

in the neighbourhood

falkirk council tenants newsletter

issue 5 // winter 2010

Building for the Future



Spotlight on Staff

Tenants often tell us they like to hear about the everyday work we do as this helps them to understand things better. So, we thought we'd focus on some of the various jobs that contribute to the service you receive from us.

This issue takes a look at the job of one of our Neighbourhood Officers,

Kay Trodden. Kay has worked with the Council for over 24 years. Currently, she is based in the Camelon Neighbourhood Team although she has a wealth of experience working with other Neighbourhood Teams in several roles.

We caught up with Kay on a rather damp morning in September as she went about her work in the Park area in Camelon. Kay provides a customer focused estate and tenancy management service to residents living in the Park area. She also supports more vulnerable tenants and assists them to access any other services they may need. Kay visits the area on a daily basis and acts swiftly

to deal with any breaches of tenancy. As we followed her on a visit, we saw that Kay is well known to local people with many of them opening their windows to call out to her about progress with their repairs and other matters.

Kay also works with the Parklife Tenants & Residents Association, attending their meetings where possible and providing advice and guidance to the group. She told us she enjoys working with residents in the Camelon area as so many of them take a pride in their community "I love my job and really enjoy meeting tenants and being part of the Neighbourhood Team."

In with the new

New Council Houses

We're building around 100 new houses over a three year timescale. A start is being made in 2009/10 with over 50 new council properties at Sawyers Avenue in Denny, Carse Crescent in Falkirk, Chisholm Place in Grangemouth, Shiel Gardens in Langlees and the Chequers site in Hallglen being developed. Most of the properties will be two storey, four in a block type housing.

Partnership New Build

Neighbourhood Services has been busy working with various housing providers to expand the availability of new housing throughout the area.

At Torwoodlea in Larbert, 43 flats are being developed for social rent by the Link Group. The estimated completion date for this site is August 2010

At Craighleith Road and Wood Street in Grangemouth, building is underway to provide a total of 105 new affordable homes, comprising a mix of houses, four in a blocks and wheelchair accessible housing. Most of these properties are for social rent with a proportion being allocated for shared equity and shared ownership. These are due for completion next summer.

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 find  click  repair

www.falkirk.gov.uk/findandrepair



Welcome to the latest issue of "In the Neighbourhood", the newsletter for tenants of Falkirk Council.

There is a lot to report in this issue on everything from reporting repairs online to the new stair cleaning service we are introducing.

Probably the biggest topic is our new housing allocations system which started this January.

It represents a big change from the previous system but will, we believe, help the people most in need, give more choice to applicants and offer a modern, accessible letting system which allows us to make the best possible use of the houses we have available.

You can also read about our new Homelessness Strategy which was launched last summer with the goal of ensuring that no-one need be homeless in the Falkirk Council area.

Our plan to improve the housing service for everyone - both existing tenants and the people who are looking for a home with us - is making very good progress on a number of issues including a high percentage of repairs completed on target.

Service improvement needs the involvement of our customers and we need you to tell us what you think and where we can do better.

There was a positive response to the introduction of "mystery shoppers" testing our responses on allocations and estate management last summer and next year the topic will be the repairs services (see page 3).

We are also happy to report that our house-building programme is underway.

As well as the work we are doing in partnership with other social housing providers like the Link group to create affordable homes across the Falkirk Council area we have won £1.35 million in Scottish Government grant towards our plans for 100 new Council homes.

The major refurbishment of seven blocks of flats in Little Denny Road and Overton Crescent is nearing its successful completion and most tenants are now settled back in to their modernised homes.

We hope you enjoy this issue of "In the Neighbourhood" and would welcome your comments.

Keep Warm - Save Energy

Saving energy around the home cuts down your bills and helps in the fight against global climate change and saves you money in the long run!

The recent extreme weather has taken its toll on us all. Here are some tips to help keep warm this winter without spending a fortune

There are a number of simple ways you can save energy and cash around the home. Try some of these out, they are easy. Start by swapping old-style light bulbs for energy efficient ones. To get you started, you can collect two low energy bulbs from your local Neighbourhood Office.

