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## **Acknowledgements**

We would like to thank Communities Scotland, Tenant Participation Team for giving us the funds to carry out our pilot project through their 'Registered Tenants Organisation grants'. Stirling Council for supporting us and especially the staff in the Raploch and Fallin housing teams for co-operating with us throughout our inspection process. TPAS Scotland and the Stirling Tenants Project for their training and support throughout the whole project, writing our report and writing this guide.

To the tenants involved in the West Lothian Tenant Led Inspections (TLI) who came to Stirling to give us a presentation on what tenant led inspection is and talk about their experiences of carrying out inspections. Also to Len Thomson, who was a tenant on the Stirling Tenant Assembly, who was involved in applying for funding and the process right up to the actual inspection. Unfortunately Len had too many work commitments to take part in the actual inspection and now he is no longer a tenant.

## **Introduction**

This guide is intended to be a practical guide for tenants who wish to be involved in an evaluation and inspection of their housing services. It is based on our experience of carrying out an inspection.

### **Why tenant led inspections?**

Tenant led inspections are a new initiative that offers different ways of getting involved. They are an active form of participation that may suit some tenants better than traditional group involvement.

TLIs offer real tenant participation. Tenants set the agenda themselves, so are able to address the issues and concerns they have as tenants. This means the service can be appraised from a tenant perspective rather than the staff / service provider's viewpoint. It allows strengths to be identified and areas for improvement to be addressed.

### **What is a tenant led inspection?**

Tenant led inspections is where tenants independently from their landlord inspect the service in a professional manner. It's a way for tenants to monitor and evaluate the performance of their landlord and be in a position to improve the service. To do this, inspectors identify the strengths and weaknesses of the service being provided and make recommendations on areas where improvements can be made. Tenant led inspections is not about inspecting individuals and making recommendations on the way individuals work, it's only about looking at the service and how effectively it's operating.

### **How is an inspection carried out?**

A team of tenants will be selected from interested tenants. This can be a small team of 4 to anything up to 10. It really depends on the size of the area being inspected and what methods will be used to carry out an inspection. Each inspection can be carried out differently, as the methods used to inspect a service can change. Some of the methods that could be used;

Looking at policies and procedures  
Mystery shopping  
Shadowing staff  
Desktop audits  
Interviews, questionnaires and surveys  
Attending meeting  
Tenants visits

Don't worry if you're not sure what is involved in carrying out some of these methods, as they will be explained in detail later. Also during the training the methods should be addressed and tenant inspectors should not be asked to do something that they feel uncomfortable with.

The information collected will be gathered together and a report will be written highlighting the services strengths and weaknesses, with suggested changes.

## **What happens to this report?**

The report will be sent to your landlord and a meeting will be arranged between the inspection team and an officer. At this meeting an action plan will be developed to carry forward any suggested changes to the service within an agreed timescale. At a later date (about 6 months) another meeting will be arranged to discuss the action plan and what has been carried out.

## **What would be expected of me as an inspector?**

The actual inspection can take about 10 weeks to complete if the group is meeting one day a week. This timescale includes training. Once a tenant has committed themselves to an inspection team they need to be committed at least until all the information is collected, but preferably until the report is written or the first meeting has been held with your landlord.

If tenants keep coming back to be inspectors you can build up several teams which will enable the project to carry out more than one inspection at a time.

## **What will tenants get out of being an inspector?**

Other than knowing how you have improved the service being provided by your landlord you will learn new skills and knowledge. Some of the skills and knowledge that you may acquire are:

- Carrying out interviews
- Developing questionnaires / surveys / interview questions
- Understanding policies and strategies
- Facilitating meetings
- Listening
- Communicating
- Writing reports
- Collecting data

You will also meet other tenants who are interested in improving the service. Get to know the staff better. Depending on what area is being inspected you will have an insight into the job of housing officers and front line staff.

## Where to start?

- Agree and set the ground rules.
- Agree aims and objectives.
- Brainstorming – each team member should contribute his or her opinions. This will help the group collectively to think and discuss creatively.
- Select a suitable housing professional from an external housing organisation who is familiar with the function being inspected and willing to act as a mentor for the TLI.
- Agree what services are to be inspected.
- Form the team – advertise for tenant inspectors through local radio, press, mail shots and posters in local shops, etc.
- Agree operation base and meeting days – it may be easier to have a coherent and logical approach if meetings are held on the same day of the week. Tenant inspectors may want to meet weekly at first to get things up and running quickly. Meetings can then be reduced to fortnightly or monthly.
- Develop an appropriate inspection plan.
- Prepare an agreed action plan.
- Carry out inspection.
- Review the collated data for each method used.
- Highlight common themes and areas for recommendation for each method.
- Review all data.
- Highlight common themes and areas for recommendations
- Write report.
- Meet with officers to develop action plan.
- Meet with officers about 6 months later to review action plan.
- Do another mini inspection to see if service has improved. (optional)

## Setting ground rules

It is important to agree with staff what aspects of the service will be covered by TLIs. Similarly, local tenant groups should be informed about inspections and progress. Time limit should be set and stuck to, so not to cause unnecessary disruptions to tenants and staff.

Tenants that are carrying out inspections should not live in the areas being inspected. This is a simple precaution to avoid any suspicions of discrimination against neighbours or individuals known to the tenant inspectors.

