



Tenant Led Inspection Report

On

Tenant Handbooks

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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 advice on the creation of a new tenant's handbook. Tenant volunteers, Council Officers and the Tenant Participation Officer (TPAS) agreed that this had to be included as part of the new tenant sign up pack, as there is currently no tenant handbook.

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 tenant handbooks and how these practices can be incorporated into Stirling Council's hand book.

4.0 Methods

4.1 The methods used in this tenant inspection consist of:

- Identifying what is the main reason for introducing a tenant's handbook; good practice.
- Inspections of other tenant handbooks; good and bad examples
- Speaking to officers who currently complete sign ups and allocate houses
- Regular meetings between staff and tenants to discuss what they want in the handbook and how they would like this presented

4.2 All comments of individual staff and/or tenants are 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.

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, and included in the recent Tenant Participation survey.
- 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 Tenant sign up packs were selected for inspection, as it is an area of concern for tenants/applicants. Tenant inspection teams were concerned that there seemed to be no current tenant handbook, therefore, it was decided that the tenants and staff would look at producing a new handbook in accordance with current procedures and policies.
- 6.2 The aims for looking at the sign up packs and producing a new tenant's handbook were discussed at the first meeting;
 - To improve the 'new tenant' experience for all new tenants
 - To improve the level of service to new tenants
 - To improve the information provided to new tenants
 - 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
 - Promote tenant participation and encourage new involvement from new tenants

Part 2 - The Inspection

Sign up packs & creation of the Tenants Handbook: Tenant Led Inspection

Tenant Inspectors: William Derrick, Hugh McClung MBE, Philomena McClung, Helen McDougall

Staff present at meeting; Laura Wallace, Lettings Officer, Leza Lafferty, TPAS Worker.

The sign up pack was looked at and the tenants/staff decided that a new Tenants Handbook was required. Laura Wallace created a summary of the information that is currently given to new tenants. From this tenants produced what they thought should be in the tenant's handbook.

Examples of other Handbooks

Examples of other Council's/Housing Association's handbooks were examined by staff and tenants to look at good and bad practice. The examples that were compared were;

Easthall Park Housing Co-operative
South Lanarkshire Council
Forth Housing Association
Kingdom Housing Association
Ochilview Housing Association
Falkirk Council

Link Housing Group
Clackmannanshire Council

It was decided that the best examples were Easthall Park and South Lanarkshire Council.

Easthall Park's was presented as a small A5 sized binder with removal pages so if information needed to be added or removed this could be done without having to republish the whole document. The tenants decided this was an excellent example of how a handbook should be presented and although the cost may be more to begin with, it would prove to be very cost-effective overtime. Tenants also liked the personal touch with photographs of tenants, communities as well as the housing stock.

The other example that the tenants preferred was from South Lanarkshire Council.

This was an A4 brightly coloured booklet which caught the tenant's attention and was easy to read. The content and colour guides were easy to follow and easy to read for all.

Therefore, tenants decided that Stirling Council's handbook should be a combination of how the Easthall Park's is presented and have content similar to South Lanarkshire's.

The contents page should be the first page of the handbook and should be clear and simple to follow using co-ordinated colours and numbers throughout.

The **contents** should include;

Introduction to Stirling Council – this should be a short introduction to Stirling Council making the new tenant feel welcomed and proud to be a Stirling Council tenant.

Tenants' responsibilities – this should explain the tenant's responsibilities (rent, good tenant, garden maintenance, repairs etc.) and the landlord's responsibilities (repairs, improvements). This could be presented as a table so it is clear who is responsible for what.

Your Rent – this section should include why it is important to make sure your rent is paid, different methods on how to pay your rent and who to contact if you are struggling to pay your rent. This section should also cover who to contact if the tenant needs advice on benefits/universal credit and how to apply. It should also be clear in this section when rent is due and the consequences of not paying your rent or failure to contact officers to discuss, but at the same time making tenants feel they can contact staff, as ignoring the issue doesn't help. Attention should also be given to the Income Maximisation Officers services here and what sort of assistance/advice they can offer. So a brief description of their job role would be helpful.

