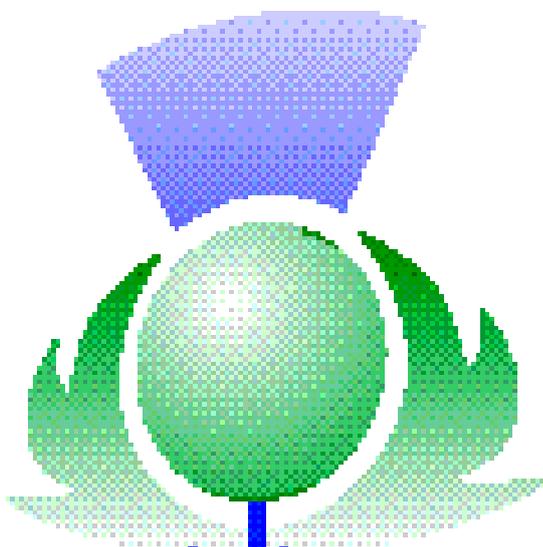


**Stirling Tenants Assembly  
Tenant Led Inspection  
Report on Stirling Council's  
Responsive Repairs  
Service.**



**stirling** *tenants assembly*

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Tenants Project and With thanks to Stirling Council.

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Paragraphs are numbered for ease of referencing. The number shows first the 'part' (1-4) then within that each subheading is number e.g 1.1 or 2.4 each paragraph within the subheading is also numbered. E.g. 1.1.3 or 2.4.7.

The section including the interviews is numbered as above for each individual question but the responses are numbered in addition to this. e.g. 2.8.1.1

## **Part 1. Background and Methodology.**

### **1.1 Introduction.**

**1.1.1** This report has been compiled for Stirling Council Housing Services. The purpose of the report is to provide feedback on the recently completed tenant-led inspection of the Council's responsive repairs service. The inspection was organised by the tenant led inspections team with support from Stirling tenants Project and the Stirling Tenants Assembly. Stirling Council gave permission and support that enabled the inspection to go ahead. Funding for the inspection was provided by Stirling Council.

### **1.2 Background and Context.**

**1.2.1** This is the fourth inspection that has been carried out by tenant inspectors from Stirling Council.

**1.2.2** The purpose of tenant led inspection is to see whether services provided by Stirling Council to its tenants are meeting the standards expected by tenants and staff alike. In most inspections tenant inspectors aim to identify whether practice reflects policy and written down procedures. However, in the case of this inspection procedural documents for responsive repairs were in the process of being reviewed and it is intended that this inspection report and the recommendations contained within be considered as part of the re-writing of the procedures.

**1.2.3** Findings and recommendations formed from the inspection process are fed back to senior managers as part of the formal consultation process.

**1.2.4** Stirling Council has recently made major changes to the running of the responsive repairs system. An appointment system for all non-emergency repairs has been implemented. This means that tenants reporting a repair are now given an appointment stating a specific day and either morning or afternoon. This has led to

changes to working practices for staff involved in repairs. The Tenant Led Inspection team had wanted to look at the repairs service but considered it best to wait until the new system was running so they could see how this was working for both staff and tenants.

### **1.3 Structure of the Report.**

**1.3.1** This report outlines the inspection methods used by the tenant inspection team and sets out their findings. It identifies any common themes found during the inspection process and highlights anything that has caused concern. Recommendations will be made on any areas where the tenant inspectors think that improvements need to be made. Good practice will also be commended in this report.

### **1.4 Methods**

**1.4.1** The methods used in this tenant inspection consist of:

- Reviewing procedural documents that were in use before the appointment system was started for comparison.
- Meeting with senior staff to discuss the workings of the repairs service and how things should work.
- Visits to local offices to see how repairs were recorded after they had been reported.
- Visits to the work scheduler's office to see how repair jobs are allocated to staff.
- Interviews with staff involved in the repairs service and the decision to change to the appointment system.

**1.4.2** The Council had been rolling out the implementation of the appointment system over a period of time. Some of the trades had been working to appointments for longer than others but the whole service was on board by April of 2008 so the inspection started in the summer after there had been enough time for the new system to settle in.

**1.4.3** All comments have been treated in the strictest confidence. Feedback and comments cannot be attributed to any individual member of staff. The feedback received is used to get a picture of how the system works day to day and can pick up areas where there may be problems that have not been identified through other methods.

