

# Performance *Matters* 2013/14



**Our annual report  
to tenants and  
service users**

# Welcome...



...to West Lothian Council's first edition of **Performance Matters**.

We have written this report for tenants and service users to show how West Lothian Council has performed against the aims of the Scottish Social Housing Charter. The report covers the period from April 2013 to March 2014 (**the reporting period**) and shows how well we did in key areas including rent collection, tenant and service user involvement, repairs, maintenance and improvements, allocations, homelessness and how we deal with issues such as empty properties and antisocial behaviour.

We are proud of our performance but know that with your involvement we can do even better in future. We are always looking for ideas on how we can improve and would value your opinion on how well you feel we have done. Please call us on **01506 280000**, email us at **customer.service@westlothian.gov.uk** or fill in the slip at the end of the report and tell us what you think.

We would like to offer our thanks to the members of our Tenants' and Editorial Panels for their dedication and commitment in working with West Lothian Council to improve services for tenants and service users throughout West Lothian; their input and expertise were vital in shaping and designing this report.

We are aware that it has been a difficult time for many people over the last year and more change is on the way in 2014/15. The council is committed to working with tenants to minimise the impact of the welfare reform changes, so please get in touch and let us know how you feel we have been dealing with this and whether the information we are providing is suitable. If you feel you would benefit from help or support, please contact your Housing Officer by calling **01506 280000**.

**Alistair Shaw,**  
Head of Housing, Construction  
and Building Services

**Tenant and Editorial Panel Members**

**Danny Mullen, Alison Kerr,  
Vera Robertson, Jessie Duncan,  
Isobel McCabe and Therese Mullen**



# Landlord Information



The Council owns and rents over 13,000 homes throughout West Lothian. These are managed by Housing, Construction and Building Services, who has a wide range of customers, including:

- **West Lothian council tenants and their families**
- **Applicants for housing**
- **People presenting as homeless or threatened with homelessness**
- **People requiring housing information and advice**
- **Residents of West Lothian requiring housing support**
- **Residents of West Lothian experiencing antisocial behaviour**
- **People who use council facilities including schools, community buildings and open spaces**

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## Council housing in West Lothian is much in demand.

We show below the average 52 weekly rent charged for our homes, which compare well with the Scottish average.

Property Size	Number	West Lothian Council Average Rent	Scottish Average Rent
Bedsit	12	£53.50	£59.96
One Bedroom	2,209	£58.88	£65.18
Two Bedroom	6,175	£61.11	£67.19
Three Bedroom	4,183	£65.00	£73.07
Four, five and six Bedroom	590	£69.30	£81.68
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>13,169</b>		

# Contact us



## The customer/landlord relationship

Our aim is to make it as easy as possible for customers to access our services in a convenient way. The Customer Service Centre (CSC) is open from 8am until 10pm seven days a week, giving easy access to highly trained advisers. After 10pm a number of staff are on-site to deal with emergency calls, such as repairs to council houses, homelessness, noise nuisance, roads, street lighting and environmental health.

Call us: **01506 280000**

Email us: **customer.service@westlothian.gov.uk**

Visit us at our local offices in:

**Armadale CIS Office**

**Strathbrock  
Partnership Centre**

**West Calder Library**

**Bathgate Partnership  
Centre**

**Fauldhouse Partnership  
Centre**

**Whitburn CIS Office**

**Blackburn Library**

**Carmondean Library**

**West Lothian  
Connected, Almondvale  
Centre**

**Linlithgow Library**

## Housing Benefit Enquiries

Revenues Officers are available from Monday 8.30am to 5pm (4pm on a Friday) to help with enquiries on housing benefit. Call **01506 280000** and select **Option 2**.

## Open to all

We provide a wide range of services to tenants and service users throughout West Lothian and take care to ensure that everyone is treated fairly and with respect and has the same chance to access services and that these meet the needs of our customers. We can provide all our information in a variety of formats and languages and can arrange for translations to be made when required. In the reporting period a total of 42 translations were made.

Translations	Number	Cost
Calls translated	31	£668
Face to face	4	£135
Documents translated	7	£232

# Involvement



## Help us to get it right

One of the ways to help us improve services is to look at the number and type of complaints we receive. If you tell us if you have had a problem with any service you have received, it helps us make improvements and provide a better service for tenants and service users.

