

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 – 30th September 2023.

C. SUMMARY OF IMPLICATIONS

I	Council Values	Being caring and compassionate; Open, honest and accountable, collaborative, inclusive and adaptive
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. TERMS OF REPORT

D.1 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. Tables 1 and 2 provide details on letting performance.

Table 1 - Property Void & Let Performance: Mainstream Tenancies

Void Period	July 2023	%	Aug 2023	%	Sept 2023	%	WL Target %
0-2 weeks	3	42.9%	2	33.3%	2	40%	55%
2-4 weeks	0	0%	1	16.7%	1	20%	30%
4+ weeks	4	57.1%	3	50%	2	40%	15%
Total Lets	7	100%	6	100%	5	100%	100%

Table 2 - Property Void & Let Performance: Temporary Tenancies

Void Period	July 2023	%	Aug 2023	%	Sept 2023	%	WL Target %
0-2 weeks	0	0%	0	0%	3	42.9%	55%
2-4 weeks	0	0%	0	0%	2	28.6%	30%
4+ weeks	4	100%	1	100%	2	28.6%	15%
Total Lets	4	100%	1	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 64 policy voids in the ward for this period as set out in Table 3 below.

Table 3 – Policy Voids

Void period	Number of properties	PV reasons
<4 weeks	2	1 Buyback 1 Electric meter
4 – 12 weeks	8	2 Buybacks 6 Upgrades
13 – 26 weeks	13	1 Capital Programme 1 Buyback 1 Flood 3 Health & Safety 7 Upgrades
26+ weeks	41	1 Legal Dispute 1 Flood

		1 Electric meter issue 3 Major works 3 Buybacks 9 Held for decant 10 Capital programme 13 Upgrades
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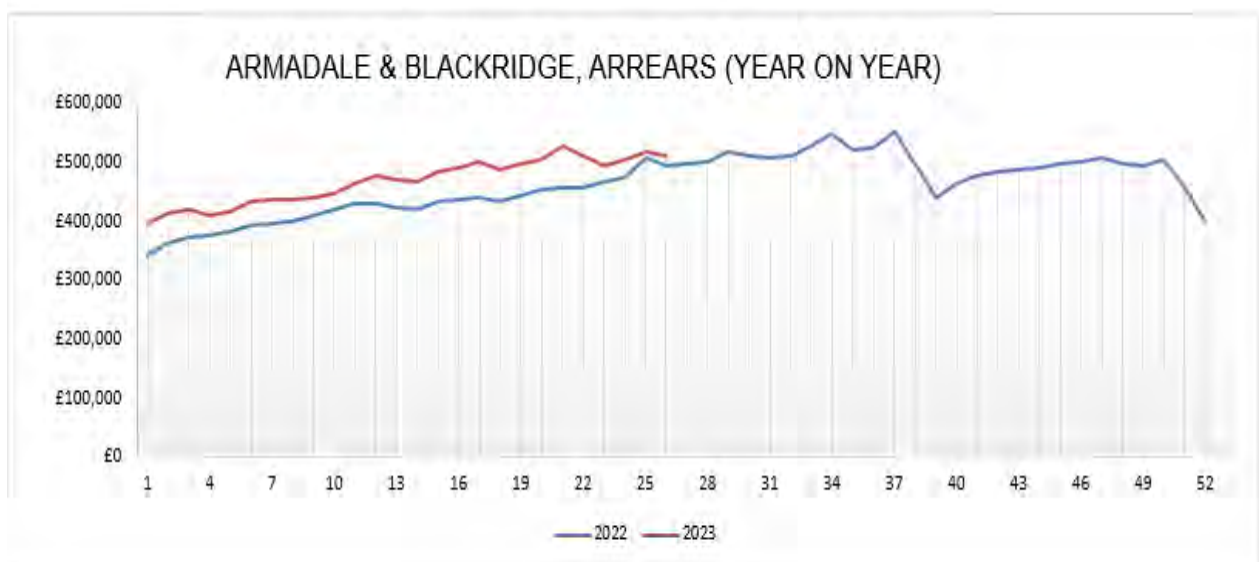
D.2 Armadale & Blackridge - Financial Summary

Overall Position

For the Armadale & Blackridge ward the collection rate for the year to date in quarter 2 remains excellent at 94.7%. Armadale & Blackridge has collected £3,539,824 in income vs a charge of £3,737,176.