## **1.5 Selecting an Inspection Team.**

**1.5.1** Tenant Inspections are open to any tenant of Stirling Council. Tenant Inspectors volunteer and if they agree to abide by the code of conduct they are welcome to become an inspector. This code of conduct was agreed by the tenant inspectors when the first inspection took place

**1.5.2** It has been stressed since Tenant Led inspections first began that Tenant Inspectors would behave professionally. They will treat everyone involved in the inspection with respect and treat all comments and interview responses with confidentiality.

**1.5.3** There were three new Tenant Inspectors involved in this project. Before the inspection began they were involved in discussion about the process and asked to agree with the code of conduct. The new inspectors were paired up with more experienced inspectors for the duration of the inspection.

## **1.6 Identifying an area of the repairs service as a focus for the inspection.**

**1.6.1** The tenant inspectors would ultimately like to inspect every area of Stirling Council's repairs service. After meeting with the tenancy services manager and the service improvement officer for technical services, it was agreed that it would be impossible to inspect the whole of the service in one inspection.

**1.6.2** The tenant Inspectors were given a presentation by the service improvement officer which broke down the whole repairs service into separate sections and gave a brief outline of what work was carried out under each section. (see appendix 1)

**1.6.3** Discussion following this presentation led to the tenant inspectors deciding to inspect the responsive repairs element of the service. This area has had a lot of changes recently with the development of the appointment system. It was felt that it would be pertinent to inspect this area to see how these changes have taken effect and how the new system has been working for both staff involved and tenants.

## **Part 2. The Inspection.**

### **2.1 Visits to Local Offices.**

**2.1.1** The tenant Inspectors, working in pairs, visited the local offices for two hours in order to see how repairs are logged when a tenant reports them. Some of the inspectors found that the office they were visiting was very quiet at the time that they were in. It is impossible to tell in advance how many repairs will be reported at any given time. They were all able to see the computer system used to log repairs though it was not fully functioning during one visit.

**2.1.2** The computer system used seems OK as it stands. Some of the inspectors were told that there are plans to make some changes to the system. There were concerns raised that some problems could be caused by changing the system as these things can take time to settle and for everyone to get used to it. There was also a concern raised that the system must be suitable for the task that it has to do.

**2.1.3** Repairs, which are reported to the local offices either in person or by telephone, are logged onto a computer system. The computer system allows the operative to log the reported repair onto the system using on screen prompts relating to the repair,

such as which room the repair is in, where exactly it is and what the problem is. The computer system then indicates to the operator whether this should be a four-hour, twenty four-hour or appointed repair. The staff member can use their initiative to make a change to this if they feel that it is required.

**2.1.4** If an appointment is to be offered then the member of staff who has just logged the repair will use the computer system to check when the next available appointment is and offer this or another time slot if that is more suitable for the tenant. This agreed appointment is then recorded into the system. Appointments are offered to the tenant on an a.m. or p.m. basis but are separated into time slots for the workers. The slots include some travel time as well as the time required to do the work.

**2.1.5** Tenant Inspectors thought that the system used was good and that as long as the computers were running and that the staff members are suitably trained that there should not be many problems with it.

## **2.2 Visits to observe the work schedulers.**

**2.2.1** The inspectors visited the work schedulers based at Springkerse complex where they were able to see what happens to the repairs lines logged at the local offices and how the work is issued to the tradespeople who will do the repairs.

**2.2.3** Tenant Inspectors again found that the work schedulers' office varied in the amount of repairs being dealt with when they were there. Some experienced a very busy office where the staff members had little time to stop but others found it to be quieter.

**2.2.4** In this office the repairs which have been logged by the frontline staff in the local offices are printed off and the staff sort them into 4-hour or 24-hour emergencies or file the job line according to the day that the appointment is for. (see appendix 2)

**2.2.5** The emergency jobs are organised into which trade is required for the job and the appropriate tradesperson for that repair who is on call will be given the job line. The appointments are organised in advance of each day into a schedule for each worker 'Joiner A' 'Joiner B' 'Plumber A, B etc by the work-scheduler according to the appointment times and the location of the job. These schedules are then passed on to the technical supervisors who appoint the tasks to a specific tradesperson according to who they feel will be best suited to the jobs required for that day, either in terms of skills or location.