No Cost Energy Saving Tips

- Time your central heating to go off 30 minutes before you leave home, and set to come on again 30 minutes before you are due back.
- Turn down your room thermostat by 1°C and you can save 10% on your fuel bill.
- Ensure curtains or furniture are not in front of radiators and draw curtains at dusk.
- Switch off appliances when not in use as they use energy on standby.
- Unplug mobile phones, shavers and electric toothbrushes once fully charged, or they will keep drawing electricity.
- Defrost your fridge regularly to keep it running efficiently.
- Wash clothes at 30 degrees and save up to a third of the energy.
- Dry your clothes outside whenever

possible and don't hang wet clothes over radiators

- Microwaves, pressure cookers and steamers all save energy.
- Boil only as much water in your kettle as you need.
- Turn the thermostat on your hot water tank down to a comfortable 60°C
- Take a shower rather than a bath (power showers use as much hot water as a bath!).
- Ensure your hot water tank is insulated

If you are worried about high winter bills, there is help available. You can call the Home Heat Helpline or the Energy Saving Scotland advice centre free, for impartial energy advice or advice about paying those winter bills. They can advise about free insulation packages for your home.

To find out more contact:-

Home Heat Helpline on 0800 33 66 99

Energy Saving Scotland advice centre on 0800 512 012

You can also find more energy saving tips by visiting www.falkirk.gov.uk and search for Household Energy Advice.

Remember, if you look after the pennies, the pounds will look after themselves!!

Stair Cleaning Service Proposed for Council Flats

A pilot scheme to introduce a stair and window cleaning service for blocks of Council flats was agreed by Falkirk's Housing and Social Care Committee.

The service, which will involve a weekly charge for tenants and any private owners in the blocks, will be piloted in the Little Denny Road - Overton Crescent area of Denny for six months. The blocks of flats involved are all let to tenants and have been undergoing major internal and external refurbishment. Existing tenants will be involved in discussions about the proposals.

The weekly service would be carried out by the Council and would include cleaning, common area stairs, floors,

windows and sills.

The Council is also looking to extend the pilot to a mixed tenure block of flats to explore what would be involved in bringing owners on board if the scheme is to be extended across the Council area; also at the possibility of a garden service if there is a demand.

Convener of Housing and Social Care, Councillor Jim Blackwood said: "What we are proposing is the sort of factor service that's common in privately owned flats and could help to deal with a very common antisocial behaviour complaint - dirty closes and common stairs in blocks of flats. I am confident it could work well if we can get people on board."



New tenant Diane Hamilton is delighted with her new home. Diane moved into her ground floor flat in September with her husband and teenage daughter.

All Change at Little Denny Road

The first six blocks of flats are now complete. Work on the final block, numbers 82-104 Overton Crescent begins in January and is scheduled for completion by April 2010.

As agreed with the tenants, each building will have its own Clan name, its own car park, open space, drying green and Euro bin store - all within a fenced boundary. Over £200,000 has been spent on the landscaping around the flats. Tenants are also being asked if they'd like to sign up for window boxes to hang on the outside of their living room windows. These will be available next spring. If you live in the refurbished blocks, and are



interested in having a window box, please contact Deryk or Wraight on 01324 590780.

Reporting Repairs Is So Easy!

Reporting your Council repairs has never been easier and Falkirk Council is reminding all their tenants that they can get in touch using a variety of different ways.

A new online repair and fault reporting system on Falkirk Council's website (www.falkirk.gov.uk) is already helping tenants with their requests where simple diagrams guide users through a few simple steps that helps them identify the fault and report it to the housing service.

The system saves time and helps diagnose problems accurately and speedily allowing a faster service for tenants. It also helps Falkirk council prioritise its work meaning tenants who have more significant repairs can get help sooner.

You can also make morning or afternoon appointments for the repairs service that covers joinery, plumbing, electrical, roofing, glazing, plastering work or a technical inspection. Each repair is prioritised as urgent (within five working days), non urgent (within 10 working days) or routine (within 20 working days) non-routine (negotiable timescales).

Tenants can also request 'on the spot' repairs where the tradesperson (where possible) can carry out small, unscheduled work of the same trade in the property.

Tenants can still drop in to their local housing office or telephone them if they wish to report a repair. However, any real emergencies should still be reported using our 24 hour contact number on 01324 503050.

If you are aged 60 or over or disabled with no able-bodied person living with you and you own your own home, you can take advantage of the small repairs service where jobs expected to take no longer than two hours can be carried out. Some typical examples include door repairs and replacing taps. For more information telephone 01324 590797.