Confidentiality is important to successful TLIs. All tenant inspectors should complete a code of conduct stating that they will treat all sensitive information confidentially. Inspectors must also be fair, objective and act professionally.

When the written report is produced there should be no details contained in it that are attributable to individuals.

## Setting aims and objectives

Before getting started you need to be clear what your aims are. You need to know what you hope to achieve from the inspection. Just thinking it's a good idea isn't enough. By the end of the inspection you need to look at the aims to see if they have been achieved and if they have not been, why not?

Our aims and objectives were:

- To improve landlords service and practise.
- To enable individual tenants to influence key decisions.
- Maximise individual tenant involvement at the heart of housing service development and delivery.
- To create opportunities for tenant involvement and increase tenant involvement.
- To develop a tenant led inspection framework that can be used by other RTOs.

## Planning

1. Identify a target area for inspection – this will depend on the interests of the tenant inspection group. You will also have to give consideration to how much training tenants will need for the area of the housing service selected.
2. Brainstorming an inspection plan – what aspects of the service do you want to inspect? What methods will you use?
3. What resources and materials will you need? – policies, procedures, good practise, other information and data such as waiting lists etc.
4. Methodology – which method suits you best: staff / tenant interviews, questionnaires, reviewing policies and procedures, shadowing staff?
5. Make a list of action points – what do you hope to cover and when?
6. Keep a diary for action point dates – there may be slippages due to unforeseen circumstances (sickness, holidays etc) although it is important to stick to your schedule.

## Brainstorming

The most important thing is for everyone to get involved and put forward their ideas. All contributions are important and will help the group to think and discuss creatively. Ideas can be recorded on flipchart paper. You should then agree, as a group, what aims and objectives you would like to meet as a group.

Think through all requirements needed for the inspection, and then list any restrictions or barriers you think you may come across. From here you can adapt your list of aims and objectives to more manageable proportions.

## Role of the external housing professional (Mentor)

It is important that tenant inspectors have an experience housing professional that you can lean on and turn to for advice. This should ideally be someone from a different landlord organisation, who is familiar with the area of service being inspected. It might be a tenant participation officer or housing officer.

## Agree what services are to be inspected

Your first inspection should be considered very carefully, as you don't want to take on an area that maybe too big and ambitious. This will put tenants off if they feel they are involved in something that is out of their depth. This inspection could be used as participatory training session to get an understanding of what is really involved in carrying out a TLI project, to identify areas that tenant inspectors don't feel comfortable doing, to try out the methods, to know what is involved. At the end of the inspection it is good practise to reflect on areas that have worked well and areas that didn't work so well so you can learn from them and change them in the next inspection.

Our first inspection was on estate management – upkeep of closes, gardens and communal areas. We chose this area because tenants often mentioned the issue of untidy gardens and communal areas. This area is also small enough to enable the tenant inspectors to learn about the process of carrying out an inspection, but also gives the inspectors enough scope to use a variety of methods.

*'This was not a big area to inspect, but it did allow us to understand the process and learn some of the methods involved.'* Inspector AL

*'We also learnt about our own strengths and weaknesses as a team and in our next inspection these will be addressed and used more effectively.'* Inspector PMcC

Our next inspection we intend to tackle something a bit bigger, as what, we haven't yet decided.

## Forming the inspection team

Tenant led inspections can be used to try to encourage new tenants to become involved. To do this you will need to advertise for tenant inspectors. This can be done through local radio, local press, mail shots, posters in local shops, through tenant groups, community events, your website, etc. This list could be endless, but use any means locally that you can promote your TLI project.

We used all of the above. Here are some examples of the adverts and posters we used.

**Wanted  
Tenant Inspectors**

To inspect services provided by Stirling Council's Housing Services.  
Council Tenants can make a difference to the service provided by housing. Training will be Given.  
Come & Join our Friendly Team of volunteers and make a difference.  
Expenses incurred will be paid.  
For more information and application form tel; Theresa Robertson 01786 443543 or [www.stirling-tenants-assembly.co.uk](http://www.stirling-tenants-assembly.co.uk)  
Closing date 20 May 05



Advert for local press

**WANTED**

Tenant Inspectors  
to inspect services provided by Stirling Council's Housing Services  
Council Tenants can make a difference to the service provided by Housing.  
Training will be Given  
Come and Join our Friendly Team and make a difference.  
For more information contact Theresa Robertson on  
01786 443543 or visit our website  
[www.stirling-tenants-assembly.co.uk](http://www.stirling-tenants-assembly.co.uk)



Poster & Flyers

### Tenant Inspectors carry out 1<sup>st</sup> Inspection on Estate Management

Stirling Tenants Assembly (STA) received a grant from Communities Scotland 'Registered Tenants Association' Grants. The money was granted so that the STA could carry out tenant led inspections (TLI). TLI's are where tenants independently from their landlord inspect the service in a professional manor. It's a way for tenants to monitor and evaluate the performance of their landlord and be in a position to improve the service.

The inspection team has decided to look at the upkeep of closes, communal areas and gardens in Raploch and Fallin areas. The inspection team will carry out this inspection by doing;

- an estate walkabout to get a general feel of the area,
- interview staff to get an understanding of how the system is working from a staff perspective,
- survey tenants who visit the local offices to find out how they feel, and
- look at paperwork so they can see how the procedures are followed in practise.

So if you see a small group of tenants walking around in your estate in Raploch and Fallin or in the local office during the 1<sup>st</sup> two weeks in November why don't you go and talk to them to find out more.

