

in the neighbourhood

falkirk council tenants' newsletter

www.falkirk.gov.uk/news issue 9//winter 2011/12

Tenants Inspect Repairs Service



Customers are scrutinising our services - find out more on page 3.

contents

Associations to deliver more new homes p2

Tenants inspect repairs service p3

Its our Neighbourhood p4

Rent Consultation p5

Performance matters p6

Housing regulator report p6

Beat the freeze p11

Calendar of participation opportunities p12



More new Council and Housing Association homes are planned for the Council area.

Big investment means new homes



Nearly 170 new affordable homes will be built over the next couple of years across the Falkirk Council area through £18m of investment.

Affordable housing providers across Scotland bid for a share of the £111.5m Innovation & Investment Fund from the Scottish Government, with the Falkirk Council area receiving one of the largest awards of funding across participating councils to

deliver new affordable homes. Falkirk Council (see p7) and its local Housing Association partners (see p2) have just been awarded £5.7m by the Scottish Government to assist in the building of a mix of traditional social and mid market rented homes. Mid Market Rent (MMR) is a new kind of affordable rented housing being developed by Housing Associations aimed at assisting people on low and modest incomes, where a

tenant pays more than a social rent but less than a private market rent.

Councillor Jim Blackwood, Convener of Housing and Social Care said 'These new properties will help address the current shortage we have across our area for suitable housing.

'We're striving to create as many new opportunities wherever we can and hope to continue to expand our new build programme.'

Associations to deliver more new homes

Successful bids to the Scottish Government for £2.6m of funding will see 64 new properties for renting across the Falkirk Council area next year.

Partnerships between Falkirk Council, Link Group, Kingdom Housing Association & Key Housing Associations will bring the new homes to four areas - Bellsdyke, Redding, Brightons and Camelon.

The properties will be a mix of 42 social rent and 22 mid-market rent (where a tenant pays more than a

social landlord but less than a private landlord) properties. It is expected that work will start in 2012 with the first tenants getting their keys in 2013.

‘The homes will be a mix of two and three bedroom properties to reflect the real demand for this size of home locally,’ said Councillor Jim Blackwood, Convener of Housing and Social Care.

To find out more about these properties, visit www.falkirk.gov.uk or contact the Housing Associations direct.



Construction will begin next year.



Could your community benefit?

A new initiative by the Cyrenians, the charitable organisation that provides a Rent Deposit Guarantee Scheme and other development projects, is set to begin a series of community based initiatives to benefit communities and participants.

Activities could be anything from community recycling to bring and buy, but whatever they are; fun and partnership will play a big part. For more information contact: Graeme Callander, Tel: 01324 633413, email: graeme@cyrenians.org.uk, website: www.cyrenians.org.uk

Thanks for your newsletter feedback!

A big thank you to every one of you that took the time to complete the questionnaire in the last edition of ‘In the Neighbourhood’. The vast majority of you were satisfied (87%) with the newsletter including the information about services, performance and how customers can influence services.

However, lots of suggestions for future articles were made. Around 40% wanted more about customer influence over services (see p 3, p9 and p12). Others wanted to see more about making a difference in your neighbourhood (see p4).

The results were considered by the September Tenants’ Forum and are available at http://www.falkirk.gov.uk/about_council/consultations/previous_consultations/Tenants-Newsletter.aspx or by contacting Lorna Fleming on 01324 590780.

Tenants inspect repairs service

Early feedback from the first ever Customer Led Inspection of Falkirk Council’s Repairs Services suggests that tenants and other service users are making services better by getting involved.

Around 20 tenants and other service users have already identified some ways to improve the Repairs & Maintenance Services. One tenant member of the group Grace Rae, said ‘This inspection has made me realise how important it is for tenants to give their feedback about the repairs service when asked. I didn’t realise how much influence tenants could have, but the Council has proved that they do listen, and they do use that feedback to improve. Overall, I was surprised at how open and transparent the staff were during this inspection.’

An action plan that incorporates some of the suggestions made will be published before Christmas along with a full explanation of any of the suggestions that cannot be taken forward. The Action Plan will be reported in the next edition of ‘In the Neighbourhood’ and at www.falkirk.gov.uk.



