

Stirling Tenants Assembly

Tenant Led Inspection Report

On

Upkeep of Closes, Gardens & Communal Areas



Funded and Supported by



Part 1 Background and Methodology

1.0 Introduction

1.1 This report has been written for Stirling Council Housing Services. The purpose of the report is to provide feedback from the recently completed tenant-led inspection of the Council's estate management service. The inspection organised by the Stirling Tenants Assembly was funded by a Communities Scotland 'Registered Tenant Organisation' grant. Stirling Council provided permission, for the inspection to go ahead and all staff taking part were briefed in advance regarding the purpose, methods and dates of inspections. The Tenant Participation Advisory Service has facilitated development of the inspection process.

2.0 Background

2.1 Tenant Led Inspections are a way of involving tenants in the review and development of the housing service. Small groups of tenants (inspection teams) select an area of the service and inspect that service to find out what works well and what could be done better. Similar tenant-led inspections have been undertaken by West Lothian Council. They have been credited with improving performance and establishing a more tenant-focussed service.

2.2 The purpose of the inspection is to see whether the service is running as it is intended to. Inspections aim to identify whether practice reflects policy and also to identify where aspects of the service could be improved. Findings are fed back to housing management staff as part of the formal consultation process.

2.3 The Stirling Tenants Assembly (STA) has just completed a tenant-led inspection. The inspection focused on estate management, in particular the maintenance of closes, gardens and other communal areas. The position of tenant inspector was made available to any tenant of Stirling Council. The STA advertised for tenant volunteers by displaying posters in its local offices, adverts in the local press and STA events.

2.4 Findings will be used to improve services and develop a framework for tenant-led inspections that will act as a national model of good practice. The inspection have been funded by Communities Scotland.

3.0 Structure of the report

3.1 This report outlines the inspection methods used by tenant inspection teams and sets out their findings. It identifies any common themes and differences in the two estates where inspections took place. The report establishes whether estate management practice reflects policy, identifies areas for improvement, makes recommendations and highlights further information tenant inspection teams feel they would like.

4.0 Methods

4.1 The methods used in this tenant inspection consist of:

- Estate walkabouts
- Inspection of local office reception areas
- Staff interviews
- Tenant surveys

- Paper trail / examples of how complaints were dealt with by local offices

4.2 In preparation for carrying out the inspection, tenant inspectors also:

- Looked at relevant estate management policy and procedures
- Practised interview techniques through role play

4.3 All comments have been treated in strict confidence. Feedback is not attributable to individual staff or tenants. Instead, it is used to demonstrate current practice and how it reflects or differs from stated Council policy and procedures. In addition all members of the inspection team have signed an appropriate code of conduct agreement and have received full training on tenant-led inspections and the Council's estates management policy.

5.0 Selecting a tenant inspection team

5.1 All Stirling Council Tenants were invited to become a tenant inspector. Posters were displayed in local Council offices with contact details and information about inspections and how to get involved. Also advertised in local press and STA events.

5.2 All tenants that volunteered to take part in the inspections were asked to complete an application form. The form was used to find out a bit more about tenants. It included their reasons for wanting to become tenant inspectors, their existing skills and what times they are available for training and carrying out inspections.

5.3 Once sufficient numbers of tenants had completed application forms an induction session was held. This session provided more information about the purpose and method behind tenant-led inspections. Tenant volunteers were able to discuss their hopes, expectations and reservations with staff members from TPAS, Stirling Tenants Project and other tenant volunteers.

5.4 Tenant inspectors agreed upon a code of conduct for carrying out inspections. It was stressed right from the start of the project that tenant inspectors would behave professionally with everyone involved in the inspection and stick to the agreed area of inspection.

6.0 Choosing an area of the Housing Service for inspection

6.1 Estates management was selected for inspection, as it is an area of concern for all tenants. In particular the tenant volunteers were concerned with inspecting the upkeep of gardens, closes and communal areas. Tenant inspection teams were also concerned with the policy and procedures concerned with these.

