



Tenant Led Inspection Report

On

Housing Application Forms

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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 Stirling Council's Housing Application Form. Tenant volunteers, Council Officers and the Tenant Participation Officer (TPAS) agreed that this had to be reviewed, and any recommendations will fall in line with the new Allocation review, which is currently ongoing.

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. 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 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 Findings could be used to improve services and develop a framework for future tenant-led inspections that will act as a national model of good practice.

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 good practices that has been found within other housing applications and how these practices can be incorporated into Stirling Council's housing application form. The report establishes whether Stirling Council's Housing Application form reflects current and new policy/legislation, 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:

- Identifying what is the main reason for changing the application
- Inspections of other housing applications; good and bad examples
- Speaking to officers who use the form on a regular basis
- Regular meetings between staff and tenants to discuss the current application and how it can be improved

4.2 All comments of individual staff and/or tenants is treated in strictest 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 current Allocation policy. Tenants are also currently involved in the council's new Allocation policy review consultation.

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 at STA events. Articles were also advertised in Stirling Council's Open Door newsletter.

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 Stirling Council, TPAS 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 Housing Application forms were selected for inspection, as it is an area of concern for tenants/applicants. Tenant inspection teams were also concerned with the policy and procedures regarding these. The Allocation policy and procedures are currently under review.

6.2 The aims for looking at the Housing Application form were discussed at the first meeting;

- To improve the application process for all applicants
- To make the application process easy for everyone to complete
- To improve the methods that applicants can apply; by introducing online applications
- Influence changes in the housing service and legislation
- Improve knowledge of the housing service within the TLI.
- Provide a tenants perspective of housing and related services.

- Make practical improvements
- Reduce the size of the application form

Part 2 - The Inspection

8.0 Housing Application Form: Tenant Led Inspection

Tenant Inspectors: William Derrick, Hugh McClung, Philomena McClung, Helen McDougall, Alex Lamb

Staff present at meeting; Steven McCabe, Allocations Service Co-ordinator, Laura Sweeney, Lettings Officer.
Leza Lafferty, TPAS Worker.

The application form was then inspected and audited page by page and the following recommendations for each section was made.

Recommendations

8.1 Mid-Market Rents: TLI discussed the option of having a separate form for Mid-Market Rents (MMR). These are managed by Steadfast Homes, on behalf of Stirling Council and applicants for MMR always understand what they are applying for. A lot of the information required on this form could be removed and Stirling Council need to publicise who manages those properties so applicants know whom they can contact, as it was felt that this was not clear on the form.

8.2 Homeless Applicants: It should be highlighted on the form that if someone considers themselves Homeless then they should contact the Housing Options Team on 01786 40 40 40 who will assess their homelessness need and complete a form with the applicant. Homeless applicants still need to complete an application form.

8.3 Icons: There are Icons used throughout the form but no explanation of what they mean. If these are required, then they need to be explained on the 'guidance notes'. Other application forms only used two icons. It was felt therefore, that these icons could be reduced and simplified, making it more user friendly to all applicants. There should be a summary on the back page explaining what each icon means.

8.4 Assistance in completing the form: 'If you require assistance in completing this form contact Housing Options on 01786 404040 should be on the **front page** of the application. Staff should also ask applicants if they require assistance when they request a form – if they say yes then assistance should be given there and then (if possible). The facility to allow applicants to complete the form should be made available. A secure general email address would then be required for applicants who complete the form online.

8.5 Data Protection details at the back of form need to be updated in line with new legislation (GDPR) and can be reduced in size.

8.6 Section 1 of the application - About You

1.1 Your details: This takes up too much space – can be reduced and icons should be limited and explained further on in the form.

1.2 Support: This question can be shortened down to one question for example; do you require support? Yes – if so who from?

1.5 Health & Housing: This should be collected in a separate Medical form – Should only ask the questions ‘ Do you suffer from a medical condition that requires you to have an adapted house or to live closer to support network? Do you need an additional room due to a health problem or disability? This can, therefore be reduced.

Questions 1.6 re Rent Arrears & Anti-Social Behaviour: This only requires to be a Yes/No answer. More details can be investigated once tenancy references are sought by allocating officer. Should also add a question to whether someone has ever had an SSST tenancy due to ASB to bring up-to-date in changes of law with the Housing (Scotland) Act 2014. Again, suspensions or penalty clauses should be put in place if a tenant gives false information or withholds information on this question.

Questions 1.9 Employment details: This question is not required.

Question 1.10 Your Household: This question should be incorporated with the questions regarding the applicant in question 1.1. Add your household details.