In the reporting year we received a total of 724 complaints. Each of these was investigated to look at the issues leading to the complaint, and the result was:

- **304 of all complaints were unfounded**
- **232 of all complaints were found to be partly in favour of the customer**
- **188 of all complaints were found to be in favour of the customer**

You can see here the reasons for complaints, ranging from standard of service, being the highest, to missed appointments, being the lowest.

Complaint Reason	Number	Percentage
Employee Attitude	67	9.4
Missed Appointments	12	1.5
Policy Related	89	12.3
Poor Communication	113	15.6
Standard of Service	380	52.5
Waiting Time	63	8.7
<b>Total</b>	<b>724</b>	<b>100.0</b>

## Taking Part

We believe that getting your views about what you want from a housing service will help us to get things right and ensure that we are providing the best possible service for all tenants and service users. There are various ways to take part such as:

- **Surveys and Questionnaires**
- **Working Groups**
- **Editorial Panel**
- **Mystery Shopping**
- **Tenant Led Inspections**
- **Tenants and Residents Groups**
- **Housing Networks**
- **Tenants' Panel**
- **Estate Walkabouts**

If you would like a copy of the Council's Tenant Participation Strategy, please call us on **01506 280000** and we can have one posted or emailed to you or you can view it on [www.westlothian.gov.uk](http://www.westlothian.gov.uk)

# Involvement



## How well did we do?

### Annual Tenant Satisfaction Survey

During the reporting year all tenants were sent a survey form through Tenants News, giving every household the chance to 'tell us what they think' of the services provided by Housing, Construction and Building Services. The number of surveys returned was quite low, with only **556** replies being received.

**If you missed your chance to reply, please tell us what you think by completing the comments slip at the end of this report.**

**88.1%** (483 tenants) are satisfied with the overall service, compared to the Scottish average of 87.8%.

**72.6%** (399 tenants) are satisfied with the opportunities to participate in their landlord's decision making processes, compared to the Scottish average of 78.4%.

**85%** (470 tenants) are satisfied that the council keeps them informed about its services and decisions, compared to the Scottish average of 88.9%.

**We would like to do better here, so if you have any ideas on how we can improve, please let us know.**

**90.2%** (480 tenants) found it easy to contact the Council about their home.

"If I owned my house, I wouldn't get my repairs done as quickly as the council do them"

"The online repair is slightly limited. I could only log one request at a time"

## Successes

### Editorial Panel

Our Editorial Panel look at all publications intended for tenants and service users, to ensure they are written in plain language and easy to read. We worked closely with our Editorial Panel to improve publications, including:

- **Tenants News**
- **Applicants News**
- **Rent Payment campaign**
- **Welcome to your new home (publication for new build properties)**

# Involvement



## TPAS Accreditation for excellence in Tenant Participation

Working in partnership with the Tenant Participation Development Working Group, the Council were awarded this prestigious award for excellent Tenant Participation activity for a further three years.

## Tenants Fun and Information Day - Saturday 12 October 2013

This informal event offers a wide range of information stalls and fun activities. It is well attended and gives those attending the chance to seek information and advice on any issues relating to housing, such as housing benefit, the Scottish Social Housing Charter and Tenant Participation. Here are some comments from those who joined us on the day.

"It was a real fun event for the children!"

"I loved visiting the new houses at Alderstone Road"

"The amount of information and variety on offer was great"

## Tenant Led Inspection Toolkit

A new toolkit was developed with tenant inspectors, resulting in an excellent step by step guide to aid inspectors through the entire inspection process from start to finish.

- **In June 2013 the new toolkit was successfully piloted by inspectors into the Council's process on re-letting empty properties.**

## Tenants Panel

The Tenants' Panel undertook a more involved scrutiny role this year as part of the Scottish Housing Regulators requirements. They scrutinised the performance of Housing, Construction and Building Services, and were involved in setting targets to ensure tenants and service users are receiving a good quality, value for money service.

