**Falkirk Council**

**Scrutiny Panel**

**Draft Report on:**

**How bin collection service affects Indicator 17: Percentage of tenants satisfied with the management of their neighbourhood**

**13/03/23**

**The Inspection Team**

Liz Jardine

Sharon Mercado

Katrina Fraser

Jim Gannon

Denis Shovlin

#### Claire McArthur

1. **Acknowledgements**
	1. The Panel wish to record their thanks to:
		* Falkirk Council for supporting the activity
		* Tenant Participation Advisory Service Scotland (TPAS) and Council staff who organised the activities, shared their time, energy, experience, and expertise.
		* The Grangemouth Glitter Team members
2. **Introduction**
	1. The purpose of this Scrutiny Panel Inspection, by Falkirk Council tenants, was to:
		* Assess how changes to the bin collection service affects Indicator 17: Percentage of tenants satisfied withtheir landlord’s contribution to the management of their neighbourhood
		* Gather information on customer’s knowledge of and perceptions of services.
		* Consider what other factors impact on tenants satisfied with the management of their neighbourhood
		* Recommend improvements to services' that may benefit bin collection service and tenant satisfaction with the management of their neighbourhood.
	2. Panel members, with the independent help of TPAS and assistance of Falkirk Council staff, scrutinised policies, practices, performance, and satisfaction with the bin collection service and how this affected satisfaction with landlord service.
	3. It was appreciated by the Panel that this was different from previous scrutiny projects. It:
		* Was the first Scrutiny exercise focusing on services that were not controlled by the Housing Service.
		* It was seeking to understand factors that influenced satisfaction.

The previous Panel Report on Estate Management Services and Action Plan in 2014 members had concluded that services could be improved, customer confusion about services reduced and satisfaction enhanced if the Council and its customers:

* + - Develop and make publicly available service standards, targets, and performance.
		- Deliver services as locally as possible, with normal practice being that accountable staff and management are accessible from One Stop Shops and only specific reasons deliver services centrally.
		- Create local opportunities for customers and staff teams to work in partnership to gather and report customer feedback, monitor, and review services and develop locally responsive services.
	1. In the intervening years there have been a number of service changes, but it was felt that these conclusion / recommendations remained pertinent.
	2. The Scrutiny Panel is a tried and tested way of involving customers in the assessing, monitoring and developing services. Covid prevented work and delayed this inspection. New members have joined the Panel, and this exercise has, in effect, been part of their learning process.
	3. Falkirk Council supported and funded the process from the Housing Revenue Account (HRA), provided information and will consider the Panel’s findings and recommendations, agree an action plan, make the Report available to all customers and provide progress reports to the Panel and the wider customer base against the action plan.
	4. In preparation for the inspection, Panel members assessed:
* A range of inspection methods including meetings, interviews, questionnaires, drop ins, informal gatherings, online discussions, shadowing staff, Mystery Shopping, Face to face, Telephone. Paper and Online surveys.
* Relevant legislation, policy, and procedures on rubbish, litter, fly tipping, anti-social behaviour, and social housing tenancy
	1. Members used the Scottish Social Housing Charter and the Scottish Housing Regulator’s (SHR) guidance on Regulation and Inspection.
	2. All comments from staff and customers have been treated in strict confidence.
1. **Structure of the report**
	1. This report outlines the process and methods used by the Panel their findings, and recommendations. The Panel’s Members will discuss the draft report with Service’s Managers and agreed an action plan with the Council.
2. **The Panel**
	1. Members were recruited from the Tenant and Residents Forum and wider public and agreed a Code of Conduct for undertaking scrutiny investigations. Members came from a wide variety of geographic areas within Falkirk Council but did not represent their areas and were careful to ensure the inspection was of the Council wide service not any specific area’s experience or issues.
3. **Scrutiny process**
	1. Panel members agreed that they would:
		* Meet with officers from Housing Management, Housing Community Estate Team and Environmental Enforcement, and Waste Services.
		* Seek views from representative local groups and local environmental action groups.
		* Examine the Council’s processes.
		* Explore the Tenants Satisfaction Survey (TSS) responses, complaints, and performance data,
		* Compare what the Council says it offers / provides against performance.
		* Recommend how future service offers may better fit customer needs, improve service, and raise the percentage of tenants satisfied with the management of their neighbourhood.
		* Consider if the bin collection services influenced tenants’ satisfaction with housing services.
	2. Work on this topic had begun pre-covid but ceased due to subsequent lockdowns and restrictions on social gatherings. Pre-covid there were two introductory sessions facilitated by TPAS:
		* 23 January 2020: to undertake basic training and consider the background to scrutiny
		* 13 February 2020: to select the topic and methods

