

Housing, Customer and
Building Services



LANDLORD REPORT 2021

INTRODUCTION

Welcome to West Lothian Council's latest edition of our Landlord Report. This covers the performance for Housing, Customer and Building Services (HCBS) during the period 1st April 2020 to 31st March 2021; referred to throughout this report as the 'reporting year'.

Due to the Covid-19 pandemic the last year has been particularly challenging for all of us and has required us to deliver our essential services using new and innovative ways to ensure the safety of our colleagues and our customers throughout West Lothian. With this in mind we have created this report in a safe, online only version to prevent people printing and handling paper copies, whilst still allowing us to get our performance information to you during the pandemic.

As you go through the Landlord Report, you will note that in some areas our performance has been affected by the coronavirus restrictions that were in place throughout the year. Since the restrictions have been lifted, we have made excellent progress in catching up in areas such as repairs and capital improvement works.



*Marjory Mackie,
Interim Head of Housing,
Customer and Building Services*

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TAKING PART

BACKGROUND

The Scottish Social Housing Charter (The Charter) is a requirement of the Housing (Scotland) Act 2010, and sets out the standards and outcomes which social landlords should aim to achieve when performing housing activities.

The Charter came into effect on 1 April 2012 and was reviewed during 2016; it is currently being further reviewed by the Scottish Government in 2021/2022. The Charter applies to all local authorities and social landlords in Scotland, with each landlord being required to submit an annual return on their performance to the Scottish Housing Regulator (SHR). The SHR is an independent regulatory authority who monitors progress against these standards; this is known as the Annual Return on the Charter (ARC).

Within The Charter there are six standards:

- The Customer Landlord Relationship
- Housing Quality & Maintenance
- Neighbourhood & Community
- Access to Housing and Support
- Getting Good Value from Rents and Service Charges
- Other Customers (Standard 6 applies only to those that are responsible for managing sites for gypsies/travellers. As we do not currently have any sites, this standard does not apply to West Lothian Council).

Under each standard there is a clear statement of what tenants and service users can expect from their landlord, and underpinning each standard there are Performance Indicators which each landlord must report on each year to the SHR.

This year, the council was required to report performance against each of these indicators to The Scottish Housing Regulator by the 31st July, and publish a Landlord Report to tenants by the 31st October 2021.

Information in this report shows how well the council has performed against each of the standards that apply to them as a landlord. This report is produced in association with the members of the Tenant Participation Development Working Group and Tenants' Editorial Panel, to ensure the information is clear and of interest to tenants and service users.

The Scottish Housing Regulator's website shows performance information from all local authorities and social housing landlords from across Scotland. If you would like to compare the Council's performance with up to four other social landlords, you can do so using the Landlord Comparison Tool, which can be found here:

➤ <https://www.housingregulator.gov.scot/landlord-performance>

LANDLORD INFORMATION

Council housing in West Lothian is managed by Housing, Customer and Building Services (HCBS). The service is managed by Marjory Mackie who is the Interim Head of Service and she is supported by a Senior Management Team, each of whom is responsible for the following Service Areas:

- Building Services
- Customer Services and Customer Services Development
- Housing Need
- Housing Operations
- Housing Strategy and Development
- Performance and Change

The council's aim is to offer an effective service; managing, maintaining and improving homes, whilst delivering an excellent value for money service.

TO CONTINUE PROVIDING QUALITY HOMES FOR RENT, HOUSING CUSTOMER AND BUILDING SERVICES EMPLOYS AROUND 800 OFFICERS



OUR HOUSING STOCK

In the reporting year, the weekly rent was increased for all properties by 3%; as agreed by tenants as part of the five year rent consultation carried out in 2017.

As at 31 March 2021, the council had 14,031 homes for rent which is an increase in our housing stock of 64 homes from 2019/20.