6.2 A brainstorming session was facilitated by the Stirling Tenants Project to establish what tenant inspector hope to achieve. The following outcomes were decided:

- To improve the community and environment
- Build up trust between tenants and Council staff
- Create a template for tenant-led inspections that can be used as a 'how to' guide for tenant-led inspection teams in other Councils and RSLs

- Influence changes in the housing service
- Improve knowledge of the housing service
- Provide a tenants perspective of housing and related services.
- Make practical improvements
- Highlight breakdowns between policy and practice – what is supposed to happen and what is actually happening.
- Involve and include others

7.0 Estates identified for inspection

7.1 Two areas were chosen for inspection:

- Raploch
- Fallin

7.2 Tenant inspectors did not inspect estates where they live as it was felt this would compromise the objectiveness of inspection.

7.3 The teams began their inspections with an estate walkabout. This allowed them to assess the condition of gardens, closes and common areas and note any areas of concern. Staff interviews were arranged with a variety of housing staff in local offices. Finally days were arranged for tenant inspectors to conduct tenant surveys in the reception area of local offices.

Part 2 - The Inspection

8.0 Raploch Tenant Led Inspection

Tenant Inspectors: Michael Griffith, Philomena McClung, and Thomas Allan Brown

8.1.0 Estate Walkabout - 4th November

Areas visited: Balfour Street, Hawthorn Crescent, Menzie Drive, and Ivanhoe Place

8.1.1 Some examples of what was found:

- Long, uncut grass with litter and rubbish
- Bulk items left in communal areas – fridge-freezer, microwave, etc.
- Smashed window in close
- Broken glass and crockery in close
- Unpleasant smelling, dirty close
- Bins overflowing

- Car wheels in front garden

8.1.2 Comments:

The estate walk about lasted about 2 hours. In general the condition of the estate was poor, although there were many closes where the households were clearly maintaining their closes, gardens and communal areas to an acceptable standard.

- 8.1.3 Several common areas were found to be overgrown and had furniture dumped in them. There were also gas meter boxes with no covers, which were damaged

8.2 Staff Interviews – 2nd & 9th November

8.2.1 Procedure

- 8.2.2 There is clear guidance on how staff record and deal with complaints. If staff are patrolling the estate they must try to deal with problems as they occur, but also keep a log.
- 8.2.3 All staff members were aware of the procedures to follow regarding an overgrown garden, dirty close and communal area.
- 8.2.4 Some staff feel that estate wardens are a great help, especially in flatted areas. Staff could encourage close meetings with tenants and use a colour-coded calendar for a cleaning rota.
- 8.2.5 All staff felt they were limited in what they could do if an owner-occupier is the person not keeping their area clean and tidy. They felt there was a real problem getting co-operation from owner-occupiers and from residents that had sub-let houses from owners. All staff felt they should have more powers to deal with owner-occupiers.
- 8.2.6 Housing Services aim to remove graffiti quickly, especially if it is offensive or racist.

8.2.7 Tenants

- 8.2.8 Tenants are able to make comments and complaints through 'Talkback'. Community groups can access funds for environmental improvements through the LEAP budget.

8.2.9 Policy

- 8.2.10 All staff feel there is a clear estate management strategy, although some staff feel there are gaps. Staff know what is expected of them as it is set out in policy and procedures. There are clear targets with 3 timescales but staff try to do work as soon as possible. There is an integrated housing management system where staff can log complaints and use spreadsheets, which can be used to look for patterns, monitor and collate information for Viewforth and see if targets are kept.
- 8.2.11 There is mixed feelings on staff training and induction to estate management. Management feel that going through the policies and procedures and shadowing an experienced member of staff is enough. Staff feel induction and training is all theory and not enough practice. Others feel induction is insufficient and consists of being 'puppy walked' by an experienced officer.

8.2.12 There is a local estate action plan, which staff contribute to. The staff gather information by walking the estate and by getting ideas from community councils and police.