West Lothian overall arrears is currently £4,666,987. Of this, the arrears position for Armadale & Blackridge quarter 2 is £510,162. This is an increase of £15,528 on last year.

Table 4 – Overall Position



We support our customers through key activities like:

- Initiating early communication with our tenants to prevent arrears and direct them towards resources and services that can help
- 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

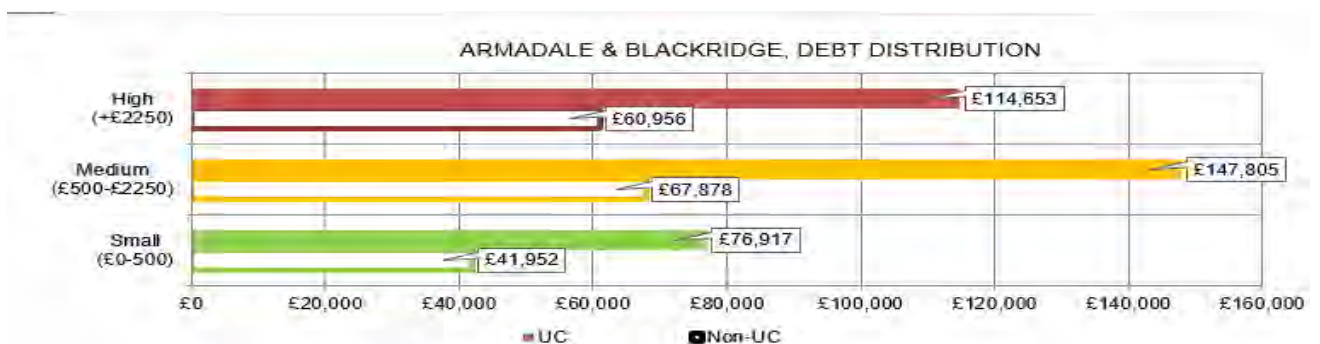
Arrears Banding	2022/23 (WK26)				2023/24 (WK26)			
	Mainstream		UC		Mainstream		UC	
	Balance	Cases	Balance	Cases	Balance	Cases	Balance	Cases
£0.01 to £199.99	£17,980	192	£15,123	141	£14,863	154	£14,898	135
£200.00 to £499.99	£31,193	96	£55,644	169	£27,089	86	£62,020	189
£500.00 to £999.99	£24,570	35	£63,397	91	£32,739	46	£66,829	96
£1000.00 to £1499.99	£16,810	14	£37,924	31	£13,825	11	£44,519	36
£1500.00 to £2249.99	£25,924	14	£43,019	25	£21,314	11	£36,457	20
£2250+	£62,246	13	£100,805	26	£60,956	17	£114,653	29
Group Total	£178,723	364	£315,911	483	£170,786	325	£339,375	505
Movement					(-) £7,936	(-) 39	(+) £23,464	(+) 22
Overall Total			£494,634	847			£510,162	830
Overall Movement							(+) £15,528	(-) 17

The total number of tenancies in arrears in this ward has changed, decreasing by 17 since last year.

Low debt cases, which are managed through early intervention by our Housing Officers, have decreased by 34 since last year. These cases (£500 or less), account for 67.95% of households and 23.30% of the debt.

High debt cases, which are managed through early intervention by our Housing Officers, have increased by 7 since last year. These cases (£2250+), account for 5.54% of households and 34.42% of the debt.

