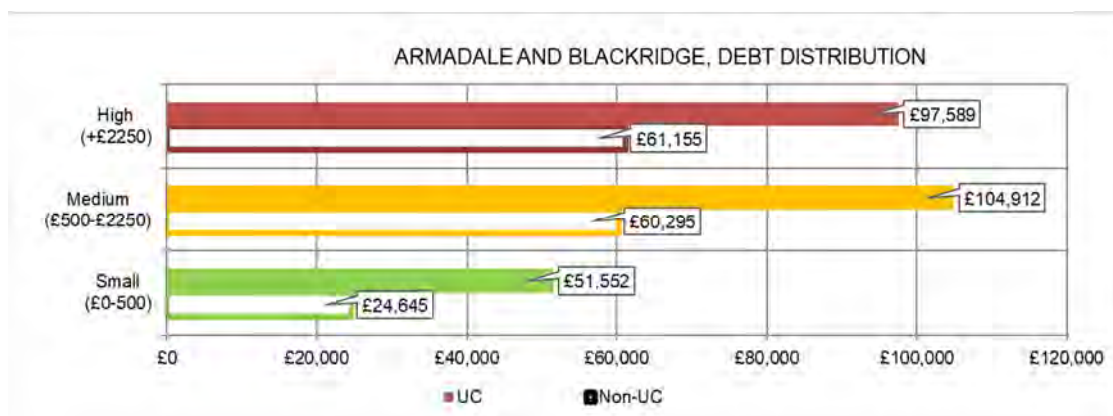
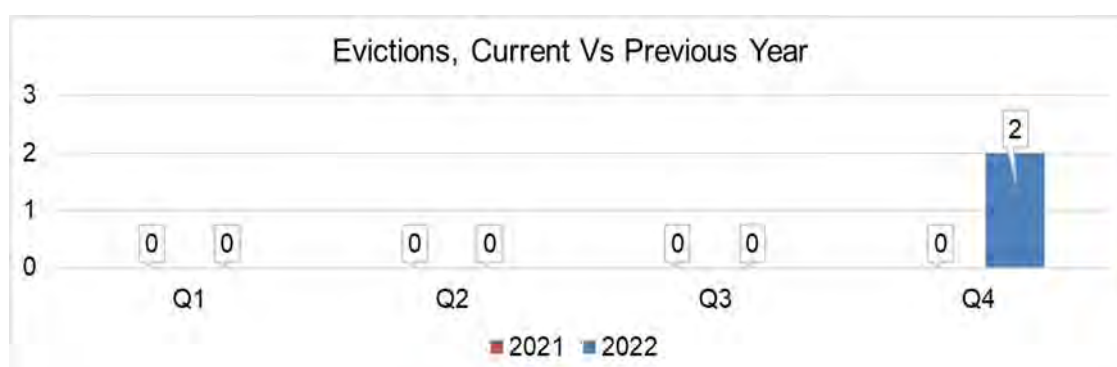


Table 6: Debt Distribution



Sequestration & Eviction

Evictions and Sequestrations remain the options of last resort. Housing Operations has a commitment to ensuring that customers can have long lasting and secure tenancies through early intervention and support.

Outside of any eviction freezes, in normal arrears recovery years we sustain at least 99.75% of our tenancies evicting less than 0.25% of our tenants

Table 7: Eviction Comparison

There were 2 evictions in Armadale and Blackridge in Quarter 4 with a total value of £18,761, making the average eviction value £9,381.

Table 8: Sequestration Comparison

There were 2 sequestrations in Armadale and Blackridge in Quarter 4 with a total value of £3,554, making the average sequestration value £1,777.

D3. Armadale Area Team Activity

During Quarter 4, Officers have continued to liaise with tenants in Burns Avenue to support them in decanting arrangements and moving out of their tenancies to progress with capital programme works. Regular meetings also continue to take place. A visit was also made to several of the tenants in the area from the Customer Service Excellence (CSE) assessor who found the visit to be very worthwhile.