Continuous Improvement In Housing Services

Year two of our Improvement Plan

The Council developed an ambitious Improvement Plan following the inspection by Communities Scotland in 2007. This Plan set out the things that we wanted to achieve in order to improve our housing and homelessness services. We have made excellent progress with our Improvement Plan and are continuing this work to improve services.

The first year of our Improvement Plan was focused on making changes to the services that we provide. We are now concentrating on checking that the improvements that we have made are working well and ensuring that they are consistently achieving the right results for our customers. So year two of our Improvement Plan will therefore be about making sure that we are putting continuous improvement at the heart of everything that we do.

We have identified the following key areas that we will be working to improve over the next year:

- Managing our Performance and reporting our performance results to our customers
- Making changes to our Housing Allocations Policy and the way that people apply for a house
- Reviewing our approach to Homelessness Assessment to make sure that we respond appropriately and sensitively when people are threatened with or become homeless
- Managing our Temporary Accommodation to make sure that we provide quality accommodation and support for homeless people who need our assistance

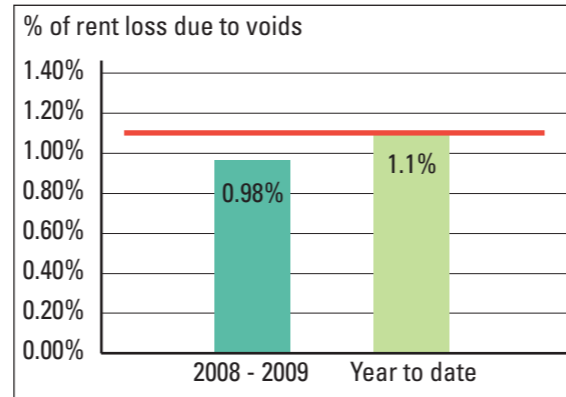
- Reviewing our Property Maintenance services to ensure that we achieve a high quality service and meet our increasing statutory obligations for health & safety
- Examining ways to improve Value For Money across the services that we provide
- Involving Service Users in making improvements to our services
- Improving our Rent Arrears processes to make sure that we make early contact with people who are experiencing difficulties paying their rent
- Making sure that our approach to Asset Management ensures that we can achieve the Scottish Housing Quality Standard by 2015
- Reviewing our approach to the Provision of Support to vulnerable homeless people and to help people to sustain their tenancies

Performance Matters

We measure our performance because we believe that it is important to be accountable to our service users and know that this is important if we want to improve our services. We have been developing ways to communicate our performance to you over the past year. We now provide performance information in our seven Neighbourhood Offices on plasma screens in our Reception Areas. We also make our performance information available on our website and will provide regular information on our performance through 'in the neighbourhood'.

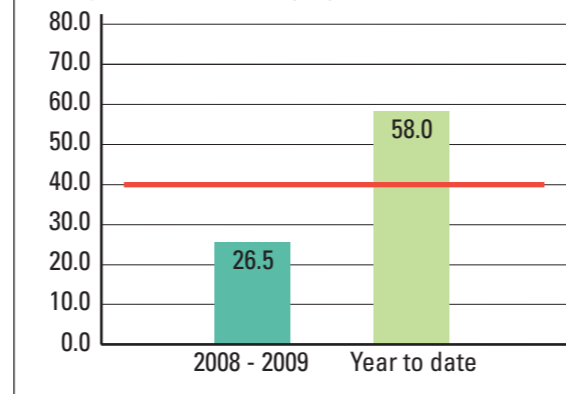
The charts opposite, provide the latest performance information trends for the last four months across various parts of the service. The red line represents our target for this year.

Managing Tenancy Changes



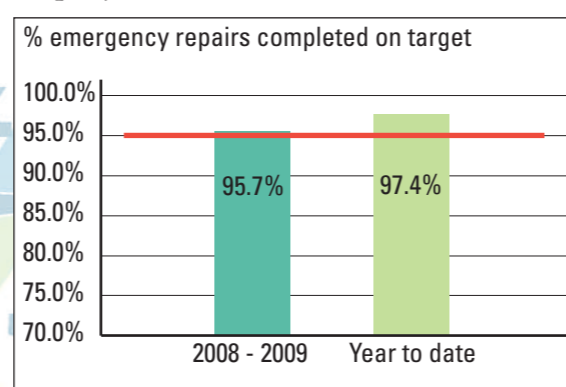
We are achieving our performance target by ensuring that empty properties are allocated to new tenants efficiently and effectively.