### **2.3 Emergency Repairs**

**2.3.1** A lot of repairs seem to be classed as emergencies. Do all of those repairs logged as emergency repairs have to be done so quickly or would an appointment be more appropriate?

**2.3.2** There was a problem during one of the inspector's visits with finding workers to carry out a urgent emergency. There might not be enough staff to deal with these.

**2.3.3** Will the new policy of encouraging staff to ask the tenant if they would be happy to wait for an appointment (in suitable circumstances) rather than take an emergency appointment help to decrease the amount of emergency repairs?

### **2.4 Staff Training**

**2.4.1** A temporary staff member covering a work scheduler's post said she was creating a 'manual' for use on the job as there is currently nothing written down with regards to what programmes are to be used for which task etc. This will help the future post holder to be able to do the job.

**2.4.2** The staff member at one of the offices during the visit was covering staff holidays. He was not suitably trained for recording repairs. Although this is not his usual job he is required to cover at times and should therefore receive adequate training.

**2.4.3** Members of the Housing Advisory Group visited a 'one-stop-shop' in Linlithgow. The staff members there were trained to do every task and the system allowed them to easily cover a holiday or sickness in another local office any where within the council area.

**2.4.4** There have been some concerns that not all of the technical supervisors are adequately trained.

## **2.5 Tenant Questionnaires/postcards.**

**2.5.1** The cards that should be given to tenants following a repair to see how happy they are with the work are only successful if tenants bother to respond and if they are given out in the first place.

**2.5.2** One of the staff members has the task of calling out to tenants when a response has not been received in order to ask them the questions on the card and also to find out if a card has been issued to them.

## **2.6 Cornton office**

**2.6.1** The layout was considered to be bad with lots of posters covering the screen so that tenants and the front line staff can barely see each other. Also it was very difficult for the staff member (who had a hearing impairment) to hear what was being said to him. Although this is outwith the scope of this Inspection, tenant inspectors can confirm that, in accordance with the law, this office does have a loop system in place. It is possible that this is not always switched on however. Tenant inspectors would like to see more attention paid to the layout of offices.

## **2.7 Staff Interviews.**

**2.7.1** Members of staff who are involved with carrying out responsive repairs were interviewed as part of the inspection.

**2.7.2** The questions were devised in order to give tenants a better idea of how the repairs service works in practice and to find out from staff what they consider to be the problems and what they think works about the system.

**2.7.3** The questions asked were similar for all staff but with variations to reflect the different jobs that the individual staff members do. The questions are designed to be open ended to allow people to answer as broadly as they wish and to allow staff to share their concerns with the tenant inspectors.

**2.7.4** As the responses are kept anonymous, the answers given to each question have been collated and are given here together. The exception to this are the interviews with the Revenue and Services Manager and the Head of Housing since it is impossible for them to remain anonymous given their job title.

## **2.8 Interviews with staff who record repairs that have been reported.**

### **2.8.1 What relevant qualifications/experience did you have before starting your current post with Stirling Council?**

**2.8.1.1** All staff members employed in jobs that are involved with repairs reporting have a variety of relevant experience.

**2.8.1.2** Prior to taking up his or her current post everyone that was interviewed had worked in an office based job either with Stirling Council or with another employer.

**2.8.1.3** One did comment that they had received no training and had no previous experience of using the 'Misc' (Management Information System for Costing) computer software. This software contains records of the properties such as the age of the property, the property type and size etc.

**2.8.2 Have you received any relevant training from Stirling Council since you were awarded your current post?**

**If yes;**

**What training did you receive?**

**Was the training suitable for your needs?**

**Was it beneficial to you?**

**2.8.2.1** Not everyone stated that they had received any on the job training but most had been trained in the computer software that they use as part of their job. Only one mentioned that they had not been trained thoroughly in the computer systems. Such as HMIS (Housing Management Information Systems) and MISC. (Management Information System for Costing)

**2.8.2.3** Other training that was provided included First Aid and Customer Service Training. There are lots of opportunities for staff members to take part in on the job training.

**2.8.3 Could you briefly describe your typical working day?**

**2.8.3.1** The staff interviewed all had slightly different jobs so the tasks involved in their daily jobs varied from one to the next. They all had to undertake a variety of duties.

**2.8.4 How has the new repairs by appointment system changed your typical working day?**

**2.8.4.1** One of the staff interviewed had only started their current post since the appointment system was put in place, it has therefore had no effect on their current post.