Council tenants gathering views about the repairs service

The inspection techniques used by the group included: mystery shopping; interviews with staff and tenants; shadowing at the Council’s Contact Centre; visiting a new build site, reviewing procedures and scrutinising performance reports.

The group used self assessment questions published by the Scottish Housing Regulator to inform their inspection criteria to ensure it was objective. In April 2012, a new Social Housing Charter will be introduced, providing a new set of criteria for future inspections.

New skills

Not only did volunteers successfully assess our repairs services, they also picked up new skills in team work, listening and report writing. If you are interested in getting involved in future inspections, contact Lorna Fleming on 01354 590780.



Social Housing Charter and New Regulator from April 2012

From April 2012 a proposed Social Housing Charter will clearly describe the outcomes and standards expected of social landlords when dealing with their customers.

A new Regulator will also mean that tenants will have a greater say and will be actively encouraged to get involved in holding landlords to account over their performance. The Charter is expected to be approved by the Scottish Parliament in the Spring.

For more information go to www.housingcharter.scotland.gov.uk or contact Tenant Participation on 01324 590780.



Observing the Customer First team at the contact centre

 **find**  **click**  **repair**
www.falkirk.gov.uk/findandrepair

You can now visit an easy to use dedicated web site to find and report all of your Council house repairs.

It's our neighbourhood



Help is at hand to make a difference in your area.

Communities are working together to make their environments better places and are backing Tenants and Residents' Associations in some of the work they do.

Some recent examples included:

- Organising community litter picks where adults and children volunteered together to clean up areas that were blighted with rubbish etc. Falkirk Council can help with supplying equipment and support - contact The Litter Strategy Team on 01324 504433.

- Applying for grants to improve derelict bits of land, playparks, neglected sheds etc. With a bit of imagination and external funding, groups can get help to transform them. Contact Falkirk Council's External Funding Unit on

01324 506065 for more details.

- Thornwood Tenants & Residents' Association won the national Tenant Participation Advisory Service 'Group of the Year' award in October 2011.

Liz Godfrey, Association Chair, said "We are delighted with this recognition and would urge anyone dissatisfied with their area to get involved in their local group or start one up - we have seen first hand the difference that a little bit of community spirit can make."

For more information about starting a Registered Tenants & Residents' Association, contact your Neighbourhood Officer or Karen Laird, Senior Neighbourhood Officer on 01324 501453.

Residents help revamp the Estate Management policy

Members will consider a new set of service standards and a revamped Estate Management Policy, following a wide ranging public consultation over estates, gardens and common areas including stair cleaning services. Thank you to everyone who took part in the focus groups or questionnaire. Results will be posted at www.falkirk.gov.uk with the draft policy, for comments in early 2012.



Neighbourhood Plans in One Stop Shops

Want to find out what's happening in your area? Neighbourhood Plans detailing the outcomes of Estate Walkabouts and the investments planned in each area are now in One Stop Shops for you to read. Next year's plans will be even better, after the Customer Led Inspection (see p3) group highlighted a number of ways to make it more reader friendly.

RENT CONSULTATION



Councillor Jim Blackwood, Convener, Housing & Social Care Committee

Have Your Say!

As tenants, your rent pays for a whole host of services that are important to you, and that is why your views matter.

You have the right to be consulted on any proposed rent increase and we want to take your views into account. We want to be able to meet the high standards expected of us when we deliver housing services and to make sure that the homes we provide are affordable. This means we need to strike the right balance between the amount of rent you pay and the costs of running the housing service, meeting future needs and improving your homes.

This year, the Registered Tenants & Residents Association Forum evaluated and approved our new method of consultation and helped us to ensure that we are publishing the type of information that tenants want to see. I also look forward to next year, when the new Social Housing Charter and Scottish Housing Regulator (see page 3) will give tenants an even greater say in how we deliver the best possible value for money with the rent monies we receive.

We are forecasting a 3.6% (on average £1.91) increase in your weekly rent in 2012/13 that would allow us to keep delivering our ambitions to ensure every Council home meets national standards by 2015.

Given the very difficult financial situation we are facing, we believe that this forecast is a fair rent for the level of investment and improvements we plan, but we need to ensure that you also consider this to be fair as well.

We're asking you as tenants to feed back to us your thoughts and opinions. Please make your voice heard using the enclosed questionnaire and pre-paid envelope, or visit our website at www.falkirk.gov.uk to respond online.