Average relet time for all properties



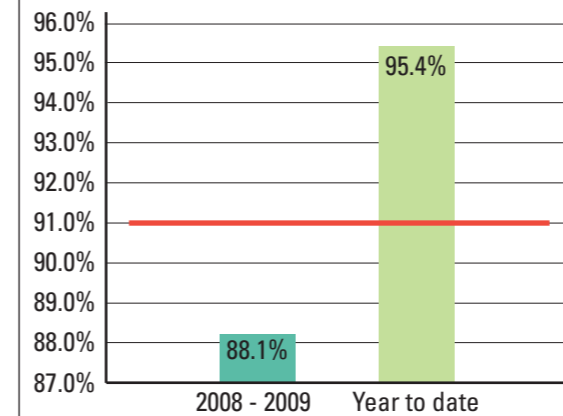
We have not achieved our target so far this year. However, we have consistently improved our performance over recent months, following a high volume of empty house repairs at the start of the year, and we aim to achieve our target by the end of the financial year.

Property Maintenance



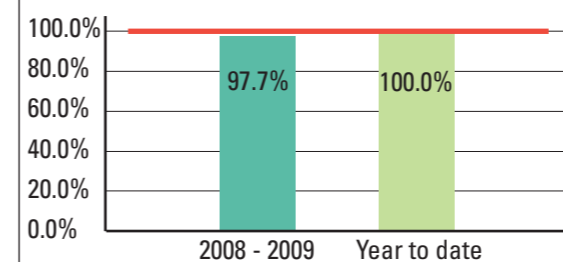
We have achieved our target for emergency repairs and have improved upon last year's performance.

% of all repairs completed on target



We are now consistently exceeding our target for our repairs service and have improved upon last year's performance.

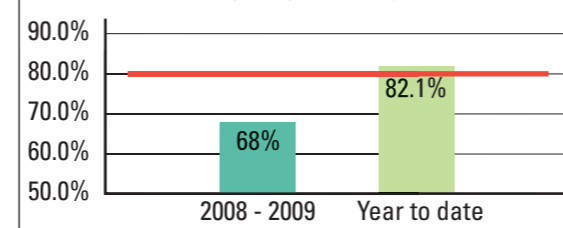
% of gas safety checks carried out within statutory timescale



We are now consistently achieving our target for our gas safety checks and have improved upon last year's performance.

Homelessness

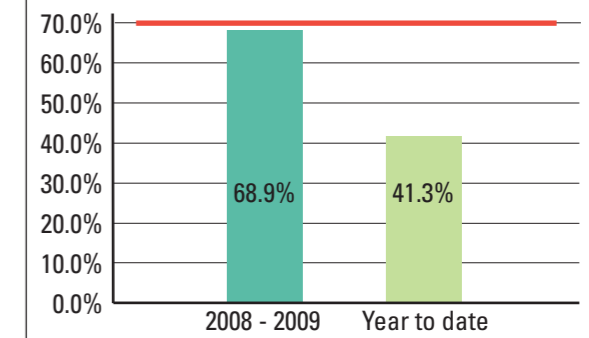
% of homeless assessment decision notifications issued within 28 days of presenting as homeless



We have achieved our target for sending homeless decision letters within 28 days and have improved upon last year's performance.

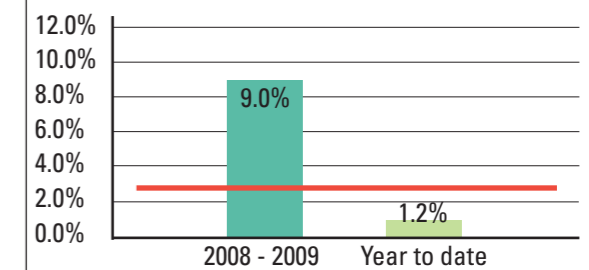
If you have any comments to make on our improvement plan or the performance information that we make publicly available you can discuss these with Robert Laley, Senior Neighbourhood Manager at robert.laley@falkirk.gov.uk or by phoning 01324 590780

% homeless applicants where duty to provide permanent accommodation was discharged within six months



We are not achieving our target but we have introduced housing options interviews in order to achieve earlier housing of applicants in homeless temporary accommodation.