Here we show the size and average weekly rent for our housing stock:

Type of Property Available for Rent	No. of Properties Available for Rent	Average Weekly Rent per property type
bedsit	16	£64.98
one Bed	2570	£70.47
two Bed	6633	£74.78
three Bed	4183	£79.32
four+ Bed	629	£84.86

IN 2020/21 THE COUNCIL HAD

14,031

HOMES AVAILABLE FOR RENT



PERFORMANCE AGAINST THE ARC FOR 2020/21

STANDARD 1 - THE CUSTOMER LANDLORD RELATIONSHIP

every tenant and customer has their individual needs recognised, is treated fairly and with respect, and receives fair access to housing and housing services.

tenants and other customers find it easy to communicate with their landlord and get the information they need about their landlord, how and why it makes decisions and the services it provides.

tenants and other customers find it easy to participate in and influence their landlord's decisions at a level they feel comfortable with.

TENANT SATISFACTION

In autumn 2019, a Tenants Satisfaction Survey was posted out to 13,663 council tenancies, giving each household the chance to say what they thought of the services received from HCBS. We also sent a reminder text message to those tenants who had their mobile listed as their main contact, with a link to the online survey. We received a total of **2,183** responses; an increase on the previous 2017 survey which received **1,785** responses.

Throughout this report we provide information from the survey showing how tenants feel HCBS performed against certain charter indicators. We also show the number of tenants who responded to each question. **These are shown as icons which represent:**



VERY OR FAIRLY SATISFIED



NEITHER SATISFIED OR DISSATISFIED



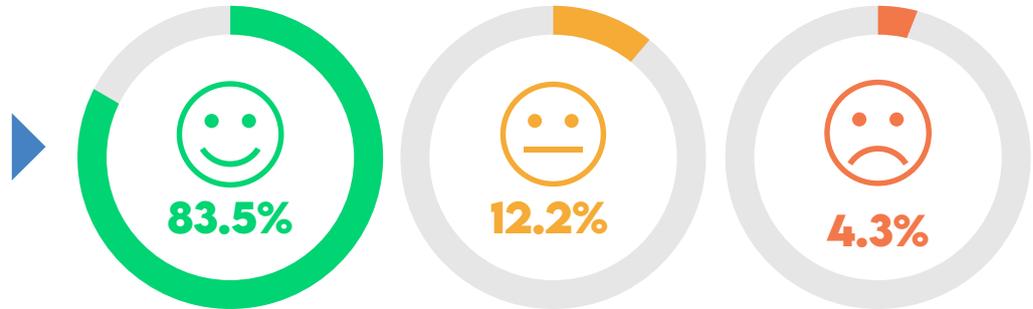
FAIRLY OR VERY DISSATISFIED

OVERALL SATISFACTION

2,171 responses received

Q. Taking everything into account, how satisfied or dissatisfied are you with the overall service provided by your landlord?

Tenants reported satisfaction levels as:

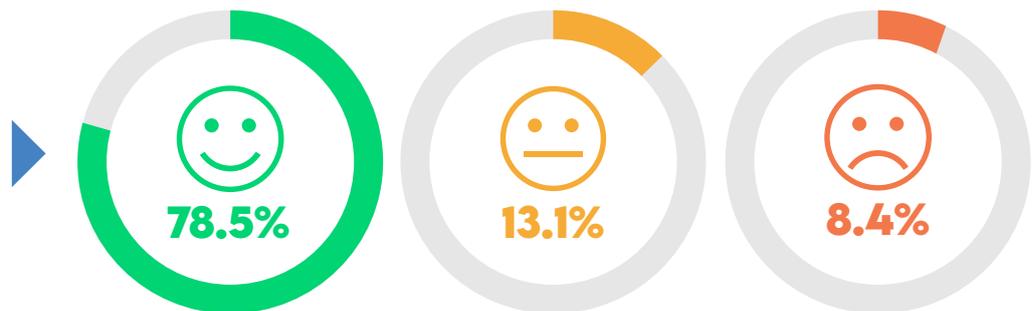


COMMUNICATION SATISFACTION

2,169 responses received

Q. How good or poor do you feel your landlord is at keeping you informed about their services and decisions?

Tenants reported satisfaction levels as:

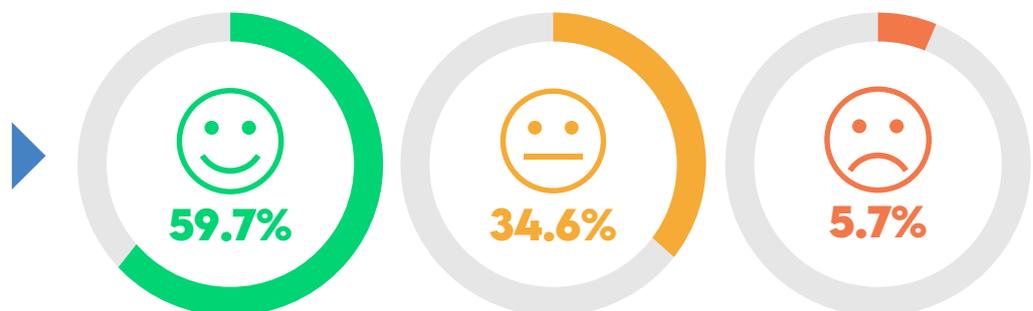


PARTICIPATION SATISFACTION

2,134 responses received

Q. How satisfied or dissatisfied are you with opportunities given to you to participate in your landlord's decision-making processes?

Tenants reported satisfaction levels as:



STANDARD 2 - HOUSING QUALITY AND MAINTENANCE

tenants' homes, as a minimum, meet the Scottish Housing Quality Standard (SHQS) when they are allocated; are always clean, tidy and in a good state of repair, and also meet the energy efficiency standard for social housing (EESH) by December 2020.

tenants' homes are well maintained, with repairs and improvements carried out when required, and tenants are given reasonable choices about when work is done.



SCOTTISH HOUSING QUALITY STANDARD

The SHQS was introduced by the Scottish Government in February 2004. At the end of the reporting year, 12,346 properties met the quality standard of the SHQS.

88.14%

**OF PROPERTIES
MET THE SHQS
STANDARD**

QUALITY OF HOME SATISFACTION

2,170 responses received

Q. How satisfied or dissatisfied are you with the overall quality of your home?

Tenants reported satisfaction levels as:



ENERGY EFFICIENCY STANDARD FOR SOCIAL HOUSING (EESH)

The Scottish Government brought EESH into force in March 2014 with the aim of improving the energy efficiency of social housing in Scotland. All social landlords were expected to achieve this standard by 2020.

The EESH sets a single minimum energy efficiency rating for landlords to achieve, meaning that tenants should benefit from a warmer home, which could mean lower fuel consumption, lower energy bills and fewer tenants in fuel poverty.



IN THE REPORTING YEAR, 386 PROPERTIES WERE BROUGHT UP TO THE EESH STANDARD, COSTING A TOTAL OF £1,995,000, WHICH WAS FUNDED SOLELY BY TENANTS' RENT PAYMENTS.

WE ARE DELIGHTED TO REPORT THAT 12,806 OF OUR HOMES, THAT FALL WITHIN THE SCOPE OF THE EESH, NOW MEET THE REQUIRED STANDARD; THIS IS 91.4% OF OUR TOTAL HOMES. THE REMAINING PROPERTIES ARE PROGRAMMED TO BE UNDERTAKEN THIS YEAR.

REPAIRS

In West Lothian we offer scheduled appointments for routine repairs so there is a choice of a morning or afternoon slot (anytime between 9:30am and 4:30pm).

To help the council manage each reported repair, these are categorised based on the type and the urgency of the repair. It is important for you to know this as each category has different timescales for when the repair must be completed.

