



Agenda Item 7

Standards of Gardens for Re-letting Properties

Falkirk Council

Title: Standards of Gardens for Re-letting Properties

Meeting: Scrutiny Committee

Date: 17 November 2016

Submitted By: Director of Corporate & Housing Services

1. Purpose of Report

- 1.1 This report provides an update on the standard of gardens for re-letting properties, as requested by the Scrutiny Committee in June 2016.

2. Recommendation(s)

Scrutiny Committee is asked to:-

- 2.1 **Note the position regarding the standard of gardens when re-letting properties.**

3. Background

- 3.1 Following consultation with tenant and other service users, a revised standard for re-letting Council Housing was agreed by the Executive in January 2015 and became operational in April 2015. At the time of the report the standard for re-letting properties had been in use for more than ten years and over the years Elected Member and customer feedback has shown increased expectations from customers when renting a Council house.
- 3.2 As well as the standard needing updated, a review was also needed to address the most common issues raised by new tenants, such as condition of décor, plasterwork repairs and garden areas.
- 3.3 Under their Tenancy Agreement, it is the responsibility of the tenant to ensure their property and garden is maintained to an acceptable standard during the course of their tenancy. Failure to adequately maintain a property or garden area can result in action being taken against a tenant.

4. Voids Standard - Garden and Common Areas

- 4.1 Since the introduction of the new voids standard in April 2015, the following form the inspection criteria for the Garden and Common Area of a property:
- Garden areas will be cleared of any rubbish/ abandoned household items, including garden furniture and ornaments unless incoming tenants formally accept responsibility for such items;
 - Sheds and decking in a satisfactory condition will remain in place;

- Paths, steps, handrails and ramps will be checked and repaired/ re-secured as necessary;
 - Gates, fencing and clothes poles will be repaired/ re-secured as necessary;
 - Fencing will be installed to box in the front garden where appropriate;
 - Overgrown trees/ hedges/ shrubs will be cut back or taken out as appropriate;
 - Where the property is a long-term void, the garden area will receive basic garden maintenance to keep it in a reasonable condition prior to occupancy.
- 4.2 Where a tenant terminates their tenancy and leaves their garden area in a poor condition, they will be recharged the cost of bringing the garden up to a reasonable condition and for the removal of rubbish and abandoned goods.
- 4.3 Given the variability of garden sizes, layout and individual tenant preferences/ needs, it is difficult to establish a single standard approach to upgrading garden areas when a property becomes vacant.
- 4.4 The report to Members in June 2016 highlighted that prior to the change in the voids standard (2014/15), c84% of tenants were satisfied with the condition of their home. This increased to c91% after the introduction of changes to the voids standard (2015/16). Of those tenants who were not satisfied, c6% (10 complaints of dissatisfaction) were dissatisfied with the condition of the garden area prior to the changes in the voids standard. This has now reduced to c3% (3 complaints of dissatisfaction) since the introduction of the new standard, i.e.: a 3% improvement in satisfaction with the condition of garden areas.

5. Other Works - Garden and Common Areas

- 5.1 Over the last three years an extensive fencing programme has been undertaken throughout the area. In addition, a programme of improvements to communal garden areas has been undertaken across the Council area. This work has improved the surrounding areas, provided clear defensible space for our tenants and provided more cost effective maintenance for future years.
- 5.2 Whilst the focus of the Housing Capital Programme is in relation to improving the standard of the building fabric, £500,000 has been allocated to environmental improvements within this year's Capital Programme. This funding will support a pilot programme of environmental works to be carried out in conjunction when properties are being re-roofed and roughcasted. The pilot is being undertaken in 2-3 roofing and roughcasting contracts.
- 5.3 In addition to the roofing and roughcast improvements, additional works will consist of the following, where applicable:
- Upgrading of paths and stepped access;
 - Enclosed Gardens with walls and fencing;
 - New gates and handrails;
 - Provide stone chips to front gardens (subject to tenant agreement).

6. Consultation

- 6.1 The Standard for Letting Council Housing was subject to full consultation with tenants and other service users.

7. Implications

Financial

- 7.1 There are no direct financial implications arising from the report. Improvement works are funded from both the Housing Revenue Account and Housing Investment Programme.

Resources

- 7.2 There are no resource implications arising from the report.

Legal

- 7.3 There are no legal implications arising from the report.

Risk

- 7.4 There are no risk implications arising from the report.

Equalities

- 7.5 An equality and poverty impact assessment is not required.

Sustainability/Environmental Impact

- 7.6 A sustainability assessment is not required.

8. Conclusions

- 8.1 Following the introduction of the new voids standard, a number of changes have been implemented to improve the condition of garden areas when a property is re-let. In addition, environmental and fencing improvement programmes to garden and communal areas is being undertaken. These programmes are now also being aligned with building fabric improvement works, to bring a more co-ordinated approach to improving our estates.

Director of Corporate & Housing Services

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Date: 24 October 2016

Appendices

None

List of Background Papers:

The following papers were relied on in the preparation of this report in terms of the Local Government (Scotland) Act 1973:

- Falkirk Council: Standard for Letting Council Housing