After the inspectors have gathered all their evidences they will write and present their report to Stirling Council and an action plan will be developed to look at carrying out the recommendations made.

'We are pleased that the Council is welcoming tenants to get involved in the inspection process. We hope this will increase co-orporation and teamwork with the Council and will contribute to a better service' said Len Thomson a tenant inspector.

If you want to find out more about TLIs or become an inspector yourself on the next inspection then call Theresa Elliot on 01786 443543. As long as you're a tenant with Stirling Council you can become an inspector.

After your first inspection you can advertise your successes from your first inspection to encourage new tenant inspectors.

When interested tenants came forward we sent them an application pack which contained information on TLI, application form and code of conduct form. Below are examples of our forms we put into our application pack.

The information sheet on TLI is the same information in the introduction of this guide:

- What is tenant led inspection?
- How is an inspection carried out?
- What happens to this report?
- What will tenants get out of being an inspector?
- What the aims of the TLI Project.



Tenant Led Inspection Project

Application Form

Personal details

Name: .....

Address: .....

.....

..... Postcode: .....

Day Time Telephone No: .....

Are you a current tenant of Stirling Council? Yes  No

Or

Are you a partner of spouse of a current tenant: Yes  No

NB: If you have answered 'No' to both of the above questions you will not be eligible to take part in the tenant led inspection project.

Gender: (✓) Male  Female

Age: (✓) 18 - 25  26 - 35  36 - 45   
46 - 59  60+

Comment [AMS1]: Add in

If you have any particular needs, please give details. For example Mobility, information requirements, sight or hearing impairments or any special dietary requirements.

.....  
.....  
.....  
.....  
.....  
.....

**Please answer the following Questions:**

1 Why do you want to be a tenant inspector? (you may continue on separate paper)

2 Are you available and willing to attend inspections at different locations within the boundaries of Stirling Council? (reasonable and approved travel expenses will be paid)

Yes  No

If not, what are your reasons? We may be able to help.

Comment [AMS2]: Add in

If **Yes**, please tick what time suits you best below:

Daytime  Evening  Both

3 Have you any experience that you feel is relevant to this role? (you may continue on separate paper)

4 Are you willing to undertake relevant training?

Yes  No

5 How do you feel about using the following methods of inspections? (√)

Method	Very Confident	OK	Not Sure
1. Report Writing			
2. Telephone Skills			
3. Role Play			
4. Carrying out Surveys			
5. One to One Interviews			
6. Site Visits			
7. Reading Reports & Documents			

I agree with the rules set out in the Code of Conduct document. I accept that failure to comply with these rules could result in my involvement with the Tenant Led Inspections Project being terminated.

Signature.....

Date.....

Please return your completed Application Form no later than Friday 20<sup>th</sup> May 2005

If you require help in filling out this form or for further information please telephone:

Theresa Elliot on: 01786 443543 or Email: [elliott@stirling.gov.uk](mailto:elliott@stirling.gov.uk)

### Optional Section on Equal Opportunities

In order to ensure that Equal Opportunities is being carried out please indicate your ethnic origin by ticking the appropriate box. (✓) (You do not have to fill in this part of the application form, it is optional. Your response will not affect your application).

- |   |                 |                          |   |                        |                          |
|---|-----------------|--------------------------|---|------------------------|--------------------------|
| A | Black Caribbean | <input type="checkbox"/> | G | Bangladeshi            | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| B | Black African   | <input type="checkbox"/> | H | Other European         | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| C | Black Other     | <input type="checkbox"/> | I | Chinese                | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| D | White UK        | <input type="checkbox"/> | J | Other (Please Specify) | .....                    |
| E | Indian          | <input type="checkbox"/> |   |                        |                          |
| F | Pakistani       | <input type="checkbox"/> |   |                        |                          |



### Code of Conduct For Tenant Inspectors

This Code of Conduct sets out the rules of the project, and the standards of personal attitudes and behaviour that you must observe. Sticking to these guidelines is critical to the success and credibility of the Tenant Led Inspection Project.

#### Who can be a Tenant Inspector?

To be a Tenant Inspector, you must:

- Be a **current tenant** of Stirling Council; or
- Be a **partner or spouse** of a current tenant; or
- Have had **training** about the aims of the project and skills, attitudes and techniques needed for it.

You cannot be a Tenant Inspector if you

- Are an **employee** of Stirling Council's Building Services or Housing Services.
- Have a current **Court Order** against you for breach of your tenancy or lease agreement.

## Your Role

As a Tenant Inspector, your job is to carry out detailed and robust assessments of the services provided by Stirling Council's Housing Services and Building Services, and

suggest how they can be improved. To do this, you must approach the task with the right attitudes:

- **Be honest and open.** Without this, you won't be able to get to the truth about services or be able to make a difference.
- **Be Positive.** It's important to highlight any problems or failings, but make sure you also pick upon successes and good points. Always try to look for and suggest improvements to make the service better – for both customers and the people providing it.
- **Be friendly, polite and courteous.** You will only get co-operation and support from people if you build and keep a good personal relationship with them. You must not insult, abuse or use any kind of offensive language or behaviour towards anyone whom you have contact with as part of the project. Be tough on *problems*, not people.
- **Listen and keep an open mind** about things until you have collected all the facts and evidence. Try to understand and appreciate the concerns and circumstances of the people who you come into contact with.
- Actively show that you are **interested in and care about** the service that you are inspecting, and want to make a positive difference.
- Choose the **right time, place and way to feedback** your thoughts and findings. Do not share your impressions and ideas with people while you are still collecting evidence from them.
- Keep to any relevant **rules or policies**. For example, observe any bans on smoking.