8.3 Tenant Surveys – 7th & 10th November

The approach taken by the tenant inspectors was to greet tenants as they came into the office. Interviewers briefly explained who they were and what they were doing. They then explained that if tenants had 5 minutes to spare they would be welcome to complete a survey after local housing staff had seen them. This approach seemed to work well both in terms of getting responses and not being too obtrusive.

8.3.1 Statistics

| | |
|--|----|
| Number of tenants who completed a survey | 10 |
| Number of tenants living in flats | 9 |
| Number of tenants living in houses | 1 |
| Number of tenants with closes | 0 |
| Number of tenants with back courts | 9 |
| Number of tenants with communal paths | 1 |

8.3.2 Closes

Not applicable. No tenant surveyed live in closes accessed by closes

8.3.3 Back courts

Have you reported a tenant for not keeping a clean backcourt or communal path?

Yes (2) No (7)

Was the problem resolved? Yes (2)

Outcome: Satisfactory. The amenities squad tidied the backcourt.

8.3.4 Bins

Do the tenants in your close put the bins out for emptying?

Yes (6) No (3)

None of the tenants surveyed had any comments to make.

8.3.5 Gardens

Do you feel the gardens around your area are generally kept tidy?

Yes (1) No (3)

The tenant who did not feel the garden was not being kept tidy did not report it to the local office.

8.3.6 Comments made by tenants

- Happy with service
- Like the area
- Satisfied with service
- Streets untidy
- Pavements dirty
- Dogs dirt on pavements
- Common ground needs to be tidied, rubbish cleared, hedges and trees need pruned and kept tidy
- The path between Drip Road and Ferguson Street always has lots of litter and the three street lights on the path do not work, making it a safety hazard, especially for women and children
- “The complaint I previously made has occurred again”. Follow up required.

8.3.7 Overview

8.3.8 The tenant surveys went very well. All tenants that came into the office were happy to complete the surveys. However, this may owe a lot to the skill and approachability of the tenant ‘interviewers’, who are very active in the community and are well regarded. Most tenants that called into the office knew Philomena and Michael personally.

8.3.9 As the front desk area was quite ‘open’ there is not much privacy to conduct surveys. Some of the questions such as whether tenants have reported neighbours for not cleaning closes are quite personal and tenants may be put off answering them within earshot of other tenants.

8.4 Local Offices

Tenant inspection teams completed a customer service checklist for each of the local offices.

8.4.1 The staff greeted everyone appropriately, courteously and were willing to help. There were no queues and people did not have to wait for long. There were clear notices displaying opening times. The leaflets on display were informative and clearly displayed. The office was clean and businesslike.

8.5 Paper Trail

As part of the tenant-led inspection both local offices were asked to provide examples of complaints received by tenants for three separate areas: closes, gardens, and communal areas. Local offices provided the inspection team with “neighbour complaints forms”. Sensitive and confidential details were blanked out. The paper trail outlined the nature of the complaints made, and details of the housing officer’s investigation, findings and actions. The paper trail also documented the outcome and timescale of each case.

8.5.1 Closes

Case 1

The tenant is experiencing problems with youths being able to enter close. They cause disturbance, graffiti walls and leave rubbish.

Other agencies involved – Police: names given to police

Outcome:

Amenity squad removed rubbish. Security door fitted. Close painted. The tenant was lettered to advise them to stick to tenancy agreement.

Completed – 2 days

Case 2

Two upstairs tenants have dogs and are allowing them to foul the close.

Outcome:

Interviewed both tenants. The close was inspected 1 week later and it had improved dramatically. A letter was also sent to both tenants and the complainant.

Completed – 12 days

Case 3

The communal close not being cleaned. Also, a tenant's children are hanging around with youths causing a disturbance at the weekend.

Outcome:

The tenant was interviewed and had been unwell. The tenant agreed to clean the close and stop children from loitering in the close. Requested door entry system. Estate warden to monitor close. Door entry system to be installed. The complainant was advised to contact police when youths are congregating.