There are five different categories of repair which should be reported as soon as possible. There are different ways to report different categories of repair, depending on whether these are emergency or non-emergency.

More information on the different repair categories can be found online at:

[www.westlothian.gov.uk/
request-a-repair](http://www.westlothian.gov.uk/request-a-repair)

BOOKING A REPAIR

Tenants have the option and flexibility to book routine repair appointments online, by telephone or in person.

You can do this by:

- Online through '[Housing Online](#)'
- through the online interactive tool [Request a Repair Online](#)
- Online at [contact us](#)
- By telephone on: 01506 280000
- In person through your local [CIS office](#)

REPAIRS PERFORMANCE

In West Lothian, repairs to our housing stock are carried out by our own Building Services operatives.



IN THE REPORTING
YEAR, THEY COMPLETED
93.10%
OF REPAIRS 'RIGHT
FIRST TIME'.

IN 2020/21, THEY COMPLETED A
GRAND TOTAL OF 36,112 EMERGENCY
AND NON-EMERGENCY REPAIRS.

REPAIRS PERFORMANCE

Here we show a breakdown of the type and number of repairs carried out, with the average time to complete and the average cost of each repair:

CATEGORY 1 - EMERGENCY AND OUT OF HOURS REPAIRS PERFORMANCE

Reporting Years	2020/21	2019/20	2018/19
total no. of repairs	26,061	23,165	22,619
average time to complete (hours)	5.94 hrs	5.96 hrs	6.56 hrs
average Cost of Repair	£83.02	£82.48	£74.78

CATEGORY 2 AND 3 REPAIRS – URGENT AND NON-URGENT REPAIRS PERFORMANCE

Reporting Years	2020/21	2019/20	2018/19
total no. of repairs	10,051	14,765	14,202
average time to complete (days)	7.74 days	7.01 days	7.85 days
average Cost of Repair	£108.57	£89.44	£84.70

REPAIR SATISFACTION

2,401 responses received

Q. Thinking about the LAST time you had repairs carried out, how satisfied or dissatisfied were you with the repairs service provided by your Landlord?

Tenants reported satisfaction levels as:



GAS SERVICING

By law, we must carry out an annual gas safety check and service to our homes with gas heating systems. This keeps our systems in good working order and gives tenants peace of mind knowing that everything is being done to keep them safe and warm. It is also a legal requirement that these checks are carried out and failure to allow us into a property can result in our operatives having to force entry to a property.



IN THE REPORTING YEAR WE WERE UNABLE TO COMPLETE A GAS SAFETY CHECK ON 557 OF OUR PROPERTIES. THIS WAS PRIMARILY DUE TO THE IMPACTS OF THE COVID-19 RESTRICTIONS, AS WE WERE RESTRICTED FROM ACCESSING TENANTS' HOMES AT CERTAIN PERIODS THROUGHOUT 2020/2021. THE SERVICE PRIORITISED THIS WORK ON THE EASING OF RESTRICTIONS AND ALL DELAYED APPOINTMENTS HAVE NOW BEEN COMPLETED.

GAS SERVICING AND SAFETY CHECK PERFORMANCE

Reporting Years	2020/21	2019/20	2018/19
total no. of properties requiring a gas safety certificate	13,608	13,493	13,228
no. of certificates renewed by their anniversary date	13,051	13,493	13,224
average cost of gas service	£55.10	£54.21	£46.27

STANDARD 3 - NEIGHBOURHOOD AND COMMUNITY

Social landlords, working in partnership with other agencies, help to ensure that tenants and other customers live in well-maintained neighbourhoods where they feel safe.



WORKING TOGETHER

In West Lothian we work in partnership with tenants, service users, the police and other council services to manage our neighbourhoods.

ANTISOCIAL BEHAVIOUR (ASB)

We record the number of antisocial behaviour complaints made to the council. These can include neighbour complaints, vandalism/damage, street drinking or problems with unoccupied houses.