**2.8.4.2** Some noted that they have had a reduction in their workload because of the new system.

**2.8.4.3** Local office frontline staff used to have more liaison with customers and they felt the new system did not allow them to give the customers the best possible service. There is a lack of feedback and communication between different departments.

**2.8.4.4** Previously it was possible for a tenant to contact the same person to report the repair in the first place and then to contact that person again if there is a problem and find out a progress report on the repair. Now there is no feedback from trades-people if there has been a delay due to, for example, lack of materials. They do not log this so that the frontline service staff are unable to answer queries from tenants. These members of staff are the first point of call for tenants with queries and therefore they should have access to relevant information.

**2.8.5 Are there any changes you would like to see implemented to improve the current system for reporting and recording repairs reported by tenants?**

**2.8.5.1** There needs to be some improvements made to the tracking system in the vans. At present they do not work properly.

**2.8.5.2** There are too many emergency repairs and it is difficult to fit them all in and to find time for appointments for standard repairs.

**2.8.5.3** There is a lack of feedback provided to staff that deal directly with tenants, they have no way of knowing whether something is being fixed or not just by looking at the computer system yet the tenants will contact them if they have a query regarding a repair.

**2.8.5.4** There is a lack of communication between all the different staff involved.

**2.8.5.5** It was better when the technical supervisor was based in the local office as it was easy to get information and easier to ensure a repair was logged correctly and the right trade requested to fix the problem.

**2.8.5.6** The tenants need to be able to report repairs more accurately.

## **2.8.6 What are the main problems (in your view) of the new repairs by appointment system?**

**2.8.6.1** It was noted by some of the interviewees that the multi-trade jobs are not working as they should do and that area needs some attention.

**2.8.6.2** That it is not possible to do follow-ups on reported repairs. This relates to the support staff members who deal with frontline enquiries from tenants.

**2.8.6.3** There are more repairs reported than there are available appointments.

## **2.8.7 What has been improved by the introduction of the new system?**

**2.8.7.1** The tenants benefit from getting to know when a trades-person is coming to their property. Tenant inspectors agree that the appointments service is of great benefit when it works. The inspection team are aware of a good deal of anecdotal evidence that suggests that the system does not work well in all cases. Specifically in the rural areas.

**2.8.7.2** Some of the interviewees felt that there have been no improvements.

## **2.8.8 What are the main benefits?**

**2.8.8.1** It is good for the tenants to be able to get an appointment.

**2.8.8.2** There should be more structure and consistency in the service now than previously.

**2.8.8.3** There has been a reduction in the amount of no-entry postcards distributed to tenants.

**2.8.8.4** One person said there are no advantages.

**2.9 Interviews with staff who carry out the repairs.**

**2.9.1 What relevant qualifications/experience did you have before starting your current post with Stirling Council?**

**2.9.1.1** All of the staff members who took part in the inspection interviews had served time as apprentices either with Stirling Council or with another contractor.

**2.9.1.2** Some mentioned that they also had qualifications such as City and Guilds.

**2.9.2 Have you received any relevant training from Stirling Council since you were awarded your current post?**

**If yes;**

**What training did you receive?**

**Was the training suitable for your needs?**

**Was it beneficial to you?**

**2.9.2.1** Most of the respondents stated that they thought that Stirling Council provided them with lots of opportunities for training.

**2.9.2.2** The training offered kept them up to date with legislation and there were good opportunities for further training and development of their skills within the council.

**2.9.2.3** Some stated that they are very keen to work their way up to higher grades under the national recognised structure for the grading of trades-people.

**2.9.2.4** Some had been able to complete college courses as well as receiving on the job training and training courses provided by the council.

**2.9.2.5** A number of people mentioned that they are being trained in multi-trades areas so they can do some work for other trades when required.

**2.9.3 Could you briefly describe your typical working day?**

**2.9.3.1** Arrive, get jobs for the day, do the jobs, clean down the van.

**2.9.3.2** For people who work outside their working day varies depending on the weather. They will work on multi-trades jobs in bad weather but in good weather will continue with inspecting the outsides of buildings and doing work out of doors.

**2.9.4 How has the new repairs by appointment system changed your typical working day?**

**2.9.4.1** Appointments are not relevant to outside workers so those who do out of doors work could not answer this particular question.