However, during the covid lockdowns the Panel did not meet and got back together in mid-2022. They met on:

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| **Date** | **Purpose** |
| 15 July 2022 | Review the background to scrutiny and selection of the topic and outline the planned activities. |
| 2 September 2022 | Consider responses, hear a presentation from the Area Estates Team to explain the service, and consider a summary of complaints |
| 18 October 2022 | Discuss processes and performance, examine Housing Services relationship to bin collection services and relevant tenancy obligations, and consider reality checking methods |
| 15 November 2022 | Consider bin collection processes, review data / information & HRA costs, .and plan next steps |
| 13 January 2023 | Meet with local environmental group, discuss services impacts with a member of housing’s local management team, discuss draft recommendations and reporting process |
| **??** | Consider draft report prepared by TPAS |

* 1. It was not possible to:
* Meet with any RTOs.
* See the recent Litter Survey.
* View HRA costs by area and types of Rapid Responses.
1. **Activities findings**
	1. The Panel’s findings have been presented under headings:
		* From general investigation activities
		* From discussion with Grangemouth Glitter Team
		* From discussion with an Area Housing Officer:
			+ Bin collection:
			+ Annual visits
			+ Estate Walkabouts
		* From previous Inspections
	2. **From general investigation activities the Panel identified**
		* Different areas / house types need different bin collection processes.
		* Difficult for tenants to know who to contact / responsible – staff should take ownership regardless of their service and make sure customer’s issues are acted on.
		* Housing staff may not follow through issues raised by tenants when it is another service. They pass it on only, but if it is not responded to there is no follow up.
		* Housing Officers are responsible for dealing with tenancy breaches
		* The Panel (and it is believed many tenants) do not clearly understand when / how / if leaving a contaminated bin, etc. becomes a breach of tenancy and therefore involve the housing officers.
		* Housing may not have the capacity or role to support tenants who are not following Waste Service directions. The Panel thought this should be jointly responded to by tenancy sustainment, support, care, or social work staff?
		* Need to identify and clarify the split between Housing Revenue Account (HRA) & Council Tax. Overall costs to HRA of uplifts, etc, where shared but this was not broken down. This is needed if seeking to address key costs and appropriate actions.
		* The division of work should be more based on need for service, areas with more challenging issues, rather than simply population density, etc.
		* Responsibilities for dealing with fly tipping, etc. is based on landownership but unsure if this information is publicly available. Making it accessible will help identifying responsibilities.
		* Panel members did not know about online reporting of issues and believe this is not known about by customers.
		* Problems with reporting issues by phone and unsure if current arrangement complies with the Scottish Social Housing Charter and Falkirk Council’s Tenant & Customer Participation Strategy (2022 – 2025) i.e a variety of communication/reporting options are available to tenants, and that direct dial numbers are issued by officers etc.
		* Unclear about Housing, Community Estate, Waste Service staff role in bin collection?
		* Need to check that Housing Services provides adequate bin storage on their estates, that it is ‘fit for purpose’ and whether this has an impact on Housing Services’ contribution to the management of estates*.*
		* Bins on pavements is a problem for many and could relate to storage, street layout, etc.
		* Need to consider better ways of providing information.
		* Damaged and disappearing bins paid for by tenants (£15 or £50 for communal bin) hinders reporting. There were reports of wind blowing and stolen bins costing tenants.
		* Waste Service produce a Litter Strategy. Its focus is prevention, changing behaviour, dog fouling and personal responsibility. Need to explore how housing can link into this Litter Strategy.
		* The recycling system is complex and requires customers to proactively engage and take responsibility. In the current system:
* There is more for customers to do.
* No one has sought the customer’s agreement to the increased responsibilities.
* Customers have limited buy into the system or its objectives.
* There is no clear / understood benefit to the customer.