## Future Plans

- **Conduct a full review of all the ways we collect tenant and service user information and views**
- **Promote the ways that tenants and service users can take part in working with the Council to influence decisions that shape services**
- **Establish tenants and residents groups where major capital programme improvement works are being carried out**
- **Continue to work closely with the Tenants' Panel representatives in setting targets and scrutinising services and performance**

# Involvement



## Demographics

We have a diverse range of tenants and service users and to ensure our housing services are fully inclusive and address a wide range of housing need we record the demographics of current tenants, new tenants and applicants. These figures show what people have told us about their ethnic origins and how they see themselves in terms of disability. Should you wish to update or tell us your own details, please call us on **01506 280000** or email us at **customer.service@westlothian.gov.uk**

## Ethnicity

Ethnic Origin for 2013/14	Existing tenants	New tenants	Applicants
White Scottish or other background	10,868	1,048	7,541
Other White British	694	57	503
White Irish	32	3	25
Gypsy/Traveller	0	0	0
White Polish	0	0	0
Other White	307	68	443
Mixed	12	2	15
Asian – Scottish/British	29	2	54
Other Asian	7	1	10
Black – Scottish/British	21	3	39
Other Black	6	0	11
Arab – Scottish/British	1	0	1
Other Arab	28	5	18
Customers with a disability	86	11	32

Sourced from Open Housing

We have identified that we are performing well in collecting information on applicants and new tenants on their ethnicity, however we recognise we have an area for improvement in obtaining this information on our existing tenants.

There are plans for our Improvement Team to conduct a full review of all the ways we collect information and views, and how we profile our existing tenants and service users.

# Value



## Getting good value from rents and service charges

The council manages over 13,000 homes that are let to tenants. It is very important to us that we provide good quality homes at a reasonable cost to tenants and that we are able to have these re-let quickly to ensure we bring in as much rental income as possible.

The rent we receive allows us to maintain and improve our housing stock, so it is very important that we make best use of the resources we have and the rent money collected, whilst ensuring we provide a good value for money service.

Against a challenging and difficult year for many tenants, we are pleased with the amount of rent collected; this is slightly below the Scottish average and we aim to improve on this figure for the next financial year. We will continue to offer help and support to tenants to ensure rent is paid in a timely manner.

## How well did we do?

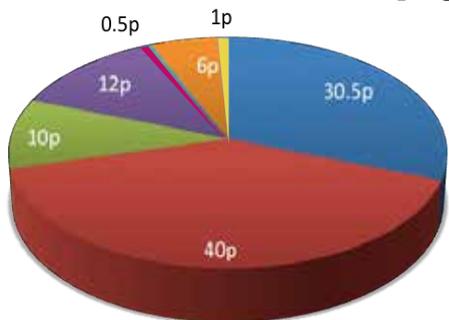


**97%** of the total rent due from tenants was collected, compared to the Scottish average of **99%**. You can see below, just how much was collected and how this was spent.

Rent Due	Rent Collected	Rent Owed from Arrears
£43,828,721	£42,516,862	£1,311,859

## Where did your rent money go?

For every £1 of rent collected, the pie chart below shows an approximate cost of how your rent money was spent. As you can see, the biggest slice is being spent on Repairs, Maintenance and Planned Investment work on tenants' homes; this includes costs for our new build programme and loan charges.



- Repairs and Maintenance
- Planned Investment (including New Build and Loan Charges)
- Employee and Management Costs
- Supplies and Services
- Void Properties
- Support Services
- Irrecoverable rents and bad debts

# Value



**3%** rent increase compared to the Scottish Average of 4%.



**81.5%** (448 tenants) think the rent they pay represents good value for money, compared to the Scottish average of 76.6%.



**0.57%** of our rent, a total of £252,486 was unable to be collected due to houses being empty. This was due to re-lets or work being carried out to improve homes. The Scottish average performance for this was 1.2%.

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## Rent Arrears

In early 2013, it was clear that rent arrears were increasing and were forecast to reach an all-time high of £3 million. This would have had a huge impact on the services the council were able to deliver to tenants, therefore preventative action was taken.

The council launched an arrears campaign, working closely with tenants to resolve arrears issues at an early stage and ensure maximum take up of welfare benefits.