Completed – 5 days

8.5.2 Gardens

Three cases were reported to the local office in person:

Case 1

Mess was left after the pruning of a tree in a tenant's front garden.

Outcome:

The property was visited the same day as the complaint was received. The only visible mess was sawdust left on the path. A letter was sent to the tenant to advise.

Completed: no date

Case 2

Garden very overgrown

Outcome:

The property was visited and a letter was sent to the tenant to advise them of their duties within their tenancy agreement. The garden was still overgrown on the 2nd visit and a 2nd letter was sent to the tenant. The grass and hedge were cut when the property was visited a third time.

Completed: no date

Case 3

A neighbour has fenced off a piece of garden that is not theirs and is also intimidating the tenant. The tenant does not want to go through a formal complaint procedure as they are afraid of reprisals

Outcome:

Housing officer advised the tenant that they should contact the police if they are being intimidated. The housing officer advised that they would look at the feu plan to establish which property was responsible for gardens.

Completed: no date

8.5.3 Communal Areas

Three complaints: 1 received by telephone and 2 reported in person at the local office

Case 1

Tenant allowing her dog to foul in the drying green area

Outcome:

The housing officer inspected the common area and found evidence of dog fouling. The housing officer left a card, followed by a letter asking the tenant to attend a meeting. The tenant was unable to attend and was visited by the housing officer.

The common area was inspected three times and found to be clear of dog mess.

Completed: no dates provided

Case 2

A complaint was received that the backcourt was full of rubbish. The backcourt is next to a park and people throw rubbish over into the backcourt. The tenant complained that they are the only person to clean the area.

Outcome:

The area was visited by an estate warden and found to contain a moderate amount of litter. The tenant was sent a letter explaining that the estate warden will continue to monitor the situation.

Completed: no dates given

Case 3

A previous tenant had left black bags and a cooker in the communal area. Hedges were also overgrown.

Outcome:

The amenities squad uplifted black bags and cooker. The housing officer also contacted grounds maintenance staff to have the hedge trimmed.

Completed: no dates given

9.0 Fallin Tenant Led Inspection

Tenant inspectors: Donald Budge, Alex Lamb, Mary Rainey, and Peter Rattray

9.1 Estate Walkabout

Areas visited: Balure Crescent, Hardie Crescent, Polmaise Crescent, Hawthorn Crescent, Beda Place, Touchhill Crescent (Plean)

9.1.1 Some examples of what was found:

- Garage and fencing dangerous by No. 39 Hawthorn Crescent
- Path to park, between 24 – 26 Hawthorn Crescent needs litter to be cleared. There was also graffiti and broken bottles lying around.
- No existing fence on corner of Hardie Crescent and Polmaise Crescent
- Cracked window in close front door: 2-8 Beda Place

9.1.2 Comments:

Some untidy gardens and graffiti on close walls but it was generally felt that Fallin was tidy. The biggest problem that was found was the boundary fencing, which was in need of repair or painted in most places.

9.1.3 The tenant inspection team also went to Plean to have a look at an untidy and poorly kept close and communal area, so they could compare with the closes and communal areas in Fallin.

9.2 Staff Interviews

9.2.1 Procedure

9.2.2 All staff felt the guidance was available on how to record and deal with complaints. If staff feel they are unable or unsure of how to deal with the complaint then they can discuss the case with the area manager. All staff said they would try to deal with the issue on the spot or at least start the process of dealing with the issue.

9.2.3 All staff were aware of the procedure to follow regarding dirty closes and communal areas and untidy gardens. The Fallin team have a policy of officers talking and behaving politely to tenants. This is intended to reduce abusive behaviour from tenants. All staff felt they had little time to deal with estate management effectively and estate wardens would help the team give tenants a better service.