**6.2 From discussion with Grangemouth Glitter Team**

* + - Operating for five years and decided not to be a formal group to focus on doing not running a group.
		- Main tasks are often seen as what the Council used to do but no longer has budget / desire:
			* litter picking (focus on fast food).
			* gardening (improve look of area).
			* education and positive reinforcement.
		- Good relationship with Council services (provide bags, etc.).
		- Raising funds and local people / businesses sponsor planters, etc.
		- Take the bin bags to tip themselves.
		- Social side is particularly important to members.
		- Not sure how active enforcement is undertaken.
		- Getting recognition for their work.
		- Their general views:
			* Bin collection is too complicated.
			* Local people not getting the right information.
			* Expect proposed changes / charges will have a negative impact.
		- Bins do have an impact on look and litter in areas but have not got a view on why variations between and withing local area occur but see significantly difference between area.
		- Panel members perceived that work that used to be paid for by Council Tax and delivered by paid staff was being made “voluntary” and the community’s responsibilities because of financial pressures without the community’s agreement. While applauding individual commitment and expressing gratitude the Panel did not agree with this change.
		- It is suggested that work is undertaken to build links between the Panel, RTOs, and other community groups.

**6.3 From discussion with Area Housing Officer**

**6.3.1 Bin collection:**

* + Bin collection information is supplied to new tenants by their housing officer.
	+ Role of housing management is to sustain the tenancy:
		- Identify any problems
		- Signpost to information / help
		- Tenancy support
	+ Can arrange joint visits to address issues with Council officers and other agencies.
	+ There are points of contact / joint work between cleansing and housing, but they have different roles:
		- Cleansing seeks to get bins collected / prevent contamination.
		- Housing’s role does not normally include action on bins. Housing gets involved if full bins mean tenants are leaving bags outside bins which will then not be collected.
	+ Among the general population, which was mirrored by the Panel, there appears to be confusion around:
		- Costs of uplifts.
		- What can go into which bins.
	+ The Panel noted that there is sometimes a disregard and / or carelessness for using the right bins among the general population.
	+ The increasing support workload means there is more housing officer time spent on bin issues.

**6.3.2 Annual visits:**

* + There is a rolling programme of annual visits by housing officers.
	+ Annual visits are designed to offer support. They are not “inspecting” / “policing” tenants’ homes. Participating in an annual visit is voluntary and a decision made by tenants.
	+ Letter is sent offering call, particularly to those that their Housing Officer has not recently seen.
	+ Concerned that tenants may not perceive these visits as supportive. Panel members were surprised that they were not about “policing.” And no one wants to be identified as in need to support, so tenants may benefit from a supportive annual visit would seek to avoid them.
	+ Panel members perceived that staff were recording annual visits as completed when / if they had visited the tenant, but this did not mean that the standard issues to be covered by the annual visits had been.

**6.3.3 Estate Walkabouts:**

* + Tenants can take initiative and request a walkabout, but this is not advertises adequately
	+ The Estate Walkabouts focus being on the environment not tenants was a surprise to Panel members. Their perception was that these visits were as much about tenant behaviour than the environment and this put folks off.
	+ Local people do not distinguish between housing and the council. So why would they not raise roads, lights, anti-social behaviour (ASB), etc. during Estate Walkabouts. This would need other services taking part.
	+ Often ownership of land is a key issue. Panel members believe housing officers should be able to easily identify ownership / responsibility.
	+ Communication / advertising does not seem to be working.
	+ Time of day (during office hours) does not help.
	+ The staff attending estate walkabouts find getting the issues addressed difficult as they do not have the authority.
	+ Identifying the role walkabouts and tenants have in resolving issue is difficult. This hinders efforts to raise the walkabout’s profile and tenants’ interest in it.