**2.9.4.2** The amount of no-access calls has improved.

**2.9.4.3** There is a lack of communication and one worker described a particular situation where two vans were sent out to Killin to do two separate jobs when it would have been more time and cost effective for one van to have gone to Killin and do both jobs.

**2.9.4.4** One interviewee stated that they felt that the system was let down by a minority that do not care what they do and mess up the system. They do not report things correctly.

**2.9.5 Are there any changes you would like to see implemented to improve the current system for scheduling and carrying out repairs?**

**2.9.5.1** The length of time allocated to a job often does not allow enough time to do the job. When a job runs on too long it puts everything else back and all of the other jobs for that day will be late.

**2.9.5.2** The standard of work can sometimes slip and jobs may not be done satisfactorily because the appointment times are too short and workers are in a hurry to get to their next appointment.

**2.9.5.3** One interviewee did state that although it was “crazy” when the appointments system first started it has got better.

**2.9.5.4** If all members of staff had a Personal Digital Assistant (PDA) system (hand held computer) it would help a lot. They would be able to communicate better with each other and record completed jobs and when jobs are incomplete record why this is so.

**2.9.5.5** Much more detail is needed on the job lines. This will help to allocate the appropriate trades-person to the job, ensure that the appointment time is long enough and ensure that the appropriate parts and materials are taken along to attend the appointment.

**2.9.5.6** Some 4-hour emergencies do not need to be done within 4 hours and a reduction in the amount of jobs scheduled for four hours (where unnecessary) would help the appointments system to run more efficiently.

**2.9.5.7** Using a mobile phone or PDA system to check in after a job and then being sent out to another job in the vicinity would be a better way of working things out.

## **2.9.6 What are the main problems (in your view) of the new repairs by appointment system?**

**2.9.6.1** Tenants are not always in when you call round to do the repair. They should phone in if they have made an appointment that they are unable to keep.

**2.9.6.2** There should be fewer postcards to give out.

**2.9.6.3** The work schedulers that work in the office don't know enough about the trades and how long it takes to do a job so they are not scheduling the work correctly. They do not allocate enough time to do the job. Each trade should measure up and allocate their own jobs. Jobs are not distributed evenly and some people feel that they have too much work to do in comparison with others.

**2.9.6.4** There is a lack of Communication between different departments and staff members involved in carrying out the repairs.

**2.9.6.5** The tracking system used in the vans is not effective.

**2.9.6.6** Appointment postcards do not always get delivered in advance and people do not know that someone is coming.

**2.9.6.7** Multi-trades jobs can let things down; it would be simpler if trades-people had enough knowledge of other trades so that they could do little bits required, such as plastering in order to finish a job.

## **2.9.7 What has been improved by the introduction of the new system?**

**2.9.7.1** There are some workers who are floating and can take over some of the appointments when appropriate and this helps to get through the work when a job takes longer than the appointed time.

**2.9.7.2** Having mobile phones has helped.

## **2.9.8 What are the main benefits?**

**2.9.8.1** Less 'no-entry' postcards are being left than before.

**2.9.8.2** A number of tradespeople said that the only benefit was to the tenants who benefit from knowing when someone will be coming.

**2.9.8.3** Another said that there are no benefits at all.

## **2.10 Interviews with the technical supervisors.**

**2.10.1 What relevant qualifications/experience did you have before starting your current post with Stirling Council?**

**2.10.1.1** One has been a joiner all on their working life and also has construction qualifications.

**2.10.1.2** One worked their way through lots of jobs within Stirling Council. Including administration within the housing service, working on the reporting of repairs, allocations and then went on to the technical post following encouragement from a boss and the completion of an HNC in construction.

**2.10.1.3** One has had a lot of experience with Stirling Council in the roads and grounds maintenance departments as well as previous experience on farms. This is not considered to be suitably relevant experience by the tenant inspection team.

**2.10.2 Have you received any relevant training from Stirling Council since you were awarded your current post?**

**If yes;**

**What training did you receive?**

**Was the training suitable for your needs?**

**Was it beneficial to you?**

**2.10.2.1** All of the technical supervisors have received a variety of training. One said that they had received so many different training courses that they couldn't even remember them all.