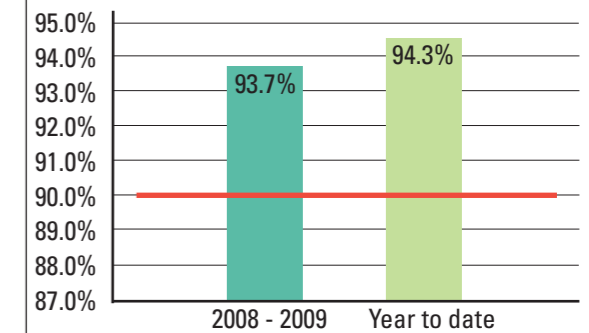
% of cases reassessed as homeless within 12 months of previous case being completed



We are achieving our target for effectively housing and supporting homeless people so that they do not become homeless again within 12 months and we have improved upon last year's performance.

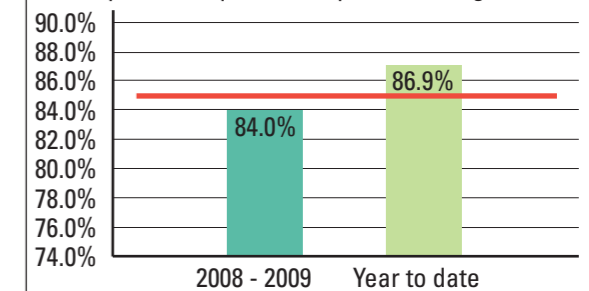
Responding to our Service Users

Overall % of customers satisfied



We are consistently exceeding our target for customer satisfaction with the services that we provide and have improved upon last year's performance.

% complaints/enquiries completed on target



We are consistently achieving our target for responding to complaints and enquiries within our service standard timescales and have improved upon last year's performance.



Preventing Homelessness: Launch of the Falkirk Homelessness Strategy

The Falkirk Homelessness Strategy 2008-2013 was launched on the 23rd of June by Falkirk Council's Chief Executive, Mary Pitcaithly. The launch highlighted the key challenges of meeting housing need today and in the future with speakers Gavin Corbett of SHELTER Scotland and Robert Aldridge, Chief Executive of the Scottish Council for Single Homeless providing an overview of the national crisis facing the housing sector in light of the rise in homelessness and a shortage of affordable housing.

The Homelessness Strategy tackles 3 key aims of Prevention, Accommodation and Support underpinned by a vision that 'By 2012, no one need be homeless in the Falkirk Council area'.

Falkirk Council Housing and Social Care Convener, Councillor Jim Blackwood, said: "The reasons behind homelessness are many - redundancy, breakdown of relationships, family problems, domestic violence, debt, abuse, discharge from the Armed Forces or hospital - and affect every sector of society.

"There has been a growing rise nationally and locally in the numbers of people finding themselves homeless," he continued. "Our new Homelessness Strategy has been developed in close consultations with other

public agencies, registered social landlords and the private housing sector," he said. "Together we are tackling both the causes and the effects of homelessness."

The number of people coming forward as homeless has risen by nearly half over the past five years in the Falkirk Council area of whom nearly a third had children. The Council and its partners have developed an action plan to ensure that by 2012 no-one need be homeless which includes:

- raising awareness of the help available
- working with families to prevent young people becoming homeless
- helping people avoid rent or mortgage arrears and claim appropriate benefits
- increasing the range of housing options locally by working with registered social landlords and the private rented sector
- expanding the housing advice service
- ensuring an adequate supply of temporary accommodation providing support to more vulnerable people

To find out more about the Falkirk Homelessness Strategy visit www.falkirk.gov.uk/homelessness or contact 01324 590852

What's happening in Your Area?

Watching the Neighbourhood in Avonbridge

Hugo Butts, Secretary of the Avonbridge Tenants & Residents Association, told us a bit about the committee's work. The group is now in its third year and Hugo told us "Time has flown by and our most successful achievement to date has been to implement the neighbourhood watch scheme in the village and expand this year by year. We are also working with other committees in the village, notably the Hall Committee, to plan some sort of youth club for children and teenagers and may start up a

Scout group too. We are coming to grips with our role in representing the village in our dealings with the Council and with the Scottish Government and hope to continue to do this well into the future." Hugo also asked us to publicly thank his fellow committee members for all their hard work during this year.