Making your house a home – this section gives advice on who to contact if tenants require assistance with furniture. It should also mention the 'Home start' service and how tenants can access assistance. This is also where Community Care Grants and Scottish Welfare Funds can be mentioned and give advice on how tenants can apply for these. Again, there should be a reference to the Income Maximisation Officer and what they can assist with. Further information regarding Citizens Advice Bureau, Salvation Army, Carpet Connections etc, can be included in the 'useful contacts' section at the back of the handbook.

You and Your Neighbours – there needs to be a section referring to 'being a good neighbour' and what to do if you needed to make a complaint about anti-social behavior. Who to contact etc.

Repairs/Charge Tenant Repairs – this section should list the different types of repairs and what would come under these categories. It should be made clear what number should be called, highlighting the difference between an emergency and a non-emergency repair. There should also be an explanation of the out-of-hours emergency repairs. The right to repair procedures should also be explained here, giving examples. The timescales for repairs should be clearly explained. An explanation of a charged tenant repair should also be clearly explained and again examples of these should be listed and who to contact if you think you may have a charged tenant repair. Information on the importance of allowing access for gas servicing should also be highlighted here, and details of why this is carried out (legal obligation etc.). The information regarding your gas service and the importance of allowing access should be in bold to highlight the importance.

Making changes to your home – This section needs to explain the step by step process on what you need to apply for permission for and why. The table displaying what you need to ask permission for should be displayed and then the information on why you need to apply, consequences of not asking for permission, and listing appeal process etc. should follow. Rights to compensation should then be explained here.

There should also be a section in here referring to 'disabled adaptations' and the process explained for who to contact and how to apply. Tenants also thought this sub-section should be called 'making your home accessible'. There should also be details of services available to other tenants suffering from other illnesses like dementia, autism etc.

There should also be information regarding tenants who require adaptations whilst in hospital and who they should contact if they were to find themselves in this situation.

Solar panels – Clear information on solar panels should be given listing the benefits to the tenants.

It also has to be made clear how they are maintained and how often.

Tenant Participation – This page should include photos of tenants, open days and include contact details for the TPAS support worker.

There needs to be information on the STA and additional tenant groups, and an explanation of what they do and a list of ways tenants can get involved.

Links for the STA website should be listed as well as a link to the YouTube video, TPAS support worker's details, email addresses and direct phone numbers for the Tenant Participation Officer..

Moving Home – There should be a clear explanation of what the tenant needs to do if they choose to move home, and what their responsibilities are. This includes explaining that an end of tenancy inspection will be required.

There should also be a clear explanation on mutual exchange and home swapper as well as how someone can apply for this, and again what their responsibilities are. Process for doing this needs to be explained, highlighting the 'like for like' policy on all swaps.

Safety in your home – this was taken from South Lanarkshire Council's handbook and tenants agreed this was a good section to include in the handbook. This section talks about gas safety, carbon monoxide monitors, advice on keeping your proposed home warm over the winter etc.

Useful contacts – this should include council phone numbers, websites as well as listing other services i.e. bulk uplift, police, social services, digital inclusion services, handyman services.

This is also the section where information regarding 'carpet connections' can be listed but there needs to be a simple explanation on how this works and benefits the tenant.

Details and a short note on credit unions, CAB etc. can all be listed here with contact details.

Links to other useful websites should also be listed here.

Information and symbols should also be detailed here on how to receive this handbook in larger print, braille, different languages.

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 of this report represent the views of the tenant inspection team. It is a totally tenant-focussed and gives a 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.

The Tenant Led Inspectors, under the umbrella of the Stirling Tenants Assembly and TPAS, offer these recommendations for consideration for the benefit of **all** tenants.