87.1%
OF REPORTED
CASES WERE
RESOLVED IN THE
REPORTING YEAR

ANTISOCIAL BEHAVIOUR PERFORMANCE

Reporting Years	2020/21	2019/20	2018/19
reported cases of antisocial behaviour	310	272	301
reported cases resolved	270	256	274

NEIGHBOURHOOD MANAGEMENT SATISFACTION 2,164 responses received

Q. Overall, how satisfied or dissatisfied are you with your landlord's contribution to the management of the neighbourhood you live in?

Tenants reported satisfaction levels as:



One of the most important things you can do to improve safety in your community is to report antisocial behaviour. With your help we can stop antisocial behaviour before it escalates into something more serious.

To report antisocial behaviour:

- [Contact the Council](#)
- Police Scotland on 101. (calls to this number are charged at the local rate)
- Police Scotland on 999, if it's an emergency.

COMPLAINTS PERFORMANCE

In the reporting year HCBS dealt with a total of 757 Stage 1 and Stage 2 complaints. This is an improvement compared to 2019/20, where 911 complaints were recorded.

Reporting Years	Stage 1	Stage 2
Complaints received in the reporting year	560	184
Complaints carried forward from the previous reporting year	7	6
Total number of complaints received and carried forward	567	190
The percentage of all complaints responded to in full during the reporting year	100%	98.95%
Average time in working days for a full response being issued for each individual complaint	3.41 days	18.18 days
Number of complaints responded to in full by the landlord in the reporting year	567	188
Time taken in working days to provide a response for the total number of complaints over the reporting year	1,935 days	3,417 days

Complaints allow us to look at where things have gone wrong and make improvements in the future, and HCBS would like tenants to tell us if they have had a problem with any service received. By telling us where problems have been experienced, the service is able to identify where issues lie and work on making services better for tenants and service users.

Complaints are broken down into separate categories to help us identify where improvements to our procedures need to be made in order to prevent similar complaints occurring in the future.

Complaint Reason	Number	Percentage
Standard of Service	343	45.3%
Employee Attitude	137	18.1%
Poor Communication	102	13.5%
Waiting Time	81	10.7%
Policy Related	76	10.0%
Missed Appointment	18	2.4%
TOTALS	757	100%

STANDARD 4 - ACCESS TO HOUSING AND SUPPORT

those looking for housing get information that helps them make informed choices and decisions about the range of housing options available to them.

tenants and people on housing lists can review their housing options.

those at risk of losing their homes get advice on preventing homelessness.

those looking for housing find it easy to apply for the widest choice of social housing available and get the information they need on how the landlord allocates homes and their prospects of being housed.

tenants get the information they need on how to obtain support to remain in their home; and ensure suitable support is available, including services provided directly by the landlord and by other organisations.

homeless people get prompt and easy access to help and advice; are provided with suitable, good-quality temporary or emergency accommodation when this is needed; and are offered continuing support to help them get and keep the home they are entitled to.



HOUSING LIST PERFORMANCE

The council allocates properties to people who have an active housing application. Applications are assigned to a group and points are awarded based on applicants housing need.

For information on applying for a house can be found [here](#).

Information shown provides details of how we managed our housing list in the reporting year.

Reporting Years	2020/21	2019/20	2018/19
applicants added to the housing list	3,475	3,390	3,600
applications cancelled from the housing list	593	2,249	2,111
applicants on the housing list	9,248	7,999	8,271
offers of housing made	1,265	2,634	2,699
offers of housing refused	682	712	1,376

**FROM THE OFFERS OF HOUSING MADE,
53.91% OF THESE WERE REFUSED
DURING THE REPORTING YEAR**

LETTING OUR HOUSES

When a property becomes empty, we do our best to re-let it as quickly as possible. This maximises rental income and provides much needed accommodation for those on the housing list.