9.2.4 Most staff felt that owner-occupiers were not a problem when it comes to keeping the area tidy as the main problem comes from young people. There are measures that can be taken to deal with owner-occupiers, ultimately leading to court action. It was also felt that estate wardens would help with problems and ASBOs in extreme cases.

9.2.5 Racist graffiti is removed within 4 hours and other graffiti within 3 days. Owners are recharged £30 for this service, although some do not pay.

9.2.6 Tenants

9.2.7 Tenants are able to make comments and complaints through 'Talkback'. There is a clear policy in place for recording and dealing with complaints. Fallin has a policy of 'treating people the same way as you would like to be treated'.

9.2.8 The Local Environmental Action Project (LEAP) budget is used for environmental improvement for tenants. It is used to benefit all tenants. Fallin try to get everyone involved thinking of ideas for what the budget is to be spent on. The technical officer would get costs for the project and take photos of the area requested for improvements.

9.2.9 Staff feel they need a local policeman again as this reduced vandalism. Also having estate wardens would improve the area.

9.2.10 Policy

9.2.11 All staff felt there is a clear estate management strategy. It is felt that it lacks vision, for example to encourage well-kept gardens and stop fly tipping. The strategy should cover other departments to encourage more joined up working. All staff knew what is expected of them as this is clearly set out in the policy and procedures.

9.2.12 All staff were aware that there are clear targets. It was mentioned that other parts of the Council do not and all departments should be helping each other achieve a better system. Estate management is recorded on spreadsheets, whereas rent arrears are recorded in a more sophisticated way, allowing staff to look up a tenant's payment history rather than looking at spreadsheets.

9.2.13 Few staff talked about estate management induction. One member of staff mentioned that she had never received any training and picked everything up through learning as she worked. All staff felt that opportunities for training would be available if required. In fact, all staff have received training for mediation and how to deal with complaints.

9.2.14 There are clear objectives to the policy and if staff feel changes are required they can make suggestions to the Service Tenant Manager.

9.3 Tenant Surveys

9.3.1 Statistics

| | |
|--|----|
| Number of tenants who completed a survey | 12 |
| Number of tenants living in flats | 3 |

| | |
|---------------------------------------|---|
| Number of tenants living in houses | 9 |
| Number of tenants with closes | 2 |
| Number of tenants with back courts | 2 |
| Number of tenants with communal paths | 2 |

9.3.2 Closes

Have you ever reported a tenant for not taking their turn cleaning the close?

Yes (1) No (2)

Did staff treat the problem seriously? Problem was responded to too slowly

Outcome:

The front door had been broken and youths were congregating. The Council is now starting to repair the close door.

9.3.3 Back courts / Communal Paths

Have you reported a tenant for not keeping a clean backcourt or communal path?

Yes (0) No (4)

9.3.4 Bins

Do the tenants in your close put the bins out for emptying?

Yes (4) Don't know (8)

9.3.5 Gardens

Do you feel the gardens around your area are generally kept tidy?

Yes (8) Some (1) Don't know (3)

9.3.6 Comments made by tenants

- Generally, any complaints made are acted on
- Most tenants are aware of bad gardens and would intervene, although not report it
- The common areas are full of rats and the grass is not cut. A complaint has been made to the Councillor, although nothing has been done about it.
- One tenant complained about a neighbour's garden, although nothing was done about it

9.3.7 Overview

The tenant surveys at the Fallin office reflected many of the issues highlighted in the estate walkabouts. The tenant inspection team in Fallin were not as comfortable carrying out tenant surveys as the Raploch team. As a result of this it should be noted that in future tenant surveys, less confident tenants are paired up with tenants that have more experience and confidence of this kind of activity.

9.4 Local Office

The staff were pleasant and helpful. They seem to work well and are pleasant to tenants and workmen. The staff greeted everyone appropriately, courteously and were willing to help. There were no queues and no one was made to wait.

9.5 Paper Trail

9.5.1 Gardens

Case 1

Rubbish lying in garden and grass needing cut and bags of rubbish ripped open.

