



In The Neighbourhood

Falkirk Council Tenants' Newsletter

Issue 1

SUMMER 2007

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Housing Challenge



Councillor Gerry Goldie,
Convener, Housing &
Social Work Committee

Today's Housing Service faces a number of challenges.

We want our housing stock to be improved to the best possible standards and to create estates where residents can take pride in their surroundings

Our waiting list is considerable and we need to use every measure we can to effectively match the available housing stock to meet people's needs and aspirations. This includes improving the time we take to re-let empty houses.

Through initiatives like shared ownership and working in partnership with other landlords, we are providing options for people to find affordable homes.

All this has to be done within our budget. Council tenants pay for the service through their rents and we want to keep these at an affordable level.

We are committed to tackling anti-social behaviour and will take quick action to prevent escalation of problems.

Raising standards of service and meeting the expectations of tenants can be assisted by looking at good practice elsewhere, including the private housing sector and our partners in social housing and – most of all – by listening to our tenants. YOU know what you expect of us and the standards we should meet. So, please tell us what YOU think – see inside for more details on how you can get involved.

Your views can help us to make Falkirk Council's Housing Service better for all tenants.

Caring For Our Customers

Customer Care Standards for all Neighbourhood Housing Offices have been developed as part of Falkirk Council's continuing commitment to providing high quality services to all customers including:

- Falkirk Council tenants, their families and representatives
- people seeking social rented housing in the Falkirk council area
- residents of mixed-tenure estates

The Standards state how we will:



Neighbourhood Office Staff, Denny

- treat our customers
- respond to enquiries and complaints and,
- provide information about our services.

Copies of the Standards are available from all Neighbourhood Offices or by contacting the Tenant Participation Co-ordinator.

What's happening in your area?

In Falkirk: New Look High Rises

Callendar Park high rise flats are to have new "rain screen" cladding system, and re-roofing to protect from water penetration and improve insulation.

Belmont Tower is top of the priority list and work will start in early summer, taking about nine months to complete

High flats residents were consulted on possible uses for the open spaces at the base of the towers. Proposals include the provision of medical facilities, such as a chiropody clinic as well as shops and a laundry.

In Grangemouth Flower Power In Kersiebank

Grangemouth verandas are blooming again in the second year of the Council's popular verandah scheme.

It's part of a range of environmental improvements in certain housing estates throughout the Falkirk Council area by HEROS - the Housing Estate Regeneration Outcomes Squad.

The verandas planting scheme, provides tenants with wall troughs and hanging baskets of flowers at flats in Torwood Avenue, Cultenhove Crescent, Croftside Court and Glenside Court to help brighten the area.

The floral decorations are free provided the tenant agrees to maintain and replenish the flowers for

three years and keep them watered throughout the summer season.

Installations are carried out by HEROS, a Council Employment Training Unit scheme.

Anyone interested in the verandas scheme can find out more and see examples of the troughs and baskets at the Project Office at 80 Torwood Avenue which is open for business every Monday: 01324 473795 or 0784 3258948 or by email: deryk.wilson@falkirk.gov.uk

Old Flats For New Homes

The Council has worked closely with its partners in the private sector and with other landlords to identify opportunities for housing regeneration in Grangemouth.

At Craigleith Road, outdated and unpopular tenement blocks have been demolished to make way for a new development of 32 properties by the Link Group who will transfer 16 of them to Paragon Housing Association.

In Wood Street and Chisholm Place, seven blocks of flats and associated lock-ups have been demolished and work by the Link Group is due to start this autumn on 36 properties for rent and 34 properties for low cost ownership.

In Dawson: New Developments

A mixed low-rise development of new houses has replaced the old Inver and Birnam Court flats in

Langlees. The Link Group and Ogilvie Homes have worked together with the Council to deliver 38 units for rent and six for shared ownership.

At Carron Road, two old sandstone blocks will be demolished to allow the development of social rented homes and flats for market sale next year.

In Lomond Drive 66 three-storey flats have been demolished to make way for 32 low-rise properties on the site. Redevelopment of Lomond Drive by Link forms part of Falkirk Council's successful bid for funding from the Housing Environmental Regeneration Fund (HERF). Work is hoped to start in October.