Forecast Rent Increase 2012/13

Number of Apartments ²	Average Weekly ¹ Rent 2011/2012	Proposed Average Weekly ¹ Rent 2012/13
One	£37.68	£39.03
Two	£44.34	£45.92
Three	£52.44	£54.31
Four	£59.34	£61.46
Five	£65.51	£67.85
Average - all property sizes	£53.43	£55.34

¹ The figures show average annual rents spread over 52 weeks. Falkirk Council tenants normally pay over 48 weeks, creating two 'free fortnights'. As not all landlords spread rent payments in this way, we have shown rent levels over 52 weeks for comparison purposes.

² The number of apartments includes living rooms. E.g. A house with one bedroom and one living room has '2 apartments'. A house with 2 bedrooms and one living room has '3 apartments'.



Your rent will fund improvements to Council homes

Scottish Housing Quality Standard

Falkirk Council needs to consider a number of factors when deciding on the rent increase.

The Council like all other social landlords is required to bring the housing stock up to the Scottish Housing Quality Standard by 2015. This requires the Council to spend circa £19.75million every year within its capital programme.

The Scottish Housing Quality Standard (SHQS) sets a national standard for the physical quality of rented properties that all Scottish social landlords should achieve by 2015.

To meet the SHQS, housing must meet a range of criteria including being:

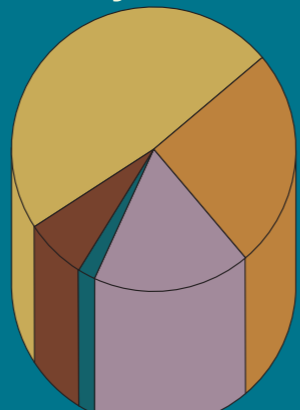
- Compliant with the tolerable standard - fit for human habitation
- Free from serious disrepair - refers to walls, structures, roof coverings, windows and a range of other items

- Energy efficient - must be well insulated and have an efficient heating system
- Provided with modern facilities and services - refers to kitchen and bathroom fittings
- Healthy, safe and secure - refers to gas and electrical systems, smoke detectors, secure door entry systems and a range of other items

We have recently carried out surveys of our housing stock to determine the current condition and this information is used to help us plan where we need to carry out investment work to ensure that all of Falkirk Council's properties meet the SHQS by 2015. The most recent performance information submitted to The Scottish Government showed that 52% of Falkirk Council housing met the SHQS. To bring our homes up to the SHQS we need to make sure funds are available for the improvements required.



How are we spending your rent money this year?