This had a positive impact on the rent being collected as you can see below:

Projected Rent Arrears	Actual Rent Owed from Arrears
£3,000,000	£1,311,859



**£23,429,211** of our rental income was received directly from housing benefit.



**9,178** West Lothian Council households received part or full housing benefit.

# Value



## 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 this money. We also engage with collection agencies to carry out further searches and recovery action.

**As at the end of the reporting period, April 2014, former tenant arrears totalled:**

**£1,160,815**

We have a small team working specifically to reduce these arrears, however it can prove difficult to track down former tenants, as their address is not always known.

**During the reporting period we collected:**

**£93,981**

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## Successes

- **A number of referrals were made to the council's Advice Shop for assistance on housing and other benefits.**
- **Launched rent arrear campaign to highlight the importance of paying rent.**
- **Introduced option to pay rent at local retail outlets through Payzone.**

## Future Plans

- **Review policies and procedures in response to Welfare Reform changes.**
- **Improve tenancy start-up process to ensure tenants have arrangements in place for paying their rent.**
- **Provide assistance to customers to deal with single or multiple debts and welfare reform changes.**

# Housing Options



## Access to housing and support

The Council allocates vacant properties to people who have an active housing application. Houses are allocated on a points based system, where points are allocated based on the need of the applicant.

## How well did we do?



**1,193** homes were let by the council during the reporting period.



**177** were newly built council homes  
**127** of these were let to existing tenants.

Each home was let to applicants on the council housing list:

- **311 to existing tenants moving home**
- **612 to homeless applicants**
- **270 to applicants on the housing list**



**21** days to re-let homes, compared to the Scottish average of 35.7 days.

- **9,095 applicants were on the Council housing list.**
- **3,176 new applications for housing were received in a year.**
- **2,256 amendments to applications were processed in a year.**
- **3,587 applicants re-registered their application through the annual review.**
- **108 Housing with Care Applications were received.**

Sometimes a property that is available for re-let may need some decoration work carried out. In certain circumstance, the new tenant can be offered decoration vouchers to help with the cost. The amount spent on decoration vouchers was £115,953 (an average of £114 per property let, excluding new build properties).

# Housing Options



## Successes

- **The council received the HomeSwapper Star Landlord Award 2014 in recognition of the efforts of staff in supporting tenants to exchange homes.**
- **178 tenants move to a property more suited to their needs using the Homeswapper online service.**
- **55 Relocation Grants were awarded to those downsizing by two bedrooms or more through the mutual exchange scheme.**

## Future Plans

- **Complete a full review of the Housing Allocations Policy to introduce a system which will promote choice, meet needs and enable us to consider a wider range of applicants with accommodation.**
- **Work with other Registered Social landlords to increase membership of the Common Housing Register.**
- **Pursue a common allocations policy with Registered Social Landlords.**

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## Homelessness

The Council provides a 24 hours service for people who are homeless or potentially homeless. There are specialist teams who provide practical support and assistance to those needing help with their housing situation. We manage temporary accommodation for homeless people, which includes emergency accommodation and temporary tenancies.

# Housing Options



There are three criteria homeless applicants must satisfy for the council to be able to accept them as statutorily homeless. These are:

- Homelessness
- Intentionality
- Local Connection.

The Council's duty to applicants depends on the outcome of an assessment. If the applicant is not homeless the Council's duty is to provide advice and assistance. If the applicant is homeless the duty is to provide settled accommodation.

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## Homeless applications

In West Lothian we received a total of 1,289 applications from households presenting as homeless; this was 7% less than the previous year of 1,413 households.

- **1,101 applications were from single person or single parent households.**
- **821 (64%) were from single persons, 510 of which were male and 311 female –this compares with the overall national average of single person applicants of 67%**
- **280 (22%) were from single parents, 178 female and 102 male single parent households – compared to the total national average of 21%**

In West Lothian, 900 applications were assessed as unintentionally homeless, meaning the council had a duty to provide the applicant with settled accommodation. 688 (76.4%) went on to accept an offer of permanent accommodation.

The remainder either sourced their own accommodation or returned to reside with friends or family.

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## How well did we do?