**2.10.2.2** They all responded that they felt that the training received was both suitable and beneficial.

**2.10.2.3** One commented that training helps to update and keep up existing knowledge.

**2.10.3 Could you briefly describe your typical working day?**

**2.10.3.1** The Technical supervisors are all responsible for different trades areas and different jobs so the jobs vary slightly from one to another.

**2.10.3.2** Tasks include, issuing work sheets for the day, house visits, job inspections and administration duties.

**2.10.4 How has the new repairs by appointment system changed your typical working day?**

**2.10.4.1** One commented that the new system had doubled their workload. There is not enough time to get the work done.

**2.10.4.2** The move from out of the local office to Springkerse yard has been a change.

**2.10.4.3** The work is now more hands on.

**2.10.4.4** One commented that time is needed in order for everyone to settle in and to allow the workers to get used to it.

**2.10.5 Are there any changes you would like to see implemented to improve the current system for carrying out responsive repairs?**

**2.10.5.1** Two of the technical supervisors commented that more staff are needed. More technical supervisors and more tradespeople to carry out the repairs.

**2.10.5.2** One said that they would prefer to have geographical responsibility rather than trades area responsibility, as this would offer tenants a better level of consistency. Tenant Inspectors agree that this might be a good idea but that it is important that it is possible to get a second opinion from a supervisor that is a specialist in the specific trade area.

**2.10.6 What are the main problems (in your view) of the new repairs by appointment system?**

**2.10.6.1** There is a shortage of staff and that makes it difficult to meet the appointments at times.

**2.10.6.2** There are not enough staff members to provide cover for sickness and holidays.

**2.10.6.3** The appointments system is good in principle.

**2.10.6.4** There are too many 4-hour repairs.

**2.10.6.5** It is difficult to find time to get work done on void properties and this affects the void turnover time.

**2.10.7 What has been improved by the introduction of the new system?**

**2.10.7.1** The tenants get an appointment that suits them.

**2.10.7.2** The new system saves time and money when it goes according to plan, as there are less visits and follow-ups required.

**2.10.8 What are the main benefits?**

**2.10.8.1** It is better for the tenants.

**2.10.8.2** There is more managerial control.

**2.11 Interview with Revenue and Services Manager.**

**2.11.1 What are the main responsibilities of your post?**

**2.11.1.1** Responsibility for stock levels, making sure repairs get done and making sure that the supervisors do their job properly.

**2.11.2 Could you briefly describe your typical working day?**

**Tasks include:**

**2.11.2.1** Updating the ten-month action plan.

**2.11.2.2** Making sure that budgets are not overspent.

**2.11.2.3** Delegating tasks to the technical supervisors.

**2.11.2.4** Interviews for sub-contractors.

**2.11.2.5** Training for trades-people and apprentices.

**2.11.3 What relevant qualifications/experience did you have before starting your current post with Stirling Council?**

**2.11.3.1** Has worked with Stirling Council for a number of years, was a gas fitter for ten years.

**2.11.3.2** Had gained an HNC in Construction.

**2.11.4** Have you received any relevant training from Stirling Council since you were awarded your current post?

**If yes;**

**What training did you receive?**

**Was the training suitable for your needs?**

**Was it beneficial to you?**

**2.11.4.1** Training is often received from the Council, this has included leadership training, 360 degree manual training, five-yearly gas seminars.

**2.11.4.2** The training received has been suitable and beneficial.

**2.11.5** How has the new repairs by appointment system changed your typical working day?

**2.11.5.1** The appointments system means that there is now more day to day involvement with the work schedulers.

**2.11.6** Are there any changes you would like to see implemented to improve the current system for carrying out responsive repairs?

**2.11.6.1** Having PDA systems for all of the workforce would be a great help, it will save on paper work and allow better communication throughout the day.

**2.11.6.2** Mobile working will also save time, as the workers will not need to return to base so often.

**2.11.6.3** Would like to see a return to Housing Integrated Working Services.

**2.11.7 What are the main problems (in your view) of the new repairs by appointment system?**

**2.11.7.1** The trades-people are not calling back into the office when they finish a job or if they arrive and the tenant is not in for example.

**2.11.7.2** Tenants are often reporting that the trades-person has not arrived at the appointed time.

**2.11.7.3** Sometimes tenants do not keep to the agreed appointment time, they should phone if they are unable to keep the appointment.