## Being Objective

Your direct experience as a customer is what makes you special and unique as a Tenant Inspector. Your own experience and views should **inform**, but **not dominate or dictate** how you work. To help you stay impartial and avoid any conflict of interest, you must:

- Not audit or inspect parts of the service that have a specific or particular **link to you and your local area**, (for example, you should not assess the front-line service at the local office which serves your home).
- Let the Stirling Tenants Assembly Committee know in writing if you have any **personal connection** with any part of the service that you are asked to inspect, (for example, if you are related to a member of staff providing that service).
- Look for evidence to **test and challenge** your personal experience of the service and organisation. Do your views reflect those of customers generally?

# Handling Information

As a Tenant Inspector, you will have access to a lot of information about Stirling Council and its tenants and suppliers. Some of this information will be personally or commercially sensitive, and you have to judge whether to share things, or keep them confidential.

This can be a difficult balance, so you should follow two simple rules in all your work:

- Treat **all** information that you receive as confidential, unless there is a clear reason to share it more widely. So, for example, you should use and share information that you collect about what service is provided, how and why. But you should not share information about members of staff or tenants personal identities or circumstances.
- If you are in any doubt about whether something is confidential or not, please ask the Stirling Tenants Assembly.

It is possible that you may come across something during your inspection that really worries you, (for example, if you think there is fraud going on, or any other sort of criminal or serious undesirable behaviour). If this happens, you must tell the Stirling Tenants Assembly Committee. If any member of the Stirling Tenants Assembly is connected with your concerns, you can contact the Stirling Tenants Project. This is called '**whistleblowing**'.

If you have to whistleblow about anything, it will not be disclosed that you have done this, and you will be able to continue with your work. Depending on the circumstances, Stirling Council may not be able to tell you exactly what happens because of your whistleblowing.

Aside from these formal protocols, you will need to be **tactful and diplomatic** in all your dealings with people as part of the project. Only you can judge this, but always think about how you say what, to whom, and what impact it will have.

# Being Fair

In your work as a Tenant Inspector, you must have and show respect for people you deal with, and take their circumstances and personal differences into account. This is about putting equal opportunities into practise in your work. The key is to simply **respect differences fairly**, so that you do not exclude anyone from your work, or treat anyone inappropriately or unfairly.

Again, this can sometimes be difficult, and only you can make it happen. So, in your work, think about:

- **How you assess the service** – does it allow everyone to have say? For example, telephone surveys may exclude people whose first language is not English.
- **Where you work**. For example, holding interviews in an upper floor office may be difficult for people who use a wheelchair or have limited mobility.

- **When you work.** For example, holding focus groups during the day may exclude people with childcare responsibilities or who are at work.
- **Being consistent.** For example, don't be 'tougher' on some people than others without reason.

Again, if you are in any doubt about how your work might affect different people, please ask the member of staff from the Stirling Tenants Project.

## Being Professional

Being professional is partly about all the things covered above, but it is also about how you personally conduct yourself. As a Tenant Inspector you are an ambassador for yourself, all tenants, the Stirling Tenants Assembly and the whole project. Most people will judge the project on how you present yourself and behave. So, to project a good, professional image, think about:

- Your **personal appearance and dress** – be clean, smart and appropriate
- How you **speak** – be clear, concise and courteous
- Your **body language** – be relaxed, focused and positive
- Be **organised and punctual** – plan and prepare things well, and be on time
- Being **in control** – never do an inspection if you have recently had alcohol, drugs, are too tired, or have done anything that might affect your concentration and poise.

## Staying Safe

You must observe any rules and health and safety guidelines given to you by Stirling Council and / or the Stirling Tenants Assembly, and take reasonable steps to ensure your own health, safety and welfare.

If you ever feel too much pressure or stress because of your work as a Tenant Inspector, please tell any member of the Stirling Tenants Assembly or the Stirling Tenants Project worker.

I agree with the rules set out in the Code of Conduct. If at anytime, it is found that I am not abiding by these rules I will automatically be taken off the Tenant Led Inspection Project.

Signature..... Date.....

## Develop an appropriate inspection plan

This section will look at all the things that need to be done before an inspection can be carried out.

### Methods

Tenant inspection team can use all or some of the following methods:

- Looking at policies and procedures
- Mystery shopping
- Shadowing staff
- Desktop audits
- Interviews, questionnaires and surveys
- Attending meeting
- Tenant visits

The types of inspection methods used will inevitably depend on what aspect of the housing service you are inspecting. To a certain extent the inspection will also depend on what activities tenant inspectors are comfortable doing and what level of training has been provided. For example, tenant inspectors may not feel comfortable shadowing housing officers in the workplace, whilst others may find it difficult to follow staff meetings and performance review meetings without having received detailed training. Once you have decided what methods offer the best insight into understanding of how the service is delivered you can decide which methods you would like to receive training on.

### Looking at policies and procedure

Looking at your organisation's policies and procedures provides a useful reference point for establishing what is meant to happen on the ground. Without a clear understanding of how the service is suppose to work it is difficult to address any shortcomings. Using any combination of the other methods will enable tenant inspectors to evaluate how well the policies and procedures are working on the ground.