Question 1.12: Joint Custody/Overnight Access: Question to be rephrased to take into account ‘anyone’ who has access to children. This could be grandparents, aunts, uncles etc. is not necessarily only parents.

Question 1.13 British Armed Forces: This question is necessary too long winded so to be reduced in size. The section stating that a letter is required from your’ commanding officer’ needs to be changed to highlight that discharge papers, or any written correspondence with the M.O.D headed paper will be accepted.

Section 2. Current accommodation:

Question 2.1: This question needs to be shortened.

Just ask is it a house or a flat, what size, how many bedrooms, Ground floor or upper. Instead of having 6 house options (bungalow, detached house, mid-terrace, end-terrace, semi-detached) just ask House, bedsit, flat in close, flat with own door, other.

Question 2.2: Reduce this by just asking current house type.

Question 2.3: Landlords details are already asked in Question 1.1 therefore this question is not required again. Can be removed.

Question 2.4: Security of your current housing. This should be moved to the front of the form where it is asking if tenant is potentially homeless - Question 1.1.

Question 2.6: Box room needs to have an explanation next to it. Size?

Question 2.9: This question can be removed as it is asked in the medical application.

Section 3: Previous addresses

Reduce size of this to three boxes and add if any further information please continue on separate sheet. Same for joint tenant.

Section 4: Your choices

Question 4.1: No point asking what size someone wants as the allocation policy will predict what he or she qualify for. We can ask their preference i.e. flat/house/no preference instead?

Question 4.2: This can be merged with question 4.1. Suggestions for rewording this could be, ' If you require additional rooms please state how many and why and complete the section below'.

Question 4.3/4.4: 4.3 & 4.4 can be merged with question 4.1 so no need for 4.2, 4.3 & 4.4.

Question 4.5: Remove question or just ask heating preference.

Question 4.6: Are you interested in a Mutual Exchange. If so, please tick Yes. Conditions of a Mutual exchange will be supplied and explained to each applicant in Mutual exchange application form/accompanied viewing.

Section 5: Remove map – as too confusing and unclear. This should be displayed at Reception areas instead Also recommended a link to an online map. If anyone asks then officers can display map of areas on google maps.

5.1 Reduce areas: For example St. Ninian's should be an option on its own instead of listing another six areas within St. Ninians. Put a question is asking 'Is there any specific street you don't want opposite area choice.

Also discussed that it should be made clearer where is URBAN & where is RURAL.

Stock turnover figures should be shown as information on the form so tenants know if an area has a high or low turnover. This would need to be updated every year to be kept up-to-date.

Section 6. This can be removed if Mid-Market have their own form. This will not only save room on the form but also stop people ticking they are interested when they don't clearly understand what it is – this will then save officers time when selecting applicants.

There can be a sentence included within the application form advertising that Steadfast Homes is a subsidiary of Stirling Council and only deals with Mid-market rent properties. If interested please contact for more information and to receive a separate application form.

6.1 Other Housing Options.

It was agreed that referral to Housing associations should be made automatic and include the option to join a Common Housing Register (CHR). Therefore, people did not need to indicate that they were interested, but it was recognized that not everyone would want a Housing Association property so instead there should be an opt out box.

With regards to LIFT/Shared equity – this can be removed as not relevant in Stirling Council

With regards to shared ownership – again this can be removed as not relevant in Stirling Council.

6.2 Further Information

It was agreed that this space should be bigger but as there is a full page at the back for 'office use only' this can be done and the space for office use can be reduced as Officers confirmed this is very rarely used.

Data Protection Act 1998

It was agreed that this was required but was out of date and possibly not in line with GDPR – therefore this should be reviewed and updated by the Stirling Council Data Protection Officer, who is the expert in this field. The data protection summary should be reviewed every 3 years.

Relationships & Checklist

Instead of referring to page numbers (as there are no page numbers), it should refer to sections.

Relationship to a staff member or committee member – it was felt that this question could be simplified and reduced.

Under the question relating to 'additional bedroom required' it could be changed to 'medical professional' instead of GP.

Voluntary and monitoring information

It was discussed if we actually require all this information, and if we can justify storing this information under the new GDPR guidelines. Can this be reduced/removed?

A GDPR expert could clarify what questions we can keep, and what is actually required.

8.7 Strengths and Benefits of Tenant-led Inspection

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.

The findings represent the views of 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.

The inspection demonstrates Stirling Council's commitment to tenant participation. It shows that the Council is open, transparent, and prepared to offer tenants meaningful methods of improving their communities.