Officers have also continued to work with Housing, Strategy & Development and Building Services whilst engaging with tenants to provide alternative accommodation and support as a result of flooding in their properties, the majority of which have now returned.

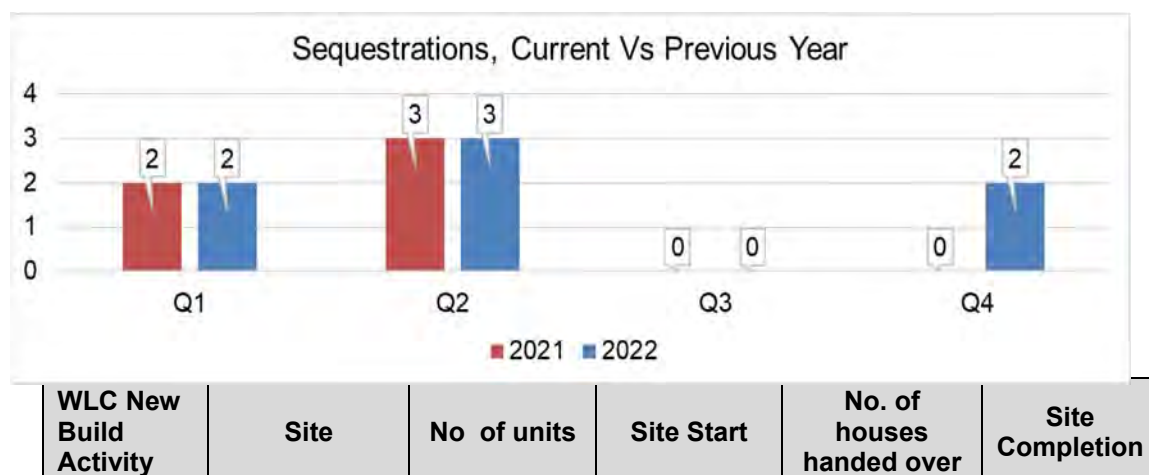
Compliance work continues to be undertaken in tenancies to ensure that these meet legislative requirements. Officers have continued to work with colleagues in Building Services on a weekly basis to ensure that the necessary health and safety work has been completed. As a result of this, there has been a number of tenants who have been identified as requiring support and officers have been progressing with these, liaising with relevant partners and agencies were required.

Rent arrears continues to be a weekly focused task for the team and they continue to work with all our tenants offering support, advice and assistance. Such assistance includes referrals for money and debt advice, benefit health checks and completion of income and expenditure to help set up a sustainable payment plans. Officers have also been successful in assisting with applications, where appropriate, for Discretionary Housing Payments.

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 9: New Build Activity



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	Apr-23

Table 10: Refurbishment & Investment

Street	Contract	Site Start	Update
Anderson Avenue	Roof & roughcast replacement	August 2021	Ongoing land dispute delaying last remaining property.
Bathville Phase 5	Regeneration	Phase 5 – October 2020	Statutory compliance work completed in owner's property. SGN work complete; ground works complete and South staircase in place. Final concrete screed to be completed and fencing work ongoing. Work been completed to void properties. Scaffold erected with approx. 1 week's work to complete insulation and walkway. Difficulties completing internal panels (powder coating) but continuing to resolve.
Burns Avenue	Orlit Upgrade	November 2021	Work continuing in the area. Eighteen properties have been completed with tenants having returned to their mainstream addresses. Building Services are currently working on a further 4 properties. Two further properties complete with tenants due to return to their tenancies within the next week. Another tenant will shortly be terminating their tenancy and a mutual exchange will also be taking place where the tenant will move directly in to decant accommodation.
Strathlogie	Heating, roof & roughcast replacement	September 2020	Roof & roughcast replacement has been completed. Anti-Poverty Service (Energy) continue to assist those tenants who have agreed to storage batteries.

			Consideration will be given to install any future vacant properties with new heating system.
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D5. Tenant Participation

Meetings

Meetings continue to be hybrid, with most being online and one face-to-face meeting. This hybrid approach allows tenants to participate in meetings in a way that is convenient for them.