**79.67** days was the average time homeless applicants spent in temporary accommodation before suitable permanent accommodation was found.

In West Lothian we give applicants two offers, compared to some landlords who only provide one, so this can lengthen the time in temporary accommodation. The Scottish average is 52.6 days.

# Housing Options



**1,091** households stayed in temporary accommodation.



**269** houses in West Lothian were used for temporary accommodation.



**1,653** people contacted the council's prevention service for help and support with their housing situation in the reporting period.

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## Successes

- **232 attended the Pamper Yourself event for people who have been through or currently affected by homelessness.**
- **Sleep Tight Packs for children under 4 years, containing a bedtime story book, blanket or quilt, dental pack, toiletries and a teddy bear.**
- **Homeless Football initiative improving physical and mental wellbeing of people experiencing homelessness.**
- **Introduced a Rent Deposit Guarantee Scheme.**

## Future Plans

- **Introduce new satisfaction surveys to capture the views of those using the homeless service.**
- **Establish a new Homeless Network to help improve services for homeless people.**
- **Provide a new emergency homeless assessment centre, with attached accommodation in Blackburn.**
- **Complete the refurbishment of Adelaide Street in Livingston, to be used as temporary accommodation for homeless applicants.**

# Community



## Neighbourhood and Community

### Housing Services

We have six area housing management teams who deal with tenancy issues, such as void properties, new tenancy sign-ups, rent arrears, monitoring tenancy conditions, antisocial behaviour, garden and general estate monitoring inspections and tenancy support.

**If you would like to speak to your Housing Officer about any issues relating to your tenancy, please call us on 01506 280000 to make an appointment for a time that suits you.**

### Estate Management

We manage the external communal areas on council housing estates through working in partnership with other council services. Our housing teams carry out garden inspections to ensure that gardens are being regularly maintained and are clear of rubbish.

### Garden Maintenance Scheme

This is provided by the council to prevent gardens becoming overgrown. There are over 2,000 tenants currently on the scheme (set rules for eligibility apply - find out more at [westlothian.gov.uk](http://westlothian.gov.uk)).

### Communal Flatted Properties

Each communal flatted property has its own stair cleaning schedule, which are on display in the communal area. Housing teams carry out inspections to check for any issues with cleaning or fly tipping.

### Antisocial behaviour and tenancy disputes

The Community Safety Unit (CSU) is dedicated to preventing antisocial behaviour to ensure safer communities where people can live their lives without fear for their own or other people's safety. The CSU is made up of staff from the Neighbourhood Response Team, Police Scotland and the Scottish Fire and Rescue Service.

Our officers will deal with the following issues:

- Neighbour complaints
- Noise nuisance
- Noisy dogs
- Vandalism/damage
- Street drinking
- Mediation

# Community



## Out of Hours Service 7pm to 4am

The Council operates an Out of Hours service for complaints of antisocial noise nuisance. If necessary, they can work with the police for more serious disturbances. Call them on **01506 280000**. During the reporting year the Out of Hours service received 2,205 calls. Here's a flavour of what happened as a result of some of the calls received:

130 warning notices issued  
233 verbal warnings administered  
16 calls were a Police matter

717 required no further action  
84 calls referred to Environmental Health

## Need the police?

Call 101 to report vandalism, stolen car, to talk to local police (calls cost 15p).  
Call 999 in an emergency

## How well did we do?

Our housing teams carried out over **5,000** garden inspections.

It cost us £506,972 to maintain shared areas for communal flatted properties.



**368** cases of antisocial behaviour were received – **278** cases were resolved, **194** of these were resolved within locally agreed targets.



**112** court actions were initiated due to non-payment of rent.  
• **5 households were evicted for non payment of rent**

We did not evict anyone for anti social behaviour. It is the council's policy to use eviction as a last resort, after all other means have been exhausted.



**90.4%** (499 tenants) felt safe in their home.

## Successes

- **Street Environmental Improvements Project** – areas regenerated from tenants suggestions.
- **Paws for Thought campaign** – a dog fouling campaign developed with East Knightsridge Tenants and Residents Association (EKTRA) from Livingston.