Outcome:

Property visited and card left. Letter sent to tenant. Property revisited and rubbish was lifted and garden had been tidied. Spoke to tenant and advised that the situation would be monitored.

Completed – 9 days

Case 2

Report from neighbour of rubbish at side of house

Outcome:

Property visited and card left. Letter sent to tenant. On revisit rubbish had been uplifted and tenant advised to keep area clear.

Completed – 14 days

Case 3

Rubbish and mattress left in garden

Outcome:

Tenant called to say they had paid for uplift and will notify the office when completed. Property revisited and the garden was clear.

Completed – 16 days

Case 4

Noticed garden was untidy and grass uncut. Card left and letter sent to tenant. A phone call was received from the tenant explaining that they had hurt their leg in an accident and would do the gardening next week. On visiting the property the housing officer noticed the grass cut and garden tidy. Tenant advised that the situation would be monitored.

Completed – 9 days

Case 5

Report from neighbour of rubbish at rear of the property.

Outcome:

Property was visited and card left. Letter was sent to advise tenant to get rubbish uplifted. Tenant brought in receipt to show they had organised uplift of rubbish. The garden was clear on the housing officer's visit.

Completed – 15 days

9.5.2 Closes and communal areas

Case 1

In February there were various items dumped at the communal back area

Outcome:

3 flats were carded and the housing officer spoke to one tenant who didn't know who the rubbish belonged to. All flats were lettered. At the next visit all rubbish had been cleared. This took 12 days. In April a report was received from a tenant that everyone was not cleaning the close.

Outcome:

Close visited and letter sent to all tenants in the close. The close was checked on 2 occasions and is being cleaned regularly

Completed – 43 days

Case 2

A complaint was received about food being thrown into communal back area. A tenant was also having parties, which were very noisy. Police called on two occasions and a fight broke out on one occasion.

Outcome:

On visiting the property food was found in communal areas. A card was left and 3 letters were sent over a period of three months, as there was no response from the tenant. The tenant responded by the third letter and spoke to the housing officer. Parties stopped after the original complaint and tenant feeds bread crusts to birds (explaining the food left in communal areas). The property was revisited on 2 occasions after this and the area was tidy. No further complaints were received.

Completed – 4 months

Case 3

Tenant having parties all weekend and rubbish and food scattered at back communal area. There is loud music and lots of people in the house all weekend.

Outcome:

Property was visited and card left. This was followed up with a letter from the housing officer. Tenant phoned to say all rubbish and food had been cleared and that there will be no more parties. The property was visited twice with all areas clear.

Completed – 40 days

Part 3 – Analysis and Reflection

10.0 On completion of the inspection, both inspection teams met to discuss findings, experiences and recommendations. The meeting also provided the tenants with the opportunity to reflect on how the inspection process could be improved. An “ideas wall” allowed tenants to voice their opinions informally.

11.0 Common themes, further information required and recommendations

11.1 Estate Walkabout

11.1.1 Common themes

- In both estates the tenant inspectors felt common ground needs improvement. Areas of common ground are frequently untidy, with grass and shrubbery needing cut, and rubbish and furniture requiring uplifted.
- Both inspection teams found the estate walkabout to be one of the most useful parts of the inspection process. It was felt that more time should have been spent on this aspect.

11.1.2 Further information required

- What is the Councils policy for maintaining common ground?
- Why is common ground left unattended, with litter etc?
- Could the amenities squad be used to tidy common ground?

11.1.3 Recommendations

- Common ground areas are an eyesore and their appearance has a bad impact on the quality of life of tenants. Tenant inspection teams would like the Council to maintain these areas to a high standard as an example to tenants.
- Future tenant inspections should focus more on estate walkabouts to establish the actual condition of gardens, closes and communal areas throughout the stock.
- Fencing in Fallin is in need of attention, either replace or paint.