Social Media

Our Tenant Participation (TP) Facebook page currently has 337 members. There has been a slight decline in numbers, but this was due to tenants deleting their Facebook pages. We are pleased to see that, despite this decline, there has been an increase in tenants engaging with our posts. Most recently, we posted a request to start a new tenants’ focus group on discussing how we can improve our annual return satisfaction on three key indicators:

- Housing, Customer, and Building Services and how we can keep tenants informed
- Providing an opportunity for tenants to take part in decision-making and how we can improve this process
- The quality of your home and how we can make sure it meets your needs

There are 6 new tenants attending a group session on the 20th April and 3 who prefer to meet one-on-one. This shows tenants are interested in being involved in decisions that affect them.

Editorial Panel

Our tenant members have approved letters, leaflets, and a web page for the upcoming Capital Investment Programme. They have been contributing towards the next Tenants News.

Tenants Panel

Tenants were provided with service area updates and advised of the engagement process currently ongoing with Building Services including what the next steps will be.

Tenant Participation Development Working Group

Staff and tenants are working with our colleagues in Human Resources (HR) to develop an e-learning module for staff to ensure everyone in the service knows what TP is and its benefits. In addition, we are developing a grab-and-go TP kit and pop-up session across West Lothian, to make TP more accessible and to encourage tenants to be involved.

Capital and Repairs Group (CARS)

This was the first meeting trialling the new quarterly approach instead of 4 weekly. This provided the tenants with more meaningful updates. This approach was well received by all parties. At this particular meeting, the tenants were provided an update on the Capital Programme, Project Budget Summary, Community Choices and Repairs.

Overall, we are confident that we are making progress in involving tenants in our work. We are committed to continuing to listen to tenants and to work with them to improve our services.

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.