For every £1 spent in 2011/12

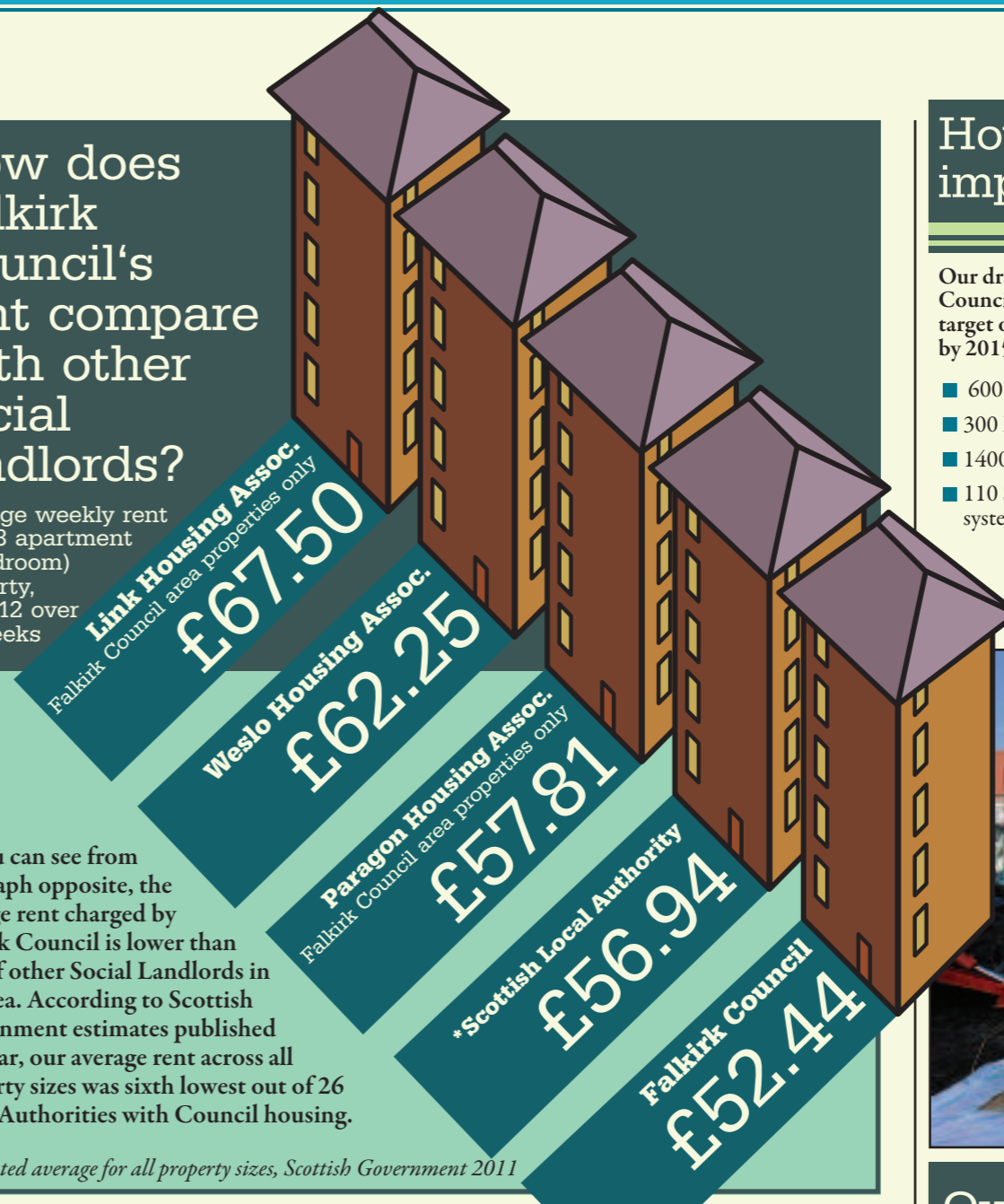
- **48p** Repairs, maintenance & improvements
- **25p** Supervision & management
- **18p** Debt, interest & repayment
- **2p** Lost rent due to unlet homes and arrears written off
- **7p** Other expenditure

How does Falkirk Council's rent compare with other social landlords?

Average weekly rent for a 3 apartment (2 bedroom) property, 2011/12 over 52 weeks

As you can see from the graph opposite, the average rent charged by Falkirk Council is lower than that of other Social Landlords in the area. According to Scottish Government estimates published last year, our average rent across all property sizes was sixth lowest out of 26 Local Authorities with Council housing.

**estimated average for all property sizes, Scottish Government 2011*



How will homes be improved next year?

Our draft programme for 2012/13 proposes that Falkirk Council's housing investment will largely be driven by the target of meeting the Scottish Housing Quality Standard by 2015. Our plans include installing:

- 600 Kitchens
- 300 Bathrooms
- 1400 Heating Systems
- 110 Secure door entry systems for blocks of flats
- 2 Multi Storey Block refurbishment
- 300 replacement roofs
- 300 replacement roughcast and rainwater goods

In addition, Estate Walkabouts will help us prepare plans for around 70 environmental projects to enhance your neighbourhoods.



Over 100 new Council homes planned

Thanks to the Scottish Government's new Innovation and Investment Fund, we can now add £3.06m to our existing budget of around £6m from rents and capital receipts, to deliver even more new homes in the Council area. A total of 102 new Council homes will be built thanks to the Council's successful bid, which was announced in September 2011. The new homes will be at:

- Maddiston Parkhall Drive (Old Primary school) - 42 units
- Summerford, Falkirk - 24 units
- Merchiston Road, Falkirk - 36 units

This adds to the new Council homes built this year at Chisholm Place, Chequers, Sheil Gardens, Cadzow Avenue and Carron Road / Millflats Court/ Haugh street. Check out the Housing Options pages of our website, or ask at One Stop Shops, for expected completion dates.