### Preparation

It is best to look at the policies and procedures before the inspection team start developing the inspection plan as they will give you ideas on who you want to talk to and what information you want to find out.

The inspection team needs to decide what policies and procedure they require. The group could just ask for all the policies and procedures on your area of inspection and sort through what you receive from there. You may ask for selected policies and procedures and after reading them decide that you need additional information. You may find it helpful to look at other organisations policies and procedures to compare with your landlords.

You may find that after you have carried out your inspection there are areas of the service that you have found out about and would like to know more about after you have analyse the data.

While reading policies and procedures it is worth making notes or highlighting areas of interest, as these will help you to develop the inspection plan.

## Mystery Shopping

Mystery shopping can be done in two ways, either by telephoning or visiting a local office in person. Either way you are assessing the quality of service and information being provided by the staff. Before carrying out this method tenant inspectors need to agree on a list of questions to ask your landlord.

### Mystery shopping by telephone

Mystery shopping by telephone is a good starting point for people who are new to mystery shopping as you are anonymous and you have a prompt sheet to guide you through the call.

### Preparation

To start with you need to establish the purpose for mystery shopping by phone. You may want to:

- Look at how quickly and politely the phone is answered; or
- Look at how your query is dealt with; or
- Look at how appropriate and helpful the advice is that you are given; or
- Look to see if you are given a personalised or standardise response; or
- A mixture of all of above.

To start with you will need to look at the policy and procedures on answering calls so you are aware of what staff should be doing when answering the telephone. Like, for example:

- Should staff answer the phone by so many rings.
- Should staff answer the phone by telling you their name and / or department.
- Should staff offer to ring you back if they can't give you all the information you require.

You could look at the policy and procedures and see how they compare to other similar organisations.

After you have decided on what you are looking for out of mystery shopping by telephone then you need to make a checklist. Make sure you include everything you are looking for. Also arrange the form so it is easy to complete during and after the call. And lastly allow plenty of space for making notes if required.

It is best to test the checklist out to make sure it collects the right information, easily and in the right order.

Practise your checklist out on fellow inspectors or family and friends before inspection to see if it flows and makes sense.

### Doing mystery shopping by telephone

Before using this method the group needs to decide:

- Which inspectors are going to doing this method.
- When the inspectors are going to carry out this method, e.g. what time of day, same time of day each time or different times.

- How are the inspectors going to carry out this method, e.g. use home phones and be compensated, landlord to provide private office space, etc.

Once these have been agreed you are ready to carry out mystery shopping by telephone, but remember to keep full and good records of calls using the checklist.

After you have carried out this method look over your records and make sure they are complete, legible and include everything relevant.

## Afterwards

Meet with all the inspectors who have used this method as agreed on your inspection plan and discuss your findings. (See analysing data and findings).

## Mystery shopping in person

This method involves going in person to your landlord's office and requesting information or services, then recording the quality and appropriateness of the service / information received. The aim of mystery shopping in person is to test your landlord's approach to an ordinary request for a service from a tenant or customer. It should never be used to trick or confuse, or test someone's patience to the limit with strange behaviour or requests.

## Preparation

Be clear about the purpose of your visit. Are you there to:

- Check to see if policy and procedures are being followed; or
- To see what happens if you ask for particular information.

To start with you will need to look at policy and procedures on the area that you are mystery shopping in person.

Once you are clear about the purpose of your visit then you need to work out what your approach might be. As with mystery shopping by telephone you need to develop a checklist that can act as a series of prompts and reminders just before you go in. Also to be used as to record your findings after you come out.

Practise your checklist out on fellow inspectors or family and friends before inspection to see if it flows and the questions make sense.

## Doing mystery shopping in person

Before using this method you need to decide:

- Which inspectors are going to do this method.
- When the inspectors are going to carry out this method.
- Which offices the inspectors are going to inspect.

Once these have been agreed you are ready to carry out mystery shopping in person, but remember to keep full and good records of your visits using the checklist. It is best to fill out the checklists as soon as possible after each visit, otherwise it may be hard to remember details of the visit. Especially if you have done several visits in one go.

After you have carried out this method look over your records and make sure they are complete, legible and include everything relevant.

## Afterwards

Meet with all the inspectors who have used this method as agreed on your inspection plan and discuss findings. (see analysing data / findings)

## Shadowing staff

Shadowing staff involves spending time with staff to see what happens in practise to understand where difficulties occur and where possible improvements may be made.

This method is a good way of following processes from start to finish. For example, if the repairs service is being inspected, shadowing staff helps to illustrate how the service operates in practise from the initial reporting of a repair to its final completion. This method could be interesting and engaging for tenant inspectors.

## Preparation

Before starting this method inspectors need to:

- Know which staff they would like to shadow.
- Arrange date and times that they will be shadowing staff, e.g. full day, half day, two days, etc.
- What aspect of the member of staff job you would like to see them perform, e.g. a housing officer for instance you would not want to shadow them on all aspects of their job, but only on the area you are inspecting. Like rent arrears for example if you are doing your inspection on rent arrears.

You may want to develop a checklist that you can refer to during the shadowing process. This will allow you to be sure to look out to see if certain tasks are carried out and you are able to record how the tasks were carried out. Also it allows inspectors the chance to see if everything is covered that they are looking for.