11.2 Staff Interviews

11.2.1 Common themes

- There is a clear strategy, although there are certain gaps in it. There are clear policies and procedures to follow.
- Staff are able to deal with issues as they arise.
- There is not enough time to carry out estate management – estate wardens would be a big help.

11.2.2 Further information required

- Is the system working effectively? One office says yes the other says no. What is the reason for this?
- What are the functions of the estate wardens?
- What are the powers for dealing with poor upkeep of gardens etc by residents of bought houses?
- What areas do the estate wardens cover?

11.2.3 Recommendations

- The Council should use different software for recording estate management.
- Clearer guidelines are required for staff training and which staff need training.
- The function of estate wardens needs to be clarified.
- Extend the estate warden service, especially to areas where there are flats.
- Introduction of colour-coded cleaning rota for closes so it is clear who's turn it is to clean common areas.
- Make clear to housing officers what powers are available for dealing with residents living in bought houses.
- Set up a mobile estate wardens to cover areas who at present don't have them.
- Raploch should have their own estate wardens, particularly with the regeneration work.
- More joined up working with other departments to deliver a better service to tenants.

11.3 Tenant survey

11.3.1 Common Themes

- Tenant surveys in both Raploch and Fallin indicated that closes, gardens and communal areas are in general kept reasonably tidy. However, majority of tenants are not keen on making a complaint at the local office.
- Tenants in both local offices complained to us about the condition of common grounds. Tenants would like to see common grounds cleared and then maintained properly.
- There are untidy gardens and streets in both areas.

11.3.2 Further information required

- It would be useful to know why common ground is not maintained. What is the Council's policy for maintaining common ground?
- Have reported problems re-occurred?

11.3.3 Recommendations

- Better system of monitoring and recording incidences of anti-social behaviour and breaches of tenancy could be introduced to keep track of areas where there are problems. This should be recorded electronically on specific software.
- Tenants are either uncomfortable making a complaint at local offices or do not consider it worthwhile. Housing officers should therefore ensure that any instances of untidy closes, gardens and communal areas are dealt with as quickly as possible.
- Untidy common areas and streets should be cleaned by the relevant person / department.
- Improve or get rid of common areas.
- Regular monitoring should take place after a complaint has been addressed.

11.4 Paper Trail

11.4.1 Common themes

- In most instances the Council's estate management policy and procedures appear to be working effectively. Tenant inspection teams for both areas were satisfied with the process used by staff to deal with complaints.
- It is clear that estate management practice reflects published policy and procedures. This is demonstrated by comparing the paper trail with the information provided during staff interviews. Tenant inspectors were satisfied that the process outlined in the paper trail

reflected the process for dealing with complaints described during staff interviews. Tenant inspectors for both areas were also satisfied that complaints were dealt with professionally and effectively.

- The only area of divergence in how local offices dealt with complaints was the reporting of how complaints were received. The Raploch office recorded whether complaints were received by telephone, letter or reported in person at the office. The Fallin office did not provide these details.

11.4.2 Further information required

- Although tenant inspectors were satisfied with how complaints were dealt with, they are interested whether there is any recurrence of problems in the future.
- Tenant inspectors would like to know whether details of complaints are recorded electronically. Does the Housing Service have software that allows them to monitor complaints, for example the same way that rent arrears would be monitored?

11.4.3 Recommendations

- Used a universal recording system for all area teams.
- The inspection team feel the Fallin office should record how complaints are received, eg telephone etc.
- In general, the tenant inspection team felt the efficiency of estate management could be improved if there was computer software available for staff. This would help to identify any recurring problems