4.33% OF OUR
LETTABLE HOUSING STOCK
BECAME AVAILABLE
FOR RE-LET.



LETTING PERFORMANCE

Reporting Years	2020/21	2019/20	2018/19
properties that became vacant (excluding mutual exchanges)	608	929	933
properties abandoned	55	81	95
average time to re-let properties	53.35 days	36.92 days	37.52 days

Of the 608 lets made; 588 were to 'general needs' and 20 were to 'supported housing'.

HOW WE LET OUR HOUSES

Reporting Years	2020/21	2019/20	2018/19
existing tenants (transfers)	83	342	371
housing list applicants	114	268	232
mutual exchanges	82	113	134
other sources	9	11	5
homeless applicants	402	763	737
TOTAL	690	1,384	1,479

HOMELESSNESS

The council provide a 24 hour practical support and assistance service for people who are homeless or potentially homeless. Our homeless accommodation includes both emergency and temporary accommodation.

HOMELESSNESS PERFORMANCE

Reporting Years	2020/21	2019/20	2018/19
average time homeless applicants spent in temporary accommodation	101.3 days	88,2 days	195 days
how many households stayed in temporary accommodation	1,765	1,829	1,427
how many houses in West Lothian were used for temporary accommodation	597	404	412
how many people contacted the council's prevention service for help and support	445	767	730
The total number of homeless households to whom the council has a statutory duty to secure permanent accommodation	1,120	696	n/a

MEDICAL ADAPTATIONS

At some stage in life, tenants may find their home is no longer suitable for them. This may be because the layout of the house is difficult due to illness, disability, mobility or if a tenant is elderly.

We can carry out alterations to a property (as approved by an Occupational Therapist), based on a tenant's medical needs. These adaptations are to help the tenant continue to live more independently in their own home. Adaptations can include grab rails, ramps or wet-floor showers.

MEDICAL ADAPTATIONS PERFORMANCE

Reporting Years	2020/21	2019/20	2018/19
medical adaptations completed in the reporting year	215	546	552

The total cost of completed medical adaptations in the reporting year was £69,827

Reporting Years	2020/21	2019/20	2018/19
average time to complete approved applications	9.58 days	10,30 days	13.71 days

WE COMPLETED 66.9% OF APPROVED MEDICAL ADAPTATIONS IN THE REPORTING YEAR

STANDARD 5 - GETTING GOOD VALUE FROM RENTS AND SERVICE CHARGES

tenants, owners and other customers receive services that provide continually improving value for the rent and other charges they pay.

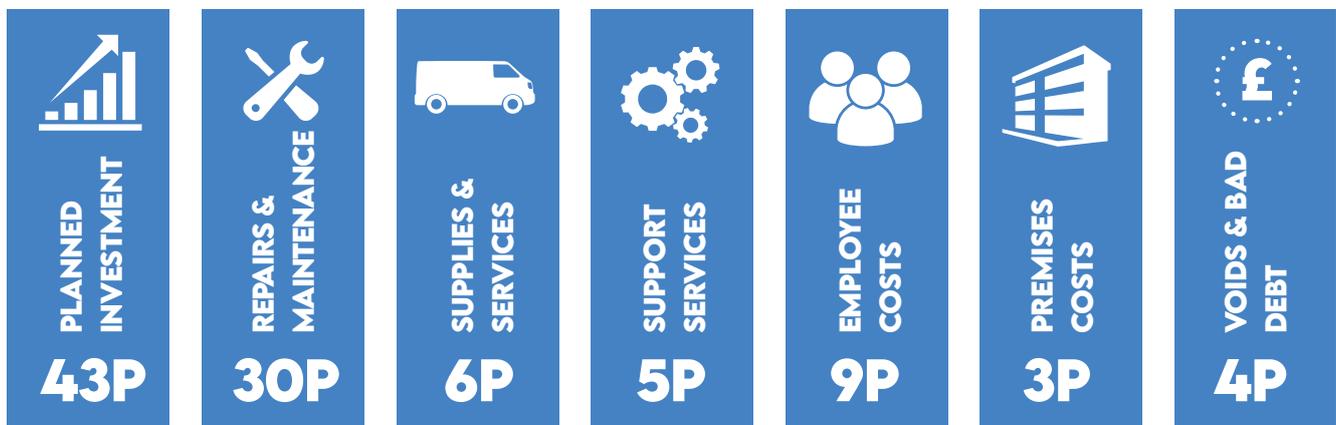
a balance is struck between the level of services provided, the cost of the services, and how far current and prospective tenants and other customers can afford them.

