

Local Housing Strategy 2004-2009



Falkirk Council
Housing & Social Work Services

Appendix C (1)

Consultation Report

The Consultation Process

As noted in the **Introduction** to this LHS, consultation is a key part of the development of any strategic vision. However, given the range of interests in the development of anything as complex as a Local Housing Strategy, no single consultation method will achieve positive results.

It is important to note that the Council's approach to consultation in this LHS has been underpinned by the belief that consultation processes have to be built on a sound information base and a recognition of the existing capacity of the local community and tenants to participate in an informed and meaningful way. The work done in preparing this LHS has created a much sounder information base that will inform the continuing LHS process. In tandem with this, community capacity building programmes are integral to both the Council's Tenant Participation Strategy and the wider Strategic Community Plan. The Council is currently exploring an approach to Local Community Planning that encourages local communities to identify local issues relating to the themes of the Strategic Community Plan and is developed at Area Forum Level in conjunction with Community Councils and other neighbourhood associations. It is anticipated that, taken together, these measures will facilitate much greater community involvement in the strategic planning process in the coming years.

These measures should provide a framework which can accommodate consultation and participation in issues relevant to future LHS development. Whilst the various consultation mechanisms used in preparing this LHS are outlined below, it is fair to say that there is no evidence from the feedback received that suggests that any key strategic issues had not been identified by the Council. Indeed, the feedback received, with its focus almost entirely on local issues and interests, suggests that the Council's approach to building consultation from a local project-based starting point is well-founded. This approach has already been used to positive effect as part of the option appraisal process in respect of specific priority areas (see Section 5). The intention over the period of this LHS would be to use this locally-based form of consultation as the starting point for participation in issues of wider policy and strategic significance.

In terms of the consultation framework adopted for this Local Housing Strategy, details are outlined below.

Consultation Mechanisms

Topic-based Consultation Papers

Five topic-based Consultation Papers were prepared on:

- Housing and Economic Development
- Housing and Health
- Housing and the Environment
- Housing and Regeneration
- Private Sector Housing.

These papers set out the current legislative and policy context for each of these issues and the Council's response to them. The papers were sent to key partner agencies, including Communities Scotland, RSLs, Forth Valley Health Board and Scottish Enterprise Forth Valley, seeking further information and observations and the LHS now reflects the information and observations received.

Key Issues and Strategic Priorities Paper

This paper was prepared taking account of national housing priorities and local objectives established through the previous Housing Planning system and other related processes. The paper was made available to key partner agencies as well as to the public and staff in all Housing and Social Work Offices, Council One Stop Shops and Libraries and on the Council's website. It was sent to Tenants' Associations, people on the Council's Tenants' Consultation Register and distributed at a Tenants' Conference.

The paper was also made available at local Area Forum meetings at which Housing staff presented the key aims and objectives of the Local Housing Strategy.

Falkirk Council News – Housing Supplement

Falkirk Council News is the quarterly newspaper which is delivered free of charge to every home in the Council area. A special four page housing feature was presented in the Autumn 2003 edition of this newspaper along with a feedback form seeking readers' views on the Council's strategic priorities and any issues which they thought had been missed.

(Analysis of the feedback received from the wide circulation of the *Key Issues Paper* and the *Housing Supplement* is provided below).

Local Housing Strategy Core Group

An LHS Core Group was formed to ensure cross-service involvement in the preparation of the LHS and appropriate linkage to other corporate strategies such as the Structure Plan, Falkirk Local Plan, Falkirk Action Plan, Strategic Community Plan and Supporting People. Representatives of the Core Group had responsibility for ensuring that the LHS objectives were consistent with strategies being pursued by key partner agencies such as Scottish Enterprise Forth Valley and Health.

Falkirk Housing Forum

Falkirk Housing Forum is a recently established group comprising the Council's Housing Service, Communities Scotland, all Registered Social Landlords operating in the Council area and Weslo who own and manage houses in Bo'ness.

The Group was founded to create a means by which issues affecting all housing agencies in the area could be discussed.

There is a need to develop the Housing Forum so that it plays a more direct role in the development of housing strategy in the Falkirk area. A number of RSLs operating in the area are national housing associations with only a small number of dwellings in the Falkirk area. Whilst these organisations are directly involved in detailed issues such as Supporting People contracts, there is scope for better interaction at a more strategic level and this will be explored with partners. However, from work undertaken in preparation of this LHS, it is intended to have focussed consultation on issues in relation to:

- Housing and support services for older people

- The development of a Common Housing Register
- Issues in relation to the potential transfer of the management of development funding.