## Doing shadowing staff

Before doing this method the group needs to decide which inspectors are going to be doing this method. All inspectors should fill in the checklists through out the inspection, so you are aware of what areas have been covered and how they have been covered.

Near the end of the inspection look at the checklist to see if there are any areas which haven't been fully addressed or not addressed at all. Use this time to talk over the missed areas with the member of staff as there may be reasons why they haven't been covered or not covered as fully as you expected.

After you have carried out this method look over you records and make sure they are complete, legible and include everything relevant.

## Afterwards

Meet with all the inspectors who have used this method as agreed on your inspection plan and discuss findings. (see analysing data / findings)

## Desktop audits

Desktops audits are office based inspections where documents and files and other paper or desk based evidence are examined. This method is different from looking at policies and procedures as you are looking at paper evidence of how things are recorded and carried out. Basically you are looking to see how the policies and procedures are being used in practise and this is another way to collect evidence.

We asked for a paper trail on complaints that were received by each local office on gardens, closes and communal areas. These consist of 3 reports for each area (closes, gardens and communal areas) by each local offices. Each report told us how the complaint was made, what the housing officer did and what the outcome was.

All the information we received we requested that all the names and addresses were deleted from all the records. This is important as all tenants have the right to data protection and for inspectors to know who the records are about isn't important. It is a good idea to ask for all the records to be re-identified like Mrs A or Mr B etc.

### Preparation

To start with you need to decide:

- What information you require from your landlord.
- Where you want to view the information, e.g. do you want to see the information on site, or do you want it sent to you.
- How many records you would like to see for each area being inspected.

The next step is either to request for the paper work to be sent to you or to make arrangements to attend your landlords' office so you can look at the paperwork either on the computer or on paper form.

You may want to develop a checklist of the things you are looking to find out from a desktop audit.

### Doing desktop audits

You need to decide which inspectors are going to carry out the desktop audits and they should attend the office at the agreed time or arrange to meet at the agreed time if you have arranged for the records to be sent to you.

Here are some things you may want to look for when doing a desktop audit:

- How have things been recorded, e.g. do all offices use the same recording method.
- Time it took for completion (only if there is completion).
- What the outcome was.
- Are there records of how satisfied tenants were with outcome.
- Have the staff followed procedure.
- Has there been any follow up and / or was follow up necessary.

These are some of the things you may want to look for when doing a desktop audit, but depending on what you are inspecting will depend on what you will be looking for.

Fill in your checklist and take notes when required. If possible acquire printouts / photocopies of records to help you when you come to analysing your data / findings.

## Afterwards

Meet with all the inspectors who have used this method as agreed on your inspection plan and discuss findings. (see analysing data / findings).

## Interviewing, questionnaires and surveys

You can do interviews, questionnaires and surveys either on the telephone or face to face. You can them either in a group or individually to find out the views of both tenants and staff about a service.

We found that doing staff interviews was a good way of gauging staff opinion on what things work and what doesn't work. Staff interviews may also help to understand organisational culture and how staff moral and performance could be improved. Interviews also provide a good insight into what difficulties exist for staff.

We found that using tenant surveys allows us to gather a greater range of tenant views than exist in the tenant inspection team. As tenant led inspection is aimed at achieving a more tenant focus housing service, is important to gather as wide a range of views as possible. Tenant surveys will allow you to quickly and accurately gather opinion on the area of the housing service you are looking at. It ensures a better response rate than postal surveys, which are often unreliable.

## Preparation

To start with you need to decided:

- What you are looking to find out with the questionnaire, interview or survey.
- Who you are going to speak to: tenants, which staff, etc.
- Which method you are going to use (questionnaire, interview or survey).
- Where you are going to speak to people.

We interviewed staff in the meeting room in their local offices and survey tenants that came into the local office. The format we used this time may not be the ones we used with our next inspection. We felt these were the right techniques to use during this inspection.

The next stage is to develop your questions for the questionnaire, interview or survey. The best way to see if the questions are easy to understand and if they flow well, is to practise them on each other and / or friends and family. This is also a good way of practising interviewing people.

Arrangements will need to be made in advance if you are interviewing staff and tenants. If you are interviewing tenants who have recently used the service you will need to arrange that you landlord writes out to tenants on your behalf to ask them if they would like to take part. If you are doing surveys and questionnaires on tenants and want to stand in the local office then it is courteous to ask in advance if this will be all right.

## Doing interviews, questionnaire and surveys

The inspectors need to ensure that:

- They turn up with plenty of time to get themselves prepared and organised.
- They keep to the agreed questions and try not to get side tracked.
- Write all the answers as fully as possible.

After you have finished speaking to the tenant / staff give yourself a few minutes to go through the questions and see if they are complete, legible and include everything relevant.

## Doing interviews, questionnaire and surveys

We had a minimum of two inspectors to conduct interviews as one person would ask all the questions and the other would write down the answers.

## Afterwards

Meet with all the inspectors who have used this method as agreed on your inspection plan and discuss findings. (see analysing data / findings).

## Attending meetings

This method is to listen to discussion to find out what people thought are about issues. Also an opportunity to ask people questions. You can attend tenants groups meetings, staff meetings, board or councillors meetings, set up your own meeting and ask tenants or staff (or both) to come (focus group).

## Preparation

Depending on exactly what you are going to do will depend how you will approach this method.