Falkirk Council stock condition information

Total number of properties:	16,183	
Meeting tolerable standard	16,183	100%
Free from serious disrepair	15,442	95%
Energy Efficient	8,812	55%
Modern facilities & services	15,097	93%
Healthy, safe & secure	15,233	94%
Total houses meeting SHQS	8,415	52%

For more information about the SHQS, check out the new leaflet A tenants' Guide to the SHQS, published in March 2011 by the Scottish Government at www.scotland.gov.uk or by contacting your local One Stop Shop.

Balancing affordability & quality

Falkirk Council needs to consider a number of factors when deciding on the rent increase.



Costs of bringing all our homes to the SHQS by 2015

Costs for ongoing management and maintenance

Costs of building new Council housing

Your views about the rent increase

Affordability of rents and service charges for tenants

Income from house sales

Income from recharges to owners and tenants

Housing regulator finds improvements

Falkirk Council's landlord and homelessness services have recently been inspected by the Scottish Housing Regulator (SHR). This was a follow up inspection to the previous inspection report published in 2008. The inspection team was on site in June and spoke to a range of customers, staff and other

stakeholders in order to assess how good the services provided by the Council are and how well they are being managed for improvement. The inspection looked at a range of services with the main focus on:

- services for people who become homeless
- how the Allocations Policy works
- how we are planning to meet the Scottish Housing Quality Standard (SHQS)

The inspection team noted some significant improvements since their last visit and also noted some areas for improvement which we will now include within a service improvement plan. Here's what the SHR said about the improvements that we have made:

“ Falkirk Council has improved its self awareness and made good progress since our last inspection in 2008. Its progress has been verified by tenants groups and other partners we spoke to. It is clear that the Council has introduced a number of new initiatives and important changes to its processes which have resulted in improved outcomes for its tenants and service users. This has included the introduction of a new housing allocation policy reflecting the statutory reasonable preference categories and a choice based letting process for applicants. Although there have been improvements to its Homeless services, progress has been less comprehensive. ”

The inspection report has now been published and this is available on the Falkirk Council website: <http://www.falkirk.gov.uk/housing>. If you have any queries about the report or the inspection of housing and homelessness services please contact Robert Laley, Senior Neighbourhood Manager, on ext 01324 590759 or robert.laley@falkirk.gov.uk.

You can bid for homes online, in One Stop Shops or by calling 0800 678 3091. www.falkirk.gov.uk/homespot **HOMESPOT**



Ensure to Insure!

Tenants are being urged to take out Home Contents insurance if they don't already have it, to protect against any floods or burst pipes that the freezing weather conditions can often bring. Regardless of whether the weather is as severe as it was last winter, spills, break-ins, floods and accidents can all be protected against with a smaller weekly

or monthly payment than you might think. Cover starts at just £1.72 per fortnight for the over 60's and £2.22 per fortnight for under 60's.

To get your home contents insurance, pick up a leaflet at your One Stop Shop, dial 01324 506350 or email insurance@falkirk.gov.uk.

Reduce waste and save cash

A massive waste reduction campaign is under way in Falkirk aimed at getting local residents to reduce their food waste and save cash at the same time.

Householders are being encouraged to sign up for the 'Waste Watchers Challenge' to make them think about what they throw away in food. Current estimates show that this equates to over £430 each year per household in Scotland.

Anyone registering with the campaign receives a Waste Watcher's diary packed with tips on how to reduce food waste, a handy spaghetti measure and recipe cards. They are also put forward for monthly draws winning prizes such as cookery classes, grow your own fruit & veg sessions, and iTunes, HMV and Love Eco gift vouchers.

For those who complete the two-week



food waste diary, additional rewards are offered e.g. shopping list pads, reusable shopping bags, freezer bag clips, cool bags to keep your shopping chilled, and fridge magnets.

To sign up for a campaign registration pack, call 01324 504444 or visit www.falkirk.gov.uk/wastewatchers.

Beat the FREEZE

Don't be caught out in cold weather - you can Beat the Freeze if you Eat Well, Keep Warm and Stay Active.