It is hoped that this more focussed approach will lead to greater participation from RSL partners and that this can be built upon in the coming years with a direct link into the wider strategic community planning framework via the Regeneration Theme Group.

LHS Key Issues Questionnaire

As part of the process of preparing the Local Housing Strategy, the views of the community in the Falkirk Council area were sought as part of a consultation exercise. Residents were asked whether the six key priorities set out were clear and whether they agreed with the key priorities. They were also invited to offer further suggestions and comments about housing-related issues which they felt were relevant to the Local Housing Strategy.

Details of the key issues to be addressed in the Local Housing Strategy were presented in a supplement in the Falkirk Council News – which is delivered to every Falkirk Council resident – and also posted on the Falkirk Council website and displayed in local area housing offices and One Stop Shops. Incorporated in these consultation documents were questionnaires which enabled respondents to offer their views. A total of 40 questionnaires were returned, 33 of which were returned through the Falkirk News, 5 through the local area offices and 2 through the website.

A total of 50% of respondents felt that Falkirk Council’s strategic priorities were clear while 65% felt that there were key issues missing (see table 1). Respondents were asked to give details of key issues they felt were missing. Several respondents felt that particular planning related issues should have been included, for example provision of parks and play areas, improving transport infrastructure in tandem with new house building, and reducing the amount of green belt land lost through housing development. Others felt that specific environment related issues were missing, including the maintenance of private estates, improving the state of roads and pavements and improving air quality. Several respondents felt that prioritisation should be given to dealing with specific tenants, including those displaying antisocial behaviour and those unable to pay rent and council tax. Mention was also made of keeping a tighter control of spending and helping homeowners with repairs.

Table 1

	Yes	No	Not Specified
Do you think Falkirk Council's strategic priorities are clear?	50%	43%	8%
Do you think there are key issues which we have missed?	65%	28%	8%

For each priority outlined, respondents were asked whether or not they agreed with its inclusion in the Local Housing Strategy. Table 2 shows that on the whole the six priorities were received favourably; with priority (c), the provision of a range of affordable housing options which meet the needs of local people, including those with

specific needs; and priority (e), the provision of support to vulnerable people in their homes, receiving the highest level of consent. This is also reflected in the next section where respondents were asked to list the three most important priorities which they felt the Local Housing Strategy should address. The specific priorities which people felt were the most important were, again, (c), (e) plus (f), a reduction in the number of households who cannot afford to heat their homes. Several respondents also felt that housing management issues were among the most important, including those concerning antisocial neighbours/tenants, maintenance of gardens, and improving the efficiency of relets and repairs.

Table 2

3)	Do you agree with the following draft strategic priorities set out in this supplement?	Yes	No	Not Specified
a)	The improvement and maintenance of the Council's core housing stock which meet local priority needs	68%	23%	10%
b)	The preparation of housing development strategies which meet local priority needs	63%	23%	15%
c)	The provision of a range of affordable housing options which meet the needs of local people, including those with specific needs	80%	10%	10%
d)	The prevention and alleviation of homelessness wherever possible	65%	25%	10%
e)	The provision of support to vulnerable people	80%	10%	10%
f)	A reduction in the number of households who cannot afford to heat their homes	68%	15%	18%

Respondents were also asked to make general comments about the Local Housing Strategy, many of which related to issues discussed above. Examples of other comments made by respondents are as follows:

“I would like to see an easier way to get hold of information on making complaints to Council offices and receiving answers.”

“There may be a case for considering wooden cabin housing (low-cost and comfortable in the short or medium term).”

“There is no use building affordable homes when tenants have the right to buy and sell them. They can re-apply for another house and get one.”

“The most important aim for housing strategy is to ensure short term solutions for today do not prejudice the situation for the future residents of the area.”

“The council is required to make and implement plans within the government's agenda. If public opinion doesn't fit where do you go?”

“The negative outlook for Grangemouth is not acceptable. What was recently a thriving community is being allowed to die in favour of other areas in the district.”

In summary, the results from the consultation showed that 50% of respondents thought that Falkirk Council’s key priorities for the Local Housing Strategy were clear, while 65% thought that there were key issues missing. On the whole, respondents agreed with the key priorities set out, particularly the following:

- the provision of a range of affordable housing options which meet the needs of local people, including those with specific needs;
- the provision of support to vulnerable people in their homes;
- a reduction in the number of households who cannot afford to heat their homes.

Respondents also felt other areas should be targeted as part of the Local Housing Strategy including planning, environmental and housing management issues.