In Camelon

Ship Shape Changes For Mariner Shops

Changes have been made to a popular shopping area in Camelon.

The Mariner Street shopping precinct is well used by local residents and provides a range of services such as Post Office, newsagent, general store and a Co-op supermarket.

The precinct, built in the 1950s, was due for upgrading but before any plans were made, housing staff visited the area to ask customers for their views on what should be done.

Around 70 people took the time to answer questions and offer their ideas about



improvements. These were taken into account in the improvement plans and the project was started this summer. It includes:

- removing uneven paving and replacing it with tarmac
- new disabled access ramps
- installing a raised central area incorporating an "anchor" theme
- new lighting posts and litter bins
- cleaning and repair of exposed brickwork

New Look Kitchens

Last year Falkirk Council installed new kitchens in 487 homes.

Kitchens are replaced generally because of age with the oldest properties given priority, and surveys have shown around 50% of homes need new kitchens.

When your home is identified as needing a new kitchen a surveyor visits to discuss the standard layout and amend it to suit your own appliances and any specific needs.

Tenants can choose from two styles of doors and two worktop patterns plus a range of colours.



Housing service in the spotlight

All Scottish Councils have to go through an independent inspection to assess how effective their housing service is.

This year it is the turn of Falkirk Council.

The inspection will be carried out by Communities Scotland which was set up by the Scottish Executive to look at Council housing services and make recommendations for improvement.

The inspectors will ask:

- how good are the services?
- how well are they managed for improvement?

They will use Performance Standards to judge how well Falkirk Council complies with the Housing (Scotland) Act, 2001 and other relevant statutory legislation.

They will also assess the extent to which the Council meets

recognised best practice in housing and homelessness service provision.

Performance standards are published on Communities Scotland's website (www.communitiesscotland.gov.uk) and set out the standards that all housing and homelessness providers should attain in the provision of services including:

● housing management

● property maintenance

- homelessness
- services for owners
- planning & managing performance
- social inclusion
- service delivery & communication

If you would like to know more about the Inspection Process, or to comment on the Falkirk Council housing service, please contact the Tenant Participation Co-ordinator on 01324 590829

Getting Involved

Have you ever wanted to tell us what you think about the Housing Service? Well, here's your chance. We work with tenants and residents in a number of ways to involve people in decisions about their homes and their communities.

Registered Tenants Organisations (RTO's)

There are around 10 Associations currently registered with the Council and Communities Scotland. These Associations provide a valuable local community resource and also work with Council staff and other agencies to improve the quality of life for residents in their areas. You can find out if there is an Association in your area by contacting your Neighbourhood Housing Office or the Tenant Participation Co-ordinator – see back page for contact details.

Interested in starting an Association in your area?

If there isn't an Association already up and running in your area you can get information about setting one up from your Neighbourhood Office. We'll provide help and support and you can meet with established Associations to get their advice and the benefit of their experience.



Upper Greenhill Tenants & Residents Fun Day, 27th August 2006

RTO's Forum

Registered Tenants Organisations can send representatives to meetings of the Forum which are held regularly in Falkirk. The Forum considers issues that affect all residents throughout the Falkirk Council area and provides a useful mutual support network for the Associations. Through the Forum, the Associations are helping to plan a Tenants Conference which will be held in the Municipal Buildings on Saturday 29th September.

Estate Walkabouts

Did you join in an estate walkabout with

Neighbourhood Housing staff last autumn? If so, you'll be pleased to know that your efforts resulted in a plan to include all areas covered by our Neighbourhood Offices. From this month, Neighbourhood Housing staff will advertise regular walkabouts where tenants can meet the staff to "inspect" their area and discuss any issues or improvements affecting the area. For details about walkabouts in your area, please contact your local Neighbourhood Officer.

Armchair Consultation

Maybe you would like to become involved in tenant

participation from the comfort of your own home? We have a register of tenants who are regularly consulted about service issues by post or by telephone. If you would like to join this consultation register, or find out more about it, please contact the Tenant Participation Co-ordinator whose details you can find on the back page of this newsletter.

Tenants Conference – Saturday 29th September

Come along and tell us what you think would improve the housing service, hear about the

activities of the various Associations – and have some fun, too.