Before you start you need to decide:

- What you want to find out from attending meetings.
- Who you would like to meet with.
- Where you are going to meeting, e.g. are you going to go to their meetings or invite them to yours.
- Is the meeting going to be unstructured, semi-structured or structured.

Unstructured – you are just going to let the group talk with very little input or direction from the inspectors.

Semi-structured – you have got some questions you would like the group to answer through group discussion, but happy to let the discussion dictate the way to a certain extent.

Structured – you control all aspects of the discussion.

For this method you will need someone to ask the questions and control the meeting in a way that the inspection team have agreed. Also you will need another inspector to write down the main points coming out of the discussion. It is probably best to use a flip chart for this so the participants can see the main points of the discussion.

## Doing attending meetings

The inspectors need to ensure:

- They arrive in plenty of time to prepare the room and organise themselves.
- They need to keep to the agreed format agreed above, (structured, etc.).
- Write down all the points as best as possible.
- Keep to time.
- Remember to thank the group for allowing you to attend or the participants for coming.

Take a few meetings after the meeting to go through the points made to make sure that you understand what has been written.

## Afterwards

Meet with all the inspectors who have used this method as agreed on your inspection plan and discuss findings. (see analysing data / findings).

## Tenant visits

It is useful to talk to tenants who have recently used the service that you are inspecting. You can find out first hand of the tenant's experience of using the service and what they thought about the service being provided to them. You could also find out areas of the service that they felt didn't work and if they have any suggested changes. To organise a tenant visit you would need to ask your landlord to write to tenants on your behalf to ask if the tenant would be ok with you visiting them.

## Preparation

You need to decide:

- What you want to find out from talking to tenants who have used the service recently.
- What questions you want to ask tenants.
- How many tenants you want to speak to.
- Do you want to speak to tenants from certain areas or any area.

It might be an idea to go with a member of staff when meeting tenants in their home, so they can introduce you. Also some tenants may not want you to meet in their home, so you may have to find a private room in your landlords office somewhere.

## Doing tenant visits

If you are going into a tenants home remember it is their home.

The inspectors need to ensure that:

- They arrive on time.
- They keep to the agreed questions and try not to get side tracked.
- Write all the answers as fully as possible.

Always thank the tenant for taking part.

## Afterwards

Meet with all the inspectors who have used this method as agreed on your inspection plan and discuss findings. (see analysing data / findings)

These are only suggested methods that could be used to carry out a tenant led inspection. You will not necessary use all these method during each inspection, but a variety of them. You may also have other methods that you might want to use. How you carry out your inspection is up to each team of inspectors and there is no harm in trying out new ideas to your approach.

## Training programme

Training is very important part of the inspection process as it will equip the tenant inspectors with all the skills required to design, develop and carry out an inspection. The training programme should cover:

- What tenant led inspection is.
- The aims and objectives of the project.
- Address the inspectors' aspiration, fears and concerns from carrying out the inspection.
- The code of conduct.
- Understanding the policies and procedure for the area being inspected.
- Cover all the methods being used in the inspection.
- Identify inspectors' skills.
- Interviewing techniques.
- Designing questionnaires, surveys and interview questions.
- Recording information and taking notes.
- Structuring and writing reports.

These are some of the things that need to be address, though you will need to adapt the training sessions to meet the needs of the participants. Through the training process the tenant inspectors will be able to identify areas that they need more training on.

We carried out an induction session which covered what TLI is, the aims and objectives of the project and looked at the inspectors aspirations, fears and concerns. All tenants that had applied to be an inspector were invited to this session so they could meet other tenants and get an understanding of what they were getting involved with.

We only had one person who felt this project wasn't for them and the rest stayed. We had 8 tenant inspectors throughout the project, except for one who had work commitments didn't allow him to carry out the inspection.

We incorporated our training into the designing of the inspection. Once we had identified what methods we were using we then designed the training around them.

For example, we decided on interviewing staff. We looked at how to develop interview questions, once we felt we had the questions required to address all areas, we practised interviewing each other using these questions. This allowed us to try two things:

- a) to see if our questions were structured in an understandable format, and
- b) to help us develop our own interviewing techniques.

We did this with all the forms we developed including the estate walkabout forms as we went out to an estate and filled them out individually and then came back to discuss how easy they were to use and to see if they covered everything we needed to know.

We spent about 7 days on training and designing the inspection.

## Address Fear and Concerns

We carried out a brainstorming exercise at the induction, which look at the following issues:

- What do you want to know about tenant led inspections?
- What do you hope to get out of being an inspector?
- What are your fears and concerns?

All of the questions and comments made for the above headings were addressed at the time of the induction. Though some of the tenant inspectors fears and concerns could not be addressed until after the inspection, for example, being received constructively by the council.

This exercise was very useful as it allowed us all to see that we were all feeling the same about the inspection. Also we were able to identify some areas of training requirements and it allowed us to go over information about tenant led inspection that we weren't too sure about.

## Designing inspection

So far you have:

- Set out your ground rules.
- Set your aims and objectives.
- Agreed what area of your landlord services you are going to inspect.
- Recruited and selected your team of inspectors.