SNT Flowchart of Incident enquiries and Cases

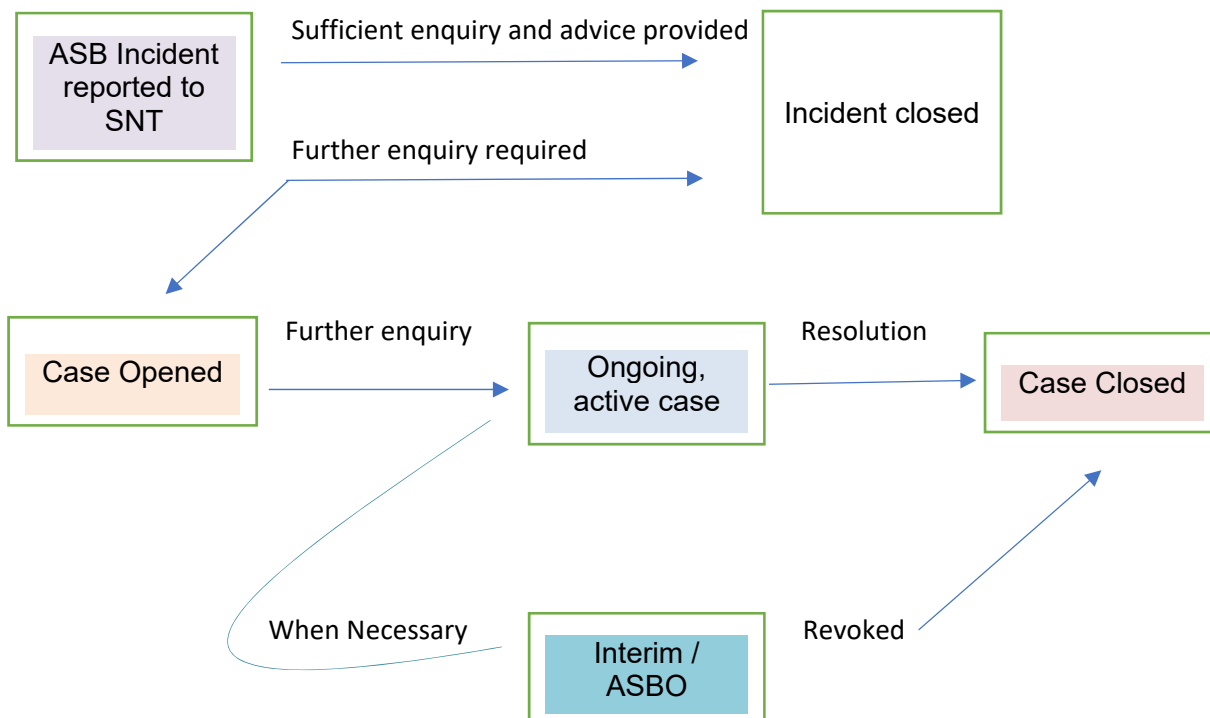


Table 11: Cases and Incidents

The table below provides details of the number of incidents reported within the Armadale and Blackridge area. Not all incidents become a case.

Cases and Incidents	<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	32	31	23	33	23	25	13	19	25	26	19	36
Number of new cases	3	1	1	2	3	1	0	1	1	2	2	5
Number of ongoing / active cases	11	5	4	5	5	5	3	3	3	3	5	9
Number of resolved cases	1	3	2	1	3	0	3	1	1	1	1	1

Table 12: Type of Incidents Reported

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 all parties involved.

Incident Categories	<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	12	20	18	28	15	15	9	7	11	12	12	22
ASB Part 5 Noise Complaint	13	9	4	2	4	4	2	9	5	11	2	4
CSU Patrol	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	2
Dog Barking	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	1	1	0
ENV Health Complaint	0	0	0	2	1	1	0	1	4	1	3	4
Non ASB Noise Complaint	1	0	0	0	0	2	1	0	0	0	0	1
SST Section 3 Tenancy Management	2	2	1	1	3	3	0	1	4	1	0	1
Youth Disorder	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	1	0	1	2
Unauthorised Encampment	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Grand Total	32	31	23	33	23	25	13	19	25	26	19	36

Table 13: Number of Anti-Social Behaviour Orders (ASBOs)

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	2	2	3	3
All of West Lothian	7 plus 1 Interim	8 plus 1 Interim	8 (2 being revoked)	6
Age of perpetrator	26 and 52	27 and 53	21,27 and 53	21, 28 and 53

West Lothian Ward Data

Table 14: Cases and Incidents

The following table provides number of all active cases and total number of incidents for the whole of West Lothian.

West Lothian	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec	Jan	Feb	Mar
Total Number of Active Cases	45	47	51	61	51	58	38	27	25	39	37	39
Total Number of Incidents	309	340	324	327	333	231	181	210	227	255	237	290

Outcomes

A number of outcomes were achieved throughout Quarter 4 and included:

- A letter drop in Mayfield Drive regarding a customer shouting and swearing. There was no responses to assist SNT with corroboration of the complaint and therefore no further action could be taken in this instance
- A noise complaint was received against a commercial premise. This was investigated by SNT and the outcome passed to Environmental Health
- A case was monitored for several months following 2 ASB warnings being served due to threatening behaviour, assault, screaming and shouting, causing alarm and distress to residents in the area. There has been no further reports of any incidents with the behaviour improved. The closed has since been closed
- Several investigations took place of cases which were passed to SNT from the Area Housing Office. These related to vandalism, shouting and swearing, abuse and threatening behaviour by customers. Police Scotland confirmed details of the incidents and warnings were served. These cases will continue to be monitored.
- Several warnings were issued to customers regarding anti-social behaviour with Police Scotland confirming corroboration
- There has been a number of patrols carried out by SNT officers regarding fire raising. These are discussed on a weekly basis at partnership meetings

E. CONCLUSION

The last year has been challenging for tenants in respect of high energy costs and rising prices. Housing staff have continued to support tenants, especially those who are vulnerable customers within our communities, by engaging with them regarding their rent as early as possible. Officers have also continued to provide advice and support on a range of issues such as anti-social behaviour, moving into new homes, financial issues, capital programme works and working with Building Services to ensure essential compliance work is progressed in tenants' homes to keep them safe.

F. BACKGROUND REFERENCES

None

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9th May 2023