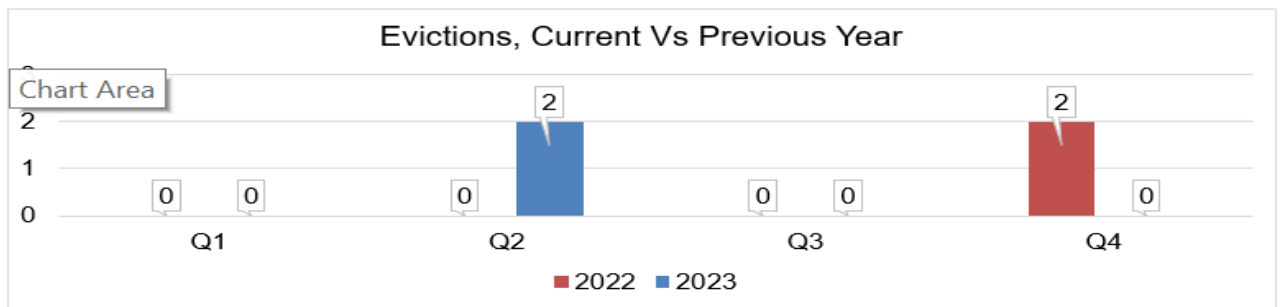
Of the households in arrears 39.2% are not in receipt of UC and 60.8% do receive UC. The number of households in arrears who do not receive UC changed by -39. The number who do changed by +22.

Table 6 - Debt Distribution

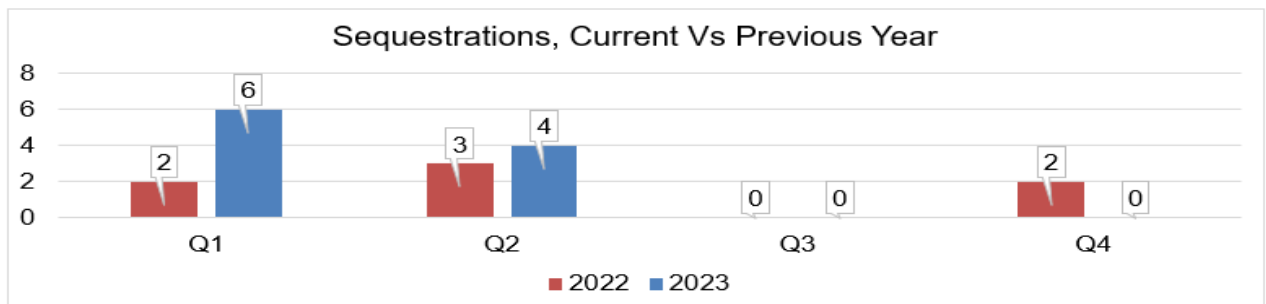
Sequestration & Eviction

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 – Number of Evictions

There were 2 evictions in Armadale & Blackridge in quarter 2 with a total value of £17,811, making the average eviction value £8,905.

Table 8 – Number of Sequestrations

There were 4 sequestrations in Armadale & Blackridge in quarter 2 with a total value of £15,603, making the average sequestration value £3,901.

D.3 Armadale & Blackridge Area Team Activity

Officers in the Housing team continue to work within the council's flexible / hybrid working arrangements, working from home, office and out in our communities. The focus on rent arrears activity continues to be a weekly priority task for the team and officers 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.

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. This has also included support and assistance to customers where capital programme work is being completed in Burns Avenue, ensuring decants are progressed within timescales.

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 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 Scotland and Safer Neighbourhood Team colleagues.

D.4 Capital Programme

Table 9 - Local Capital Investment Upgrades

Street	Contract	Site Start	Update
Bathville Phase 5	Regeneration	Phase 5 – October 2020	Work now complete. Building Services are currently completing work to vacant houses.
Burns Avenue	Orlit Upgrade	November 2021	Work continuing to progress well in the area. Twenty seven properties, 5 of which are being used as decants, have been completed. Building Services are currently working on a further 4 properties. Three further preliminary visits have been completed, one which includes a mutual exchange. Twelve properties are still outstanding.