There are currently 17 Tenants and Residents Associations throughout the area. If you would like any information about these, or are interested in starting a group in your neighbourhood, see the council's website or contact your local neighbourhood office for guidance.

Greenfingers in Hallglen



Dawna Chisholm from the Hallglen Youth and Environmental Group got in touch to tell us about the work they've done to transform open spaces in Hallglen. The group gained funding from the Big Lottery fund to run an environmental and art programme. They decided to expand on a project which they'd already received a certificate of merit for from Keep Scotland Beautiful.

Dawna told us "We have transformed a drying green into a vegetable patch and have utilised other open spaces for community gardens and a bio-diversity garden. We worked hard in partnership with the community and with Neighbourhood Services and the Jupiter Centre in



Grangemouth gave us lots of good advice about plants for the bio garden."

The Group say they owe a huge thank you to the HERO's team, from the Employment and Training Unit, who helped with the construction of the garden in Garry Place. Without their dedication, the project would have taken years.

And there's more to come next year from this hard working group! "We look forward to supporting the local primary school next year with similar projects and we encourage anyone - with green fingers or just with curiosity - to get involved. If you'd like to find out more, please contact us through the Neighbourhood Services Tenant Participation Team on 01325 590780.



Richard Green in Burnbank depot

Calling in to Property Services Depot in Burnbank, we met with Richard Green who is a Buildings Operations Co-ordinator. Richard started work with Falkirk Council in March 2008 bringing many years of experience from his work with another local authority.

Burnbank depot is a base for a multitude of functions, including:

- The Gas Section
- Stores
- The Asbestos & Legionella Team
- Capital Investment works
- A Glazing Workshop
- The Kitchen Assembly Workshop

Richard is responsible for managing various sections, such as:

- All stages of the kitchen and bathroom renewal programmes



Adaptations to council houses referred from the Social Work Team

- All glazing work for both housing and non-housing stock
- Periodic electrical inspections and rewiring of houses

Richard told us "I find my job very interesting because, although we are under a lot of pressure at times, the work we do here is important to our customers - the tenants - and I enjoy knowing that I'm contributing to keeping their homes in a good and safe condition".

Your Choice Changes to Housing Allocations

This month saw the introduction of "Homespot" which is our new Choice Based way of letting houses. Houses available for let are advertised and applicants can decide which houses they wish to be considered for.

What are the main changes?

Vacant properties will be advertised every two weeks. The first properties will be advertised from 13 January to 26 January 2010. From 13 January, you can find the list of these properties on the Council's website at www.falkirk.gov.uk or in the Homespot newsletter that is available from the Accommodation Resource Centre (ARC), Neighbourhood Offices/One Stop Shops, local supported accommodation projects, libraries and in housing association partners' offices.

If you are registered with the scheme and you see a property that you like you can "bid" for it. A bid lets us know you are interested in a property and would like to be considered for it. It does not mean you will have to part with any money.

To bid for a property you can:-

- Use Homespot at www.falkirk.gov.uk
- Visit one of our Neighbourhood Offices/One Stop Shops or the ARC, where a member of staff will be able to register a bid for you.
- Fill in the bidding coupon in the Homespot newsletter and return it to one of our Neighbourhood Offices/One Stop Shops or ARC.
- Call the free phone service (0800 678 3091) where you can leave a message and a member of staff will phone you back.

Applicants are placed in one of three different applicant groups depending on their housing situation and there are targets for lets to each of these applicant groups.

Applicants are awarded one level of priority based on their most significant housing need.

We have written to applicants to let them know what their priority for housing is under the new policy. If you are an existing applicant and have not received this information, please contact your local Neighbourhood Offices/One Stop Shops or ARC.

A leaflet that gives more information about Homespot is available from our Neighbourhood Offices/One Stop Shops and on our website. The Allocations Policy document is also available on our website at www.falkirk.gov.uk/housing.

Applicants who have queries about their housing application should contact their local Neighbourhood Office/One Stop Shop.

HOMESPOT



Vacancies!

In the last issue of in the neighbourhood we told you we were introducing Mystery Shopping to Neighbourhood Services. Since then, we've completed three shopping projects looking at the homelessness, estates management, allocations and repairs services.