tenants get clear information on how rent and other money is spent, including any details of individual items of expenditure above thresholds agreed between landlords and tenants.

WHERE DOES YOUR RENT MONEY GO?

Rent money is used to fund the repair service, improvements to tenants' homes and new-build projects. It is therefore very important that tenants pay their rent to ensure the council is able to deliver these vital services.

The graphic below shows where every penny in the pound goes from your rent payments. You can see how the rental income is being spent, with over 73 pence in every pound collected being spent on Repairs, Maintenance and Planned Investment work on tenants' homes.



RENTAL INCOME

As a landlord we have a duty to collect as much rental income as possible so we can provide a good value for money service to all our tenants.



AGAINST A CHALLENGING AND DIFFICULT YEAR FOR MANY, WE WERE ABLE TO COLLECT 99.13% OF THE RENTAL INCOME DUE. THIS IS AN INCREASE ON LAST YEAR'S FIGURE WHICH WAS 98.2%

OUR AIM FOR 2021/22 IS TO CONTINUE TO WORK WITH TENANTS TO MAXIMISE OUR INCOME AND REDUCE RENT ARREARS.

PAYING RENT

Paying rent is part of your tenancy agreement and it is important that rent is paid on time and in full. If you are having difficulty paying rent, please contact your housing officer for help and advice.

Tel: 01506 280000 or

visit www.westlothian.gov.uk/contactus

If you wish to pay your rent online, click here:

<https://www.westlothian.gov.uk/article/47580/Housing-Rent>

INCOME AND ARREARS PERFORMANCE

In the reporting year, 10,608 households had their housing benefit paid directly to the Housing Revenue Account, amounting to £31,335,417.

Reporting Years	2020/21	2019/20	2018/19
rent due	£54,138,937	£51,817,411	£47,851,906
rent collected	£53,277,472	£50,490,260	£46,699,279
rent arrears (gross)	£4,206,919	£3,331,538	£3,184,868

The performance information shown above also includes figures for former tenant arrears. When a tenant leaves a council property with rent arrears we keep a record of these and work with our colleagues in Revenues to collect the money owed.

EVICCTIONS

Restrictions due to the Covid-19 Pandemic, suspended the use of eviction by local authorities. Therefore, no tenants were evicted from their home in the reporting year due to rent arrears.

RENT LOST DUE TO EMPTY PROPERTIES

When a property becomes empty, we do our best to re-let it as quickly as possible; however, sometimes this can take longer than we would like due to improvement work being carried out on the property.

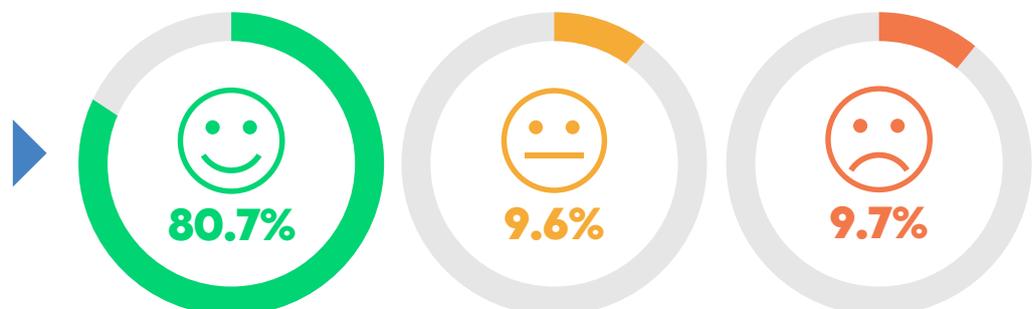
IN THE REPORTING YEAR, 0.73% OF OUR RENT, A TOTAL OF **£396,509** WAS LOST DUE TO PROPERTIES BEING EMPTY.

