

# **Rent arrears up by almost £100,000 in one area of West Lothian**

## **Rent arrears in one part of West Lothian have surged by almost £100,000 in a year.**

The steep climb in Armadale and Blackridge has been fuelled by a rise in small amounts of debt, as households struggle to manage their finances amid rising food and fuel costs.

Despite the arrears, housing officers say that the rent collection rate remains “excellent”.

The local housing manager Lorraine Donnelly was giving her quarterly update to the Armadale and Blackridge Local Area Committee this week.

The arrears position for Armadale & Blackridge in the third quarter of the year – between October and December – was £551,112. This is an increase of £96,177 on the same quarter for the year before, October to December 2023.

Across West Lothian the arrears total was £4,484,906.

In her report Mrs Donnelly said the bulk of the arrears- more than 60%- owe £500 or less.

She added: “The total number of tenancies in arrears in this ward has changed, increasing by 73 since last year.

“Low debt cases, which are managed through early intervention by our Housing Officers, have increased by 15 since last year.

These cases (£500 or less), account for 61.62% of households and 17.26% of the debt.

“High debt cases have increased by 11 since last year. These cases (£2,250+), account for 6.79% of households and 36.11% of the debt. Of the households in arrears 31.2% are not in receipt of UC and 68.8% do receive UC. The number of households in arrears who do not receive UC dropped by 17. The number who do rose by 90.”

Mrs Donnelly told the meeting: “As part of the arrears process, we try to speak to tenants as early as we can. A lot of the time it does depend on how much tenants will engage with you.

“If we can get in there early and prevent arrears from escalating to help tenants manage and maintain payments that’s good but obviously there will be times where people have financial difficulties. We can refer them to the Advice shop for help but again that relies on engagement from the tenant.”

The rent collection rate in the Armadale and Blackridge ward was described as “excellent” at 96.6%.

By Stuart Sommerville, Local Democracy Reporter