**6.4 From assessment of previous inspections**

The key factors identified in the 2014 Inspection of Estate Management were still relevant to Indicator 17. These were:

* + - Lack of knowledge / publicity on Estate Management policy, procedures, and service standards.
		- Not placing enough emphasis on communal areas,
		- Estate Walkabout system is not working because:
			* Customers are not being recruited
			* Advertising is poor
			* Staff are unsure of their roles and the purpose of Estate

Walkabouts

* + - * There is a perception that Estate Walkabouts involved customers “policing” neighbours.
		- While the Council has provided information in several ways many customers and staff are unsure of their responsibilities.
		- The challenges of private landlords had not been addressed.
		- The significant changes in tenure in many local communities has made estate management more complicated
1. **Conclusions**
	1. Delivering Estate Management Services is a complicated and interwoven activity that requires various partnerships between many Council services, external agencies, and the community.
	2. Panel members concluded that Indicator 17: Percentage of tenants satisfied with their landlord’s contribution to the management of their neighbourhood was affected by the bin collection service but that this was as part of a range of issues and was not a deciding factor in itself when tenants were indicating their satisfaction with Housing Services contribution to the management of their neighbourhoods.
	3. There is confusion around bin collection, recycling, fly tipping and other related services.
	4. Other services provided by Area Estates Team and others, are as, influential as bin collection when considering Indicator 17. These key partnerships need better co-ordination, clarification and work is required to strengthen community participation and engagement.
	5. While the Council had used the 2014 Panel Report it was believed it had not been implemented and the Panel wanted to monitor implementation of this Report’s recommendations more closely.
2. **Recommendations**
	1. The Council and customers should work together to :

8.1.1 General:

* + - Review service standards and targets for bin collection and other estate management / environmental services.
		- Make these service standards and targets publicly available.
		- Show how customers will be kept informed of performance.
		- Ensure enquiries / complaints are recorded, followed up, and responded to.
		- Prioritise joint actions by Housing and Waste Service to deal with bin collection problems
		- Assess costs, etc. of improving bin storage and access and include in asset planning programmes.
		- Explore Housing’s links to planned new Litter Strategy.

8.1.2 Communication:

* + - Put a focus on “Easy to Read” publications.
		- Information issued when tenancy starts is not adequate and needs reinforcing over the course of the tenancy, among private tenants and owners and when services change.
		- Devise a cross service, ongoing information campaign to:
			* Promote online information and reporting.
			* Clarify and communicate roles, responsibilities, expectations of staff and contact methods in cross service issues.
		- HRA Rapid Response costs by area, complaints, and issues identified to enable local solutions to be developed and monitored.
		- Develop simpler lines of responsibility:
* What are staff to do (housing & other services)?
* What are tenants / public expected to do?

8.1.3 Annual Visits

* Reduce stigma / fear of annual visits.
* Issue positive stories about annual visits and advertise visit helping to reduce fuel costs, improve recycling, using Council services, rate housing service, suggest changes to services, etc.
* Focus annual visits on those tenants finding it hard to maintain tenancies, recycle, receiving fines / warning about bin collection, etc.
* Devise joint service / community visits to address bin issues and other estate management issues

8.1.4 Estate Walkabout

* Creating a contact list of interested tenants who are notified of walkabouts, issues raised, and outcomes.
* Use reports, service requests, complaints, and comments to select walkabouts and plan walkabouts.
* Have a particular issue to look at, not just going to an area.
* Have the right people / staff there.
* Explain about access / walking needs, etc. and plan walkabouts to be as accessible as feasible.
* Pilot online and blended Estate Walkabouts.
* Revise the Estate Walkabouts system to allow customers to practically monitor and assess service standards, budgets, targets, and performance on a local basis.

8.1.5 Engaging the community

* + - Share HRA Rapid Response costs by area and type of rapid response among Services and with communities to enable local responses.
		- Set out support for community groups like the Grangemouth Glitter Team and encourage joint work between community groups / RTOs
1. **Action Plan**
	1. The Scrutiny Panel members will seek an agreed Action Plan with the Housing Service’s SMT.