12.0 Positive and negative experiences

| Good experiences | Bad experiences |
|---|--|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Majority of areas inspected were very good • Interviews with Council staff were helpful, interesting and enjoyable • The public and tenants on estate walkabouts were friendly and interested in purpose of inspection • Good to see such a difference in the places visited • Will be very interested to see feedback • Inspections will be worthwhile as long as it results in improvement to the area • Enjoyed being in Raploch office interviewing and meeting tenants and staff • Tenants were good to interview – no problems • Taking part in inspections was enjoyable • Liked interviewing staff – liked estate walkabouts | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Access was not available to certain closes (estate walkabout) due to security entry systems • Uncomfortable interviewing tenants • More discussion of aims and objectives is required before inspections take place • Travelling to estates is okay as long as cars are provided. The bus journey is sometimes a problem • Bus times are not always suitable • Too much was expected within in a limited time. Felt like more time was needed • Should have spent more time on estate walkabouts, going further round the estate |

Solutions to bad experiences

- Carry out estate walkabouts when service buzzers are on for security doors
- Transport – arrange times for inspections to suit bus timetables
- Arrange interview times for days when more cars and drivers are available.
- Could transport be laid on by the Council / taxis covered by expenses?
- Interviewing tenants – pair up tenant inspectors so that those who are not confident at interviewing are paired with those who are.
- Discussion – allow more time – separate session – to get a clearer idea of what the inspectors are looking for and hoping to achieve
- Allow more time for the whole inspection
- Spend more time on estate walkabouts
- More training on interviewing people in the street

13.0 Strengths and Benefits of Tenant-led Inspection

- 13.1 Tenant inspectors would like the findings and recommendations of this report to be taken into consideration by Stirling Council and reflected in policy when it is next reviewed.
- 13.2 The findings represent the views of both the tenants that took part in surveys and the tenant inspection team. It is a tenant-focussed and needs-based analysis of the service received by tenants. This provides the Council with excellent feedback on how to improve the service it currently provides under the best value regime.
- 13.3 The inspection demonstrates Stirling Council’s commitment to tenant participation. It shows that the Council is open and transparent and prepared to offer tenants meaningful methods of improving their communities.

14.0 Limitations of the inspection

- 14.1 The potential of the tenant inspection was slightly reduced by the inability to carry out mystery shopping exercises. This would have added extra integrity to the inspection process, as well as emphasising an organisational culture of transparency within Stirling Council. However, the inspection methods used still represent valid analysis of estate management, which should be used to improve the service.

15.0 Recommendations

From experiences gained carrying out the tenant-led inspection, the following recommendations are suggested as a priority:

15.1 Common Grounds:

There are significant amounts of un-maintained common ground, which is ruining the appearance of estates. The tenant-led inspection team recommend that the Council to clear rubbish and debris from common ground. It is also recommended that the Council regularly cut grass and shrubbery.

15.2 Staff Induction / Training

Staff do not appear to receive formal induction and training. The Stirling Tenants Assembly realise that housing officers are doing a difficult job and would recommend that formal training / induction is introduced as standard for all frontline staff.

15.3 Owner occupiers / Absentee landlords

It is clear that housing officers find it difficult to deal with complaints about homeowners and homeowners tenants. Staff should be given training about what powers could be used to resolve these problems – Antisocial Behaviour (Scotland) Act 2004. All residents that are not maintaining common areas properly should be dealt with strictly.

15.4 Antisocial tenants

The inspection team recommends that a harder line is taken on anti-social tenants that are not sticking to the terms of their tenancy agreement, especially with respect to maintaining closes and communal areas.

15.5 Estate Wardens

Staff interviews have highlighted the benefits of the estate warden service. It is recommended that this service be extended to cover the whole of Stirling Council.

15.6 Contact with housing officers

The tenant inspection team have been reassured during staff surveys that housing officers deal with issues such as unclean closes whilst they are 'on the street', rather than simply telephoning or sending letters from the office. The inspection team recommend that housing officers have as much face-to-face contact with tenants on their 'patch' as possible, as it is felt this will encourage a better tenant / landlord relationship. This will also ensure housing officers become aware of problems as they arise.

15.7 Monitoring estate management issues

The inspection team recommend that the Council consider the merits of a more sophisticated software operating system that will allow instances of antisocial behaviour, breach of tenancy to be recorded and analysed in a more sophisticated way.