The Tenants Conference is open to all tenants of Falkirk Council and we'll be providing plenty of publicity about it during the coming months. If you want to know more about this forthcoming event, please contact the Tenant Participation Co-ordinator whose details are listed on the back page.

Funding Matters

Local organisations looking for funding should make Falkirk Council's External Funding Unit their first call.

The Unit deals with a wide variety of inquiries and produces a quarterly newsletter which provides up-to-date information on funding opportunities for every size of project.

The current edition is available at www.falkirk.gov.uk – click on Funding at Falkirk and follow the links, or contact the External Funding Unit to obtain a paper copy.

If you are looking for funding sources for any ideas or projects your group may have, contact the External Funding Unit at funding@falkirk.gov.uk or telephone 01324 506065 or 506263.



New Clubrooms at Breton Court are given the thumbs up!

Switching On To New Heating

The first high flats tenants are now switched on to affordable heating in Falkirk's Callendar Park.

Falkirk Council's Combined Heat and Power (CHP) project provides heat and hot water to the mainly elderly residents starting at £6 per week for a single-bedroom home.

The £2,435,000 project will provide central heating and hot water to Breton and Corentin Courts, and Maxwell, Paterson, Symon and Marshall Towers using a central boiler. Surplus electricity generated is sold back to the national grid.

Falkirk Council also has plans to instal a "BioMass" district heating system for 29 homes in Letham and a communal heating system at Dorrator Court in Camelon involving 26 homes.

Falkirk Council also installed gas central heating systems across the area 2006-07

- Denny area - 169
- Grangemouth area - 196
- Stenhousemuir area - 155

• Falkirk area - 134
Programmed for 2007-08 are:

- Bo'ness area - 54
- Camelon area - 190
- Grangemouth area - 49
- Stenhousemuir area - 80
- Falkirk area - 45

Energy Saving

For information on energy saving contact your local One Stop Shop or visit www.falkirk.gov.uk and look in the A to Z under E for energy advice, efficiency and tips.

Investing In The Future

Improving the quality of its housing is a priority for Falkirk Council and it has developed a long-term investment plan to ensure national quality standards are met.

The Scottish Quality Housing Standard requires all Councils to set out how their houses will be improved by 2015.

The Falkirk Council investment plan estimates that £258 million is needed over the next seven to eight years to meet and maintain the quality standards.



Key areas for investment this year are:

- carrying out a house condition survey
- developing new

strategies for energy efficiency and fuel poverty

- a strategy to tackle disrepair in the

private sector

- continuing to improve council housing by, for example, replacing central heating, kitchens and bathrooms

What To Do About Nuisance Neighbours

Antisocial Behaviour does not have to be tolerated.

Everyone has a right to live in a safe and secure community and enjoy a peaceful home life.

But with rights come responsibilities and we should all treat our neighbours and others in the wider community with respect.

Those people who cause trouble need to know their behaviour will not be tolerated and that appropriate action can and will be taken against them if they persist.

Falkirk Council has a range of services to deal with neighbour nuisance and Antisocial Behaviour.

Your neighbour doesn't have to be a Council tenant as the law on antisocial

behaviour applies to everyone.

If your neighbour is an owner-occupier or the tenant of a private or social landlord, Falkirk Council Housing Services can still give you advice and in certain circumstances take action.

Often, it is enough to have a word with your neighbour and discuss the problem, but if that doesn't work or you feel uncomfortable talking to your neighbour, there are other options. You can contact:

- the Council's Antisocial Behaviour Helpline²⁴ for advice, information and assistance
- the Mediation Service
- Housing Services staff at your One Stop Shop
- the Council's Private Sector Team if your neighbour is a tenant in the private sector
- the Antisocial Behaviour Noise Team if the issue is noise related
- the Police if the matter is serious, or of a criminal nature.

Always remember you can get help and assistance. Don't suffer unnecessarily.
Helpline 0808 100 3161
Mediation 01324 30700

The Housing Service will continue to consult widely with tenants about improvements to their homes and will keep tenants informed about progress towards meeting the Quality Standard.

For more information on the investment proposals for Falkirk Council housing please visit the Council website www.falkirk.gov.uk or contact Alex Barr, Senior Investment Officer on 01324 504000.

A Step Up!

Bo'ness tenants were given improved access to their homes as part of a range of work carried out over the past year.