**2.11.7.4** There is a barrier with some staff members who do not like change and have not responded well.

**2.11.7.5** The system would work better if more of the staff were able to do basic multi-trades jobs and could complete a job if it included minor work such as plastering over an area after work has been completed.

**2.11.8 What has been improved by the introduction of the new system?**

**2.11.8.1** The new system has cut down on the amount of time taken to do jobs as the staff members can go directly from one job to another without having to go back to base after each job.

**2.11.8.2** The new system has cut down on the amount of time tenants have to wait in order to have a repair done.

**2.11.9 Do you have a particular procedure for emergencies? E.g bad weather meaning that there are a larger amount of repairs than usual. Or if someone has an accident inside his or her house and the property needs to be broken into in order to get that person out? (Note that this question was added in response to an incident that happened while tenant inspectors were visiting the Work schedulers)**

**2.11.9.1** There are no written guidelines for tradesmen.

## **2.12 Interview With Head of Housing**

**2.12.1 What relevant experience and qualifications did you have before starting your current post with Stirling Council?**

**2.12.1.1** He has had a lot of experience within housing having worked through a number of posts in Stirling Council's Housing department and then moved on to work with the Scottish Government within the Regulation and Inspection team before returning to Stirling Council in the post of Head of Housing.

**2.12.2 You have made significant changes to the housing service since taking up the post as head of housing. Why did you think that the system had to be changed?**

**2.12.2.1** There had been far too many complaints about repairs and it was clear that some changes had to be made. The amount of complaints has been reduced by 80% since the changes have been made but any complaints are too many.

**2.12.3 What factors were influential in deciding to create an appointment system for repairs?**

**2.12.3.1** The new system will cut labour time and costs and also provide a better service for tenants.

**2.12.4** In comparison to how the responsive repairs part of the service was working before and how it is working now. What were the good and bad points of the previous system? And  
**What are the main advantages and disadvantages of the new way of working?**

**2.12.4.1** Gas servicing can now be increased in frequency as a result of financial and time savings and it will now be done every ten months rather than ever two years.

**2.12.4.2** It is hoped that £1/2 million can be saved in order to reinvest this in a programme of house building.

**2.12.5** What (if any) problems are there with the new system?

**2.12.5.1** He hasn't heard of any.

### **Part 3: Analyses and Reflection**

**3.1** On completion of the inspection, the inspection team met as a whole to discuss their findings and the recommendations to be made based on these findings. The group discussed their impressions of the service as a whole and their experience of carrying out the inspection. The inspectors identified the common and recurrent themes from the inspection findings. These have been presented under headings detailing which part of the responsive repairs process they relate to.

### **3.2 Reporting a Repair**

**3.2.1** Tenants can report repairs by telephone to the local office or in person at the local office. There were problems identified with reporting repairs as it was not always possible for accurate diagnoses to be made. Some staff felt that they did not get a satisfactory report from the tenant when they reported the repair. Tenant Inspectors do not think that tenants should be expected to have the level of knowledge required to report a repair the way a technical officer would. It is therefore recommended that Stirling Council improve the tools used by staff to whom repairs are reported. Perhaps by including more questions during the repairs reporting stage.

### **3.3 Appointing Repairs**

**3.3.1** Some of the staff members reported that the time appointed to carry out repairs were often not long enough. It was expressed that this was caused by the person appointing the job not having enough technical knowledge to accurately assess the length of time required to carry out the repair. Tenant Inspectors recommend that someone suitably trained be on hand at all times to support those taking the repair details and scheduling the jobs.

**3.3.2** There have been some problems with the appointing of repairs in the rural areas. One interviewee stated that he knew of an occasion when two separate vans were sent to Kippen to do two repairs, it would have made more sense to send one van to Kippen to do both jobs. Time was wasted by travelling and this should be avoided. Technical Supervisors should ensure that this does not happen.

**3.3.3** It had been commented on that appointment postcards do not always get delivered in advance of the appointment and that, therefore tenants do not always know that a tradesperson is coming. There is not much that can be done by the Council itself about this, but it is important that when possible the Council makes use of the text messaging facility to let tenants know what time they have an appointment at. It is important however that something else is put in place for people who do not use mobile phones and texting, such as a telephone call.

**3.3.4** Several respondents stated that there were too many 4-hour emergency repairs to deal with. Not all of the repairs appointed as 4-hour emergencies need to be dealt with within the 4-hour period. Some changes should be made to the way these repairs are appointed and appointments should be offered where possible rather than having them all as 4-hour emergencies.