D.5 Tenant Participation

The Tenant Participation (TP) Facebook page has maintained a consistent number of members throughout this quarter, with a total of 334 members.

There was a positive response to the introduction to TP sessions. As a result, we have successfully gained another tenant on the panel.

The tenants have been focused on reviewing letters sent to tenants to make sure they are in a user-friendly format.

This quarter, the Summer edition of the Tenant's News was published and a draft of the Winter edition has been prepared to feature in the Bulletin.

Tenants' attended a tenants' panel to assess service performance. This led to a learning and development session on the Scottish Housing Quality Standard (SHQS) and helping our newer tenant panel members understand what this means.

Tenants' continued to focus on developing a staff e-learning module. This module aims to enhance staff members' understanding of tenant participation and provide guidance on effectively involving tenants during the tenancy sign-up process.

Work is progressing well with the Tenant Participation Grab and Go sessions. We are finalising the dates with the partnership centre and preparing PR material, such as pop-up displays.

D.6 Safer Neighbourhood Team

The Safer Neighbourhood Team (SNT) officers 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 anti-social behaviour (ASB). Partnership working involves the local housing team, council officer within SNT and officers from Police Scotland and the Scottish Fire and Rescue Service all working together to tackle anti-social 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

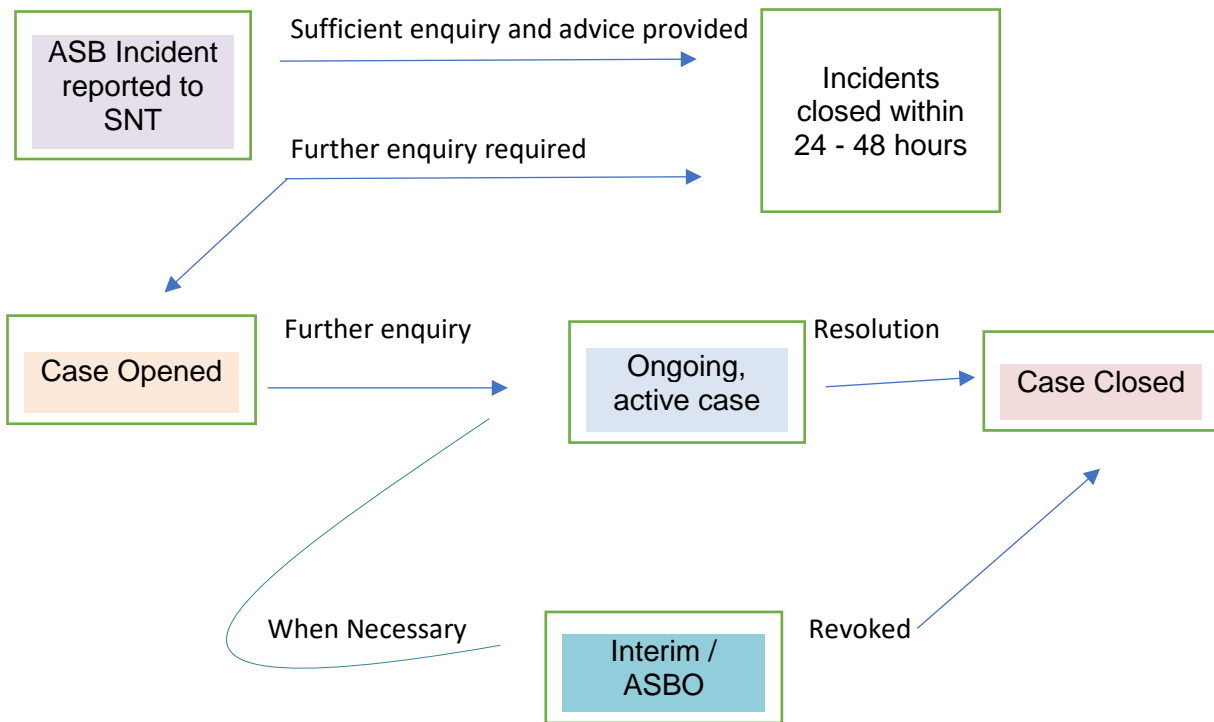


Table 10 - Armadale & Blackridge Ward Data

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.