More than £800,000 of works including footpaths, steps and ramps, and fencing were carried out following a pre-planned maintenance programme survey which identified what improvements were needed in the Bo'ness area.



Community Wardens Make A Difference!

That's the view of residents who took part in a recent survey of the Community Warden Service.

The survey involved face-to-face interviews with people living in each of the Community Wardens areas – Bo'ness, Camelon, Denny, Grangemouth, Hallglen and Stenhousemuir.

Interviews were carried out with 287 residents for their views on their neighbourhoods and what needed improvement.

Most people said they felt safe in their neighbourhood during the day but less so after dark.

Many of those interviewed thought there should be more community pride and that people needed to take more responsibility for neighbourhood improvement.

It was also found that a majority of people in each area knew about the Community Wardens service and almost 90% believed the service should continue.

A Community Warden's role is to try and ensure that everyone can enjoy the area they live in by helping to reduce the fear of crime, incidents of crime, graffiti



and other forms of antisocial behaviour and, developing close links with young people

Community Wardens will provide a friendly face to promote the area as a safe, attractive area to visit, shop, work and live. They

have a wide range of duties which involve Crime Prevention and Community issues.

If you would like more information about the Community Wardens Service, please contact them on 01324 503634.

Housing Performance Matters

Housing & Social Work Services is committed to continuous improvement in the Housing Services we provide and we want residents to know how well we are doing. As part of this commitment we want to provide you with key information on our Housing Services.

The following information shows the performance in 2005-2006 and compares this to the performance of other Councils:

Rent loss due to empty homes

2.2% of rent was lost due to houses being vacant (compared to the Scottish average of 2.3%)

Dwelling re-lets

29.8% of houses that were not considered to be 'low demand' were re-let within four weeks of becoming vacant (compared to the Scottish average of 44.2%)

It took us an average of 48 days to re-let empty houses (compared to the Scottish average of 64 days)

Rent Arrears

Current tenant arrears were 6.2%

of the net amount of rent due (compared to the Scottish average of 7%)

Council House Sales

79.4% of Council house sales were completed within 26 weeks (compared to the Scottish average of 74.6%)

Repairs

88.2% of all repairs were completed on target (compared to the Scottish average of 89.8%)

96.6% of all repairs categorised as an emergency were completed on target (compared to the Scottish average of 93.8%)

Homelessness

Falkirk Council had the best performance in Scotland in dealing with cases of

homelessness. It took us 3.9 weeks on average to assess circumstances where people presented as homeless or potentially homeless (this compares to the Scottish average of 16.5 weeks)

Local Performance

Housing Services also collects and monitors a great deal of local performance information in order to ensure that the Housing Service is of a high standard, to check that we are achieving our objectives, and so that we can continuously improve the service. This information, monitored by area housing offices, includes:

- Time taken to carry out Job Inspections;
- Annual gas check performance;
- Number of refusals by property type and area office and reason for refusal; Reason for tenancy termination;
- Time taken to process

housing applications; time taken to process medical applications;

- Number and percentage of close inspections completed;
- Number and percentage of common drying area inspections completed;
- Number and percentage of garden inspections completed;
- Number and percentage of common bin store inspections completed;
- Number and percentage of new tenant visits
- Number and percentage of annual visits
- Homeless applicants – length of time waiting to be re-housed since homeless points awarded
- Time taken to process homeless applications
- Number of Acceptable Behaviour Agreements

How Your Rent Is Calculated

Running the Housing Service in 2007-08 will cost around £47.3 million which comes from the rents paid by tenants.

This includes repairs, maintenance and the interest on money borrowed to pay for major work like re-roofing projects.

This year, the average rent for a council house or flat is £45.78 a week.

Of course, some tenants pay less than this and some pay more – depending on the size and type of house you live in.

The chart shows how much money is needed to pay for the various parts of the service.

As you can see, the total amount of rent needed to pay for the various housing services works out at an average of £50.12 a week.