### **3.4 Completing the Repairs**

**3.4.1** Some comments were made about there not being enough time to complete repairs and that as a result the workmanship was suffering in some cases. This can be corrected by making the suggested changes to appointments. (see section 3.3)

**3.4.2** Comments were made that there are problems with multi-trades jobs. Tenant inspectors consider it important that workers are able to do minor works in a variety of trades so that one worker can complete a job if it requires a small amount of work in a trade that is not their specialism.

### **3.5 Follow up to Repairs**

**3.5.1** When a tenant has a problem, such as the repair not being carried out on time they can only contact the local office staff to whom they have reported the repair. Some of these staff have commented that they do not get feedback from technical services on why a job has still to be completed and are therefore unable to give a satisfactory answer to the tenant. It is important that hold-ups such as awaiting a required part are logged onto the system so that front line staff can answer queries.

### **3.6 Additional Comments**

**3.6.1** Several interviewees commented that the tracking system in the vans did not work.

**3.6.2** Some staff preferred having the Technical Supervisors in the same office as the front line staff who take the repair calls. They felt that this meant that it was easier

and quicker to get information that helped ensure that the repair was logged correctly. Tenant Inspectors also feel strongly that this should be the case.

**3.6.3** More detail is needed on job lines.

**3.6.4** Communication was considered to be a problem for many of the interviewees.

**3.6.5** Some tenants are not in when tradesmen call to carry out the repair, even when the tenant has been offered an appointment. Though there are less 'no-entry' postcards left than there was before.

**3.6.6** Two of the technical supervisors commented that there are not enough staff to carry out the work.

#### **Part 4: Recommendations**

**4.1** Following discussion of the research findings, the tenant inspection team agreed on the following recommendations.

**4.2** There needs to be some improvement to the amount of detail recorded when a repair is reported so that the correct trade attends the appointment and so that the appointment time is long enough. Tenant Inspectors recommend that the computer system used to log repairs includes more questions so that the repairs can be logged with more detail. Alternatively staff could be able to refer to someone else who will be able to give them guidance on how to log a complex repair. Inspectors recommend that staff logging repairs work together in one office alongside staff with technical expertise so that they can benefit from each other's experience.

**4.3** With specific reference to rural areas, it is important that staff resources are managed efficiently, if appointments have been made for one trade in the same area then the same workers should attend each job. If a job requires more than one different trade area, perhaps it would be possible for the workers to share one van.

- 4.4** The council should continue to make use of the text messaging facility to inform tenants of appointment times, but be aware that this method will not be suitable for everyone.
- 4.5** Appointments should be offered to tenants in cases where an emergency appointment is not needed.
- 4.6** Craftworkers should be given training in other trade areas so that they are able to complete multi-trades jobs where appropriate. This would only be when small jobs needed to be done to complete the repair to the tenant's property.
- 4.7** Staff should be recording progress on repairs at all stages of the process. This should be recorded onto the IT systems used by front line staff so that they can respond to queries from tenants who contact them looking for information about a repair.
- 4.8** Tenant Inspectors think that the service would be improved if staff who deal with repairs through from the first point of contact with tenants to carrying out the repair and following up if there are any complaints or problems were located in the same office. This would simplify the process as tenants would be able to phone one number regardless of where they lived in order to report their repair. This would simplify things for the tenants. If staff were all located together then it would be easier for staff who are unsure of, for example, how long a particular repair will take to do they would be able to easily talk to a staff member who has more knowledge of the trade who could help them to ensure that they appoint a long enough period of time for the job. This would also make things easier for staff if there is a problem with a repair as the craftworkers as well as the frontline staff will be in the same place and it would be easier to communicate with each other.
- 4.9** Tenants need to be aware that they should cancel an appointment if they will be unable to keep it. This will mean that the staff are not making a no-entry call and could get on with other jobs. Tenant Inspectors recommend that notices to this effect be displayed in local offices and articles be included in open door to inform tenants of the importance of cancelling appointments.

## **Key to abbreviations**

<b>HMIS</b>	Housing Management Information System
<b>MISC</b>	Management Information System for Costing
<b>PDA</b>	Personal Digital assistant ( hand-held computer)
<b>HNC</b>	Higher National Certificate