# Your Home



## Housing quality and maintenance

We are responsible for providing and maintaining good quality homes that meet the diverse needs of our customers.

### New Build

Between April 2009 and March 2014, we completed 650 new build council homes and for the last two years we built more council homes than any other local authority in Scotland. We are proud of this achievement and of the high standard and variety of homes being built, which have been designed in consultation with tenants and service users.

### Repairs and Improvements

We carry out housing repairs and improvement works including roofing and roughcasting programmes, heating upgrades, fencing and painting programmes. We also have to ensure that our houses will meet the Scottish Housing Quality Standard by 2015.

### How well did we do?



**82.7%** (456 tenants) are satisfied with the quality of their home.

**54,368** repairs completed at a cost of **£8,762,842**

**86.1%** (472 tenants) are satisfied with the repairs service, compared to the Scottish Average of 87.6%

Repairs	Number
Total number of non-emergency repairs carried out	31,519
Number of non-emergency repairs completed that were right first time	28,782
Total number of emergency repairs carried out	22,849
Number of non-emergency repair appointments kept	22,675



**91.2%** of reactive repairs were completed 'right first time', compared to the Scottish average of 87.2%



**99.7%** of repairs appointments were kept, compared to the Scottish average of 92.9%

# Your Home



The council has a policy in place to pay compensation to tenants where we have failed to keep a pre-arranged appointment to carry out a repair. In the reporting year, we missed 78 appointments, however due to an error with our system we failed to compensate the tenants concerned. We are looking at new ways to monitor and identify missed appointments to ensure this does not happen in the future.

## Average length of time taken to complete repairs

	WL Council	Scottish Average
Emergency repairs	11.3 hours	6.9 hours
Non-emergency repairs	10.3 working days	8.2 working days

We have changed the way we record the time taken to complete an emergency repair to improve our performance. We have set a challenging target of 6.9 hours and in August 2014 we took an average of 6.02 hours.

## Gas Safety

As a landlord, West Lothian Council has a duty to access all properties every year for an annual gas service and safety check. If we are unable to gain access, we will cap the gas supply or force entry to the property concerned as a safety measure.

Number of checks completed on time	13,064 (99.3%)
We carried out 10 forced entries for gas safety checks at a cost of	£547.50
We capped/uncapped 760 properties at a total cost of	£53,868

## Scottish Housing Quality Standard - improving homes



**94.2%** (12,466 homes) meet the Scottish Housing Quality Standard

**100%** (13,169 homes) are expected to meet the Scottish Housing Quality Standard by 2015.

In the reporting year we made the following improvements to council homes:

<b>2,406</b>	<b>Loft Insulation</b>
<b>1,848</b>	<b>Rhones Cleaned</b>
<b>1,075</b>	<b>Fence Replacements</b>
<b>991</b>	<b>Electrical Inspections</b>
<b>682</b>	<b>Heating Upgrades</b>

<b>409</b>	<b>Window Replacements</b>
<b>221</b>	<b>Rhones Replaced</b>
<b>561</b>	<b>Wall Insulation</b>
<b>714</b>	<b>Handrails Fitted</b>
<b>414</b>	<b>Outside Lights Fitted</b>

# Your Home



## Successes

- A new telephone system was introduced to improve the customer experience when phoning to report a repair and book an appointment.
- Up to the end of the reporting year 650 new council homes throughout West Lothian were built at an approximate cost of £70 million. £14 million of funding was received from the Scottish Government.

## Future Plans

- Proceed with plans to build a further 1,000 new council homes across all nine multi-member wards in West Lothian.
- Consult on proposals to introduce new repair categories to reduce the number of jobs classed as an emergency.
- Bring all properties up to the standard set out in the Scottish Housing Quality Standard by 2015.
- Implement new monitoring processes relating to compensation payments for missed repair appointments.

### Tell us what you think

If you have any comments you would like to make on the content of the report, or if you have suggestions on how we can improve services, please let us know.

Name .....

Address .....

Telephone No.....

Email Address.....

How would you like us to contact you?    Email     Post     Telephone

### Tell us what you think!

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You can also email us at [tp.mailbox@westlothian.gov.uk](mailto:tp.mailbox@westlothian.gov.uk)