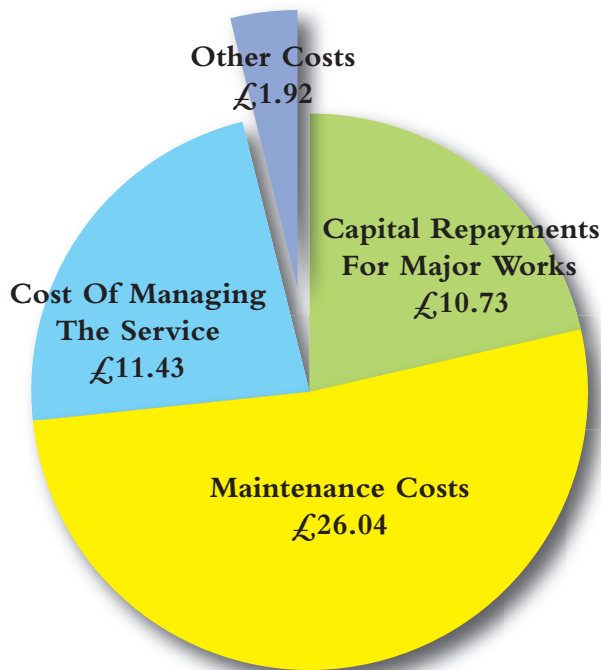
This is offset by income the Council receives from things like house sales so the average rent works out at an average of £45.78 a week.

KEEP ON TOP OF YOUR RENT PAYMENTS

Every few months you are issued with a rent statement which tells you what you have paid and whether there are any arrears on your rent account.

If you have rent arrears, it is important that you seek advice right away.

You can contact the Council's Welfare Benefits Advice Service or your local Neighbourhood Office who will be able to help and assist you.



Your views on repairs

Consultation on the repairs and maintenance service was held with tenants last autumn.

Overall, a large majority of tenants responding were either satisfied or very satisfied with the repairs service.

The consultation was done through:

- tenants focus groups
- telephone surveys
- face to face surveys and,
- consultation register postal surveys

Tenants were asked what they thought was good about the service, what needed to be improved and what the priorities should be.

Tenants Focus Groups

The first was held in Bo'ness and concentrated on a recently completed planned maintenance contract in the Mingle area. Those attending said they were happy with most aspects of the contract.

The second focus group looked at the whole repairs service and involved tenants

from across the Falkirk Council area. It was a successful event with good responses and recommendations for improvements to the service like an appointments system being set up. This is now being tried out in Stenhousemuir.

Surveys

The three surveys posed questions on:

- repairs reporting
- inspections
- the repair itself
- tenants' overall impressions of the repairs service

and revealed high levels of satisfaction with repairs reporting but less so with the inspections process, although most respondents were satisfied.

Tenants were either satisfied or very satisfied with the standard of workmanship of repairs but less so with the arrangements for access.

Tenants' feedback is extremely valuable and is being taken into account in making changes to the service.

CONTACT DETAILS

Neighbourhood Offices:

Bo'ness One Stop Shop
24 East Pier Street,
Bo'ness EH51 9AB
T: 01506 778899

Callendar Square One Stop Shop
Callendar Square,
Falkirk FK1 1ZF
T: 01324 506868

Camelon One Stop Shop
256 Main Street,
Camelon FK1 4EQ
T: 01324 503640

Dawson Centre
David's Loan,
Bainford FK1 4EQ
T: 01324 503640

Denny One Stop Shop
Carronbank House,
Carronbank Crescent,
Denny FK6 6GA
T: 01324 504050

Grangemouth One Stop Shop
5 York Lane,
Grangemouth FK3 8BD
T: 01324 504550

Stenhousemuir One Stop Shop
398 Main Street,
Stenhousemuir FK5 3JR
T: 01324 503340

Private Sector Team
Suite 5, The Forum
FK1 1XR
T: 01324 590797

Debt Advice
Telephone: 01324 506735

Welfare Benefits Advice
Telephone: 01324 501404

Maximising your income
Telephone: 01324 501404

Tenant Participation Co-ordinator
Suite 5, The Forum, Callendar
Business Park, Falkirk, Fk1 1XR
Tel: 01324 590590

Mediation Service
Telephone: 01324 506735

Community Wardens
01324 503634

Repairs (Contact Centre)
01324 590590



Falkirk Council
Housing & Social Work Services
www.falkirk.gov.uk

If you would like this information in another language, Braille, large print or audio please contact one of our Neighbourhood Offices or One Stop Shops