Cases and Incidents	Jul	Aug	Sep
Incidents reported to SNT	47	50	21
Number of new cases	8	4	2
Number of ongoing / active cases	9	6	9
Number of resolved cases	5	2	3

Table 11 - 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.

Incident Categories	Jul	Aug	Sep
ASB Part 2 Complaint	17	29	8
ASB Part 5 Noise Complaint	21	15	11
Dog Barking	0	0	0
ENV Health Complaint	1	2	1
Non ASB Noise Complaint	1	0	0
SST Section 3 Tenancy Management	5	4	1
Youth Disorder	0	0	7
Unauthorised Encampment	0	0	0
CSU Patrol	0	0	0
Grand Total	47	50	21

Table 12 - The following table provides numbers of ASBO that are current in ward and compared to all of West Lothian.

ASBO	Q2
Number of ASBO's current	2
All of West Lothian	4
Age of perpetrator	2 x females aged 22 and 49 2 x males aged 55 and 54

West Lothian Ward Data

Table 13 - The following table provides number of all active cases and total number of incidents for the whole of West Lothian.

West Lothian	Jul	Aug	Sep
Total Number of Active Cases	60	52	55
Total Number of Incidents	332	324	260

Outcomes

A summary of some of the outcomes that officers managed to achieve throughout the period for quarter 2 July, August and September 2023 are detailed below:

Table 14 - Outcomes

Warning	<p>Several 1st stage warnings were issued to tenants following information from Police Scotland with regards to an assault and also officers witnessing noise nuisance.</p> <p>Numerous calls were made about loud music from a neighbour. SNT have witnessed this and a 1st stage warning has been served. Investigations are also continuing.</p>
Letter drop	<p>A letter drop was carried out in an area with no response. However, a further corroborated noise complaint was received allowing SNT to serve a warning in person on the perpetrator. The consequences of continued ASB were explained and there have been no reported incidents since.</p> <p>Ongoing complaints of loud music was received and SNT have carried out a letter drop to highlight the importance of reporting and are awaiting a response to determine if any further action can be taken.</p> <p>A complaint was received regarding frequent disturbances of loud music and threatening behaviour from a property. A Letter drop was completed including to the alleged perpetrators address. No further complaints have been received.</p> <p>A complaint was received regarding frequent disturbances of loud music and threatening behaviour from a property with the tenant having moved out and sublet the tenancy. A letter drop was completed including to the alleged perpetrators address – no further complaints have been received. The area housing office are currently investigating sublet issues.</p>
Successful action	<p>2 cases have been closed with no further reports after first stage warnings being issued.</p> <p>SNT received a loud music call late into the night, officers attended and witnessed the noise. SNT spoke with the perpetrator who agreed to turn the music down.</p>

E. Conclusion

The void and let turnover remains low and officers continue to provide advice and assistance to customers on their housing options and ensuring that their housing need points are maximised. The team continue to provide support and assistance to new tenants moving into their tenancies both in mainstream and temporary accommodation.

Income management continues to be one of our main focuses of work to ensure customers are supported and that officers maintain good income collection.

Officers continue to engage with tenants who are being affected by capital programme work in Burns Avenue by preparing decant accommodation or are due to return to their tenancies, providing support and assistance.

Officers within the team have supported colleagues in Building Services ensuring that compliance work is completed within our tenancies.

Joint working has continued with police colleagues and wider community safety partners in dealing with issues of anti-social behaviour.

F. Background References

None

Appendices/Attachments:

None

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31st October 2023