The shopping exercises involved tenants, who had all taken part in mystery shopping awareness and role-play sessions, telephoning and visiting neighbourhood offices and checking the council website. They used scenarios, which they developed working together with the Tenant Participation Team, to test the level of customer service, the knowledge of staff and the appearance and suitability of the office.

Overall, the results were very positive with calls being answered promptly and the shoppers receiving the information they sought.

All those taking part said they thoroughly enjoyed the process and

are very keen to continue. A few changes to the services were recommended by the shoppers and these are now being implemented. Staff are supportive of the process and are happy to take part too - although they won't know if a day-to-day enquiry is real - or if it's a shopper!

Of course, it may sound like fun - but there's a serious motive behind it. They are now preparing for a further examination of the repairs service looking at all aspects of the service - from reporting repairs right through to completion.

Due to the size of this service, we need to get more shoppers on board. We provide training and reimburse any reasonable outlays, such as travel costs. If you'd like to know more about getting involved in this interesting activity, please contact the Tenant Participation Co-ordinator on 01324 590780 or e-mail tenant.participation@falkirk.gov.uk for an application form.

All Systems GO!

IHMS is on its way. What is IHMS? The letters stand for "Integrated Housing Management System". Are you still not with us? Well, this is a new computerised system that will enable us to store, update and retrieve information about our services more quickly and efficiently. There are 13 modules associated with the system, including Rents, Repairs, Homelessness, and Allocations. We are working closely with Capita Software Services, who were awarded the contract to supply and develop the system over the next 18 months, with the Allocations package becoming available in January 2010.

These systems should help us provide you with even more efficient and effective services. We'll keep you posted on the progress with this in the summer 2010 newsletter

If you would like this information in another language, Braille, LARGE PRINT or audio, tape, please contact one of our Neighbourhood Offices/One Stop Shops.

Jeigu jūs norėtumėte gauti šią informaciją kita kalba, Brailio šriftu, stambiu šriftu ar įgarsintą, prašome susisiekti su vienu iš mūsų Apylinkių ofisų/Filialų.

Jeżeli chciałbyś/chciałabyś uzyskać owe informacje w języku innym niż język angielski, w języku Braille'a, w DUŻYM FORMACIE lub zapisane na kasetach audio skontaktuj się z jedną z Naszych placówek.

ਜੇਕਰ ਤੁਸੀਂ ਇਹ ਜਾਣਕਾਰੀ ਕਿਸੇ ਹੋਰ ਸ਼ਬਾਨ, ਬਰੇਲ, ਵੱਡੀ ਫ਼ਾਈਲ ਜਾਂ ਆਡੀਓ ਤੇ ਲੈਣਾ ਚਾਹੁੰਦੇ ਹੋ ਤਾਂ ਡਿੱਖਾ ਕਰਕੇ ਅਪਣੇ ਸਥਾਨਕ ਸੇਸਲ ਵਰਕ ਆਫਿਸ ਨਾਲ ਸੰਪਰਕ ਕਰੋ

如果你希望獲得此份資料的其他語言、凸字、大號字印刷或者錄音格式，請與你附近的社會工作辦公室聯絡。

اگر آپ یہ معلومات دوسری زبان، بریل، بڑے حروف کی چھپائی یا آڈیو میں چاہتے ہیں تو براہ مہربانی اپنے لوکل کونسل ورک آفس سے رابطہ کریں۔

إذا كنت بحاجة إلى هذه المعلومات بلغة أخرى، بريل، حروف كسبيرة أو مسجلة صوتياً، يرجى التواصل مع مكتب الخدمات الاجتماعية المحلي.

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 501450

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
Seabegs Road, Bonnybridge FK4 2BU
T: 01324 590797

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Accommodation Resource Centre
21-25 High Street, Falkirk FK1 1ES
T: 01324 503600

Debt Advice
T: 01324 506735

Welfare Benefits Advice
T: 01324 501404

Maximising your income
T: 01324 501404

Tenant Participation Co-ordinator
Suite 5, The Forum, Callendar Business Park, Falkirk FK1 1XR
T: 01324 590780

Mediation Service
T: 01324 503700

Community Wardens
T: 01324 503634

Repairs (Contact Centre)
T: 01324 590590

www.falkirk.gov.uk/housing