RENT SATISFACTION

2,172 responses received

Q. Taking into account the accommodation and the services your landlord provides, do you think the rent for your property represents good or poor value for money?

Tenants reported satisfaction levels as:



PRIORITIES FOR IMPROVEMENT 2021/2022

Housing, Customer and Building Services are a key player in developing and deploying corporate strategies aimed at improving the quality of life for all people in West Lothian. In the next four years, the service will continue to support the delivery of the council's eight key priorities with value adding activities and will also assist in the delivery of the council's transformation programme through:

- achieving all of the standards and outcomes in the Scottish Social Housing Charter for tenants, people who are homeless and others who use our services.
- complying with all of the following legal obligations related to housing and homelessness, equality and human rights, and tenant and resident safety.
- recognising the risks and pressures associated in delivering on the standards and outcomes in relation to homelessness, and improvements in this area of the service is one of the key areas of focus for the service as we deliver the reviewed Rapid Rehousing Transition Plan in 2021/22.
- understanding the ongoing impacts of UK Government welfare reforms on our tenants, and in particular, those most vulnerable to social deprivation. The service has made practical support and guidance a cornerstone of our service development programme, in order to help reduce future impacts and pressures on tenants and our ability to respond. The planned changes to benefits and ongoing impacts of Universal Credit remain the biggest threat to stable household income and service revenue collection.
- prioritising the recovery and renewal of services as Scotland and the housing sector moves out of Covid-19 related restrictions on our activities. The service has spent considerable time and resources on mitigating the worst impacts of the pandemic on tenants in 2020/21, and understands the pressure this has placed many of our tenants under. Ensuring support and easing access to key services remains a service priority, and the progress made on embedding digital service delivery is built upon in the coming year.
- focussing on improvements in void performance in order to maximise our stock availability to relieve pressures felt in the service in terms of turnover
- having an ARC improvement plan in place to ensure continuous improvement is a key focus for all service areas.

The logo features a white outline of a house with a gabled roof. Inside the house outline, the words "LANDLORD" and "REPORT" are stacked in a bold, white, sans-serif font. Below "REPORT", the year "2020" is written in a smaller, bold, black font. The entire logo is set against a bright green background that has a clipped top-right corner.

LANDLORD REPORT 2020

TAKING PART

The Housing (Scotland) Act 2001 and 2010 gives tenants legal rights in relation to participation and places a duty on Local Authorities and Registered Social Landlords (RSL's) to consult with tenants on a range of housing issues.

In West Lothian, we have a Tenant Participation Strategy that sets out how the council will communicate, consult and most importantly, take on board and use the views and opinions of tenants to influence decisions that shape our services.

There are many ways in which any tenant or service user can take part, either as an individual or as a member of the various groups in a way that suits them.

We are presently holding all meetings virtually through online conferencing software, so you don't even need to leave the comfort of your own home to join in.

We have various initiatives and activities available that provide a means for tenants to come along and find out about changes or improvements to services such as rent levels, repairs or any other housing related service.

If you would be interested in taking part, please contact us by:

Email: TP@westlothian.gov.uk

Telephone: 01506 280000 and ask to speak with the TP Team

Complete our online form: <https://www.westlothian.gov.uk/article/32597/Taking-Part>

 Or join us on Facebook by searching:
West Lothian Council Tenant Participation