This is the stage where you to think how you are going to carry out your inspection. You need to decide:

- What information you want to find out.
- What methods you are going to use.
- How you are going to use the methods, e.g. what methods are you going to use to speak to tenants, staff, to record what information is on display at local offices, etc.
- What resources you need for methods, e.g. questionnaires, interview questions, etc.
- Who you are going to speak to, e.g. tenants, what staff, RTOs, other groups, etc.
- Where you are going to go to speak to people, e.g. local offices, local community centre, etc.
- Where you are going if you are carrying out an estate walkabout.
- Which inspectors are going to do what. We suggest that you have a minimum of 2 inspectors for any one activity.
- Set dates for carrying out each part of the inspection.

Once you have developed your methods and your inspection plan you are ready to carry out your inspection. Make sure that everyone:

- is comfortable with what they are doing,
- knows what they are doing,
- knows where they are going and when,
- knows who they are working with (other inspectors),
- knows what is expected of them (code of conduct),

- knows what resources are needed to enable them to carry out their bit, e.g. survey & interview questions, various recording forms, etc.

## Talking to staff

Before we carried out the inspection we arranged to attend the staff team meetings of the local offices we were inspecting. This was so we could tell staff about what tenant led inspection is about and to discuss some of their fears and concerns about tenants coming into the offices and inspecting them. This is a very important exercise as it gives staff a chance to openly discuss how they feel about the process. Also for the tenants or a representative of the tenants to let staff know that it's not them that is being inspected personally, but we are trying to get an understanding of how things actually work on the ground.

We asked our support worker to go on our behalf.

## Things to consider

When developing your inspection plan you may want to consider the following:

- How long you will need to carry out each method.
- Which inspector is doing what.
- When each method will be carried out.
- How do the inspectors will get to agreed place, e.g. bus, car, train, will be pick up, etc.
- If inspectors are using public transport do the times of the transport allow them to arrive by the appointed time.

## Carrying out the inspection

The actual inspection process should be straight forward as long as the group has prepared themselves enough. The longest and hardest part of doing a tenant led inspection is the pre-inspection stage, but if done right will make the inspection goes easily and allow you to collect good and informative data. So take your time and be as prepared as possible, before you go out and do it.

We carried out our inspection over a two week period. Though not all the inspectors were out every day, but on average spent no more than 2 days a week carrying out the inspection.

Here are some things you should take into consideration when it's time to go out there and do the inspection:

- You should meet at the agreed time and place.
- Be friendly and courteous.
- Record positive and negative points.
- Remember throughout the inspection is confidential.
- Stick to the agreed plan and try not to get side-tracked.
- Introduce yourself to participants and explain about the project.
- Thank all those who have taken part.
- If conducting interviews. Ask all questions clearly and take good notes.
- Obtain all information before ending the inspection.

Inspectors should keep to the inspection plan that has been decided by the group throughout the inspection, unless:

- The inspection group makes changes to the plan.
- Unforeseen circumstances don't allow you to keep to the plan. If this happens then it should be noted and the inspection group told as soon as possible of why and the changes that took place.

It is good practice to mention any changes that were made in the report, with an explanation of why the changes were made and any affect they may have had on the outcome of the data collected.

## **Analysing Data / Findings**

When you have completed each method individually you will need to look at your data / findings. Here are some questions you may want to ask while analysing the data / findings:

- What were the good points?
- What was done well or exceeded your expectations?
- What was poor or needs to improve?
- Are there any common themes?

From these findings you will be able to suggest recommendations for changes.

When the whole inspection is completed the whole inspection team should meet to discuss all the methods, their findings and suggested recommendations from each of the methods. When analysing this information again here are some suggested questions you could ask:

- What are the good points coming through all the methods?
- What was poor or needs improving through all the methods?
- Are there any common themes?
- Are there similar recommendations in the methods?

## **Writing the report**

The report can be as long or as short as you want it to be, though you do need to have a certain amount of information in the report. We would suggest three main headings of:

- Introduction,
- The inspection, and
- Conclusion.

### **Introduction**

The introduction will set the scene of the report. It could:

- say who the report is written for.
- give a brief background why you are doing TLIs.
- What method you have used.
- How you selected the inspection team.
- Why you chose the area of service to inspect.

### **The inspection**

The inspection will look at how you carried out the inspection. This area could look at the methods in more detail and talk about your findings for each method.

## Conclusion

The conclusion is where you would put your overall recommendations in. you may want to add other things into this bit like:

- Positive and negative experiences
- Strengths and benefits of TLIs.
- Limitations of the inspection

The report should be sent to your landlord after the group has approved the report.

## Developing an action plan

Once your landlord has received the report you need to request a meeting with them to discuss and action plans.

An action plan should set out your recommendations, with action to be taken, by whom and a completion date.

Recommendation	Action to be taken	By whom	Completion date
Upgrade software	The purchase relevant software	J McM	Dec 2006
Tidy up common ground	To discuss with grounds department	AHM	Ongoing

Here is an example action plan. This can change depending on what format and style your landlord uses. If for some reason your landlord can not implement a recommendation or it is a responsibility of another department, then they should give you a reason.

After both the inspection team and the landlord have developed the action plan, then a date should be set within a 6 month period to discuss how the changes are progressing. The team may want another meeting after this if there are still a number of outstanding actions to be taken.

At anytime the inspection team can go back and do a mini inspection of this service to see if things have improved on the ground.

Congratulations you have just completed you 1<sup>st</sup> tenant led inspection. We hope you enjoyed it as much as we did.

The Stirling Tenants Assembly Inspection Team were:

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This guide was written by the  
Tenant Led Inspection Team on  
30<sup>th</sup> May 2006.