- Make sure you know where your stopcock is and how to turn it off.
- During winter, keep the central heating on at a low level overnight and open the loft hatch so warm air can circulate. Remember to close your curtains at dusk to keep the heat in, making sure they are above or behind a radiator.
- Eat at least one hot meal each day and have regular hot drinks. Try to keep active if you can, even simple stretching exercises every morning help circulation and will keep muscles supple.
- Wear several layers of thin clothing as they will keep you warmer than one thick layer.
- Keep an eye on elderly neighbours, relatives and friends. Make sure they are well this winter. Remember there are many organisations who can provide help.
- If you are going away, arrange for a friend or relative to have a key for your home.
- Finally, check you have home contents insurance.

To find out more visit www.falkirk.gov.uk and download a copy of our Winter Warmth, Beat the Freeze and Heating Advice leaflets.

You can also pick them up at local offices.



Falkirk Council Small Repair & Handyperson Services

The Small Repair Service is available to home owners and covers small repairs which should take no more than two hours to complete.

The Handyperson Service is available to home owners and council tenants and covers Health and Safety related jobs which should take no more than one hour to complete.

The Service can be accessed up to five times a year by people who are:

- 70 years and over, with no able bodied person living with them, or
- Disabled, with no able bodied person living with

them and are unable to do small jobs themselves.

An hourly rate of £12.50 is charged for each job along with the cost of materials.

More Information
Small Repair & Handyperson Service
Tel: 01324 590797
email: privatesector.housing@falkirk.gov.uk
or pick up a leaflet from any One-Stop-Shop to see if we can assist you with small jobs in and around your home.



Falkirk Council
Corporate & Neighbourhood Services

Calendar of Participation Opportunities

Next year we plan to consult tenants and other service users about a range of issues. If you would like to join the housing services Consultation Register or to get involved in any of the consultations listed, please email tenant.participation@falkirk.gov.uk or dial 01324 590780.

- **Housing Estate Management Policy** - following initial consultation in 2011, we will seek views on new service standards and a new consultative draft policy in 2012.
- **Tenant Participation Strategy 2013-2016** - our existing strategy to give you a say in all that we do comes to an end in December 2012, so we will be seeking views on our next strategy throughout 2012.
- **Rent Policy** - forthcoming changes in the law mean we will be consulting various groups about how we support tenants to pay their rent and deal with any arrears.
- **Customer Led Inspections** - following this year's successful inspection of repairs services, we are seeking more volunteers for future inspections. Results will feed into our new regulatory framework when the Social Housing Charter and Housing Regulator are introduced in April 2012.
- **Asset Management Strategy** - we will be seeking views on our long term plans to make sure Council properties are well managed and maintained, fit for purpose and in demand.
- **Homelessness Services** - we will be seeking views on how we can improve our services and deliver advice about housing options.

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.

ਜੇਕਰ ਤੁਸੀਂ ਇਹ ਜਾਣਕਾਰੀ ਕਿਸੇ ਹੋਰ ਭਾਸ਼ਾ, ਬਰੈਲ, ਵੱਡੀ ਟਾਈਪ ਜਾਂ ਆਡੀਓ ਤੇ ਹੋਰ ਆਰਜ਼ੀਆਂ ਦੇ ਰੂਪ ਵਿੱਚ ਪ੍ਰਾਪਤ ਕਰਨਾ ਚਾਹੁੰਦੇ ਹੋ ਤਾਂ ਸ਼ੁੱਧ ਆਪਣੇ ਸਭਨੇ ਸੰਪਰਕ ਸੰਪਰਕ ਨੰਬਰ 'ਤੇ 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 چھاپی یا آڈیو میں چاہتے ہیں تو براہ کرم اپنی اپنے لوکل سوشل ورک آفس سے رابطہ کریں۔

إذا كنت بحاجة إلى هذه المعلومات بلغة أخرى، بريل، حروف كبيرة أو مسجلة صوتياً نرجوا منك الاتصال بمكتب الخدمات الاجتماعية المحلي.

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 aniżeli język angielski, w języku Braille'a, w DUŻYM FORMACIE lub zapisane na kasetach audio skontaktuj się z jedną z Naszych placówek.

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
Suite 5, The Forum,
Callendar Business Park,
Falkirk FK1 1XR
T: 01324 590797

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

Anti Social Behaviour Helpline
T: 0808 100 3161

Repairs (Contact Centre)
T: 01324 590590

www.falkirk.gov.uk/housing