

FALKIRK COUNCIL

Subject: HOUSING ESTATE MANAGEMENT POLICY
Meeting: EXECUTIVE
Date: 6 AUGUST 2013
Author: DIRECTOR OF CORPORATE & NEIGHBOURHOOD SERVICES

1. INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 The purpose of this report is to seek approval of the Housing Estate Management Policy, which has been revised following consultation during 2012-13. The report describes key elements of the policy and the changes made to it as a result of feedback.

2. BACKGROUND

- 2.1 Members may recall the report to Housing & Social Care Committee on 14 February 2012 containing the draft Housing Estate Management Policy, which was approved subject to further consultation. The policy describes what Council services are available to tenants and other residents to ensure their neighbourhood environments are pleasant and safe places in which to live. It also states the Council's commitment to working in partnership with residents and other organisations (e.g. Police, voluntary sector) to meet the policy aims. Issues such as garden maintenance, communal areas, neighbour nuisance, litter and graffiti are included in the policy.
- 2.2 The original draft policy was the result of extensive public consultation which aimed to develop a clear policy and service standards, so that the public would know what to expect from Council services. This consultation took place during 2011 and involved over 180 individuals. It included a focus group, a survey and briefing which were distributed to tenants, tenants' groups and home owners within mixed tenure estates. The resultant draft policy brought to Committee on 14 February 2012 reflected the views of the community and the work of officers across various Council services (e.g. housing, estates management, litter strategy, community safety, environmental health and cleansing).

3. IMPLICATIONS OF THE SCOTTISH SOCIAL HOUSING CHARTER

- 3.1 Since the original draft policy was brought to Committee, the Scottish Social Housing Charter has been introduced by the Scottish Government. The Charter contains 16 standards and outcomes to be achieved by Social Landlords, including the following outcome for the 'Neighbourhood and Community' section – *"tenants and other customers live in well-maintained neighbourhoods where they feel safe"* (Scottish Government, April 2012, p7).
- 3.2 The Scottish Housing Regulator (SHR) will measure the above outcome using the following information:
- The percentage of tenants satisfied with the management of the neighbourhood they live in
 - The percentage of anti-social behaviour cases reported in the last year which were resolved within locally agreed targets.

- 3.3 The revised Estates Management Policy now reflects the requirements of the Scottish Social Housing Charter. The revised policy will also be supported by the future introduction of Neighbourhood Charters across Falkirk Council areas, once the guidance has been fully developed.

4. CHANGES TO THE DRAFT POLICY AS A RESULT OF FEEDBACK

- 4.1 The consultation on the draft policy took place during 2012-13 and comprised a further briefing and questionnaire, which were posted on the Council's website and made available in One Stop Shops for a six week period. Written requests for feedback were also issued to: individuals on the Housing Services' Consultation Register, 17 Registered Tenants' Organisations, partner organisations including Police Scotland, Council officers and equalities groups known to the Council. The matter was also discussed at the Tenants' & Residents' Forum.
- 4.2 Although only a limited number of responses were received, the comments put forward were extremely valuable and constructive in terms of influencing the content of the final policy. Key changes are summarised in Table 1 below:

Table 1: Changes to draft policy due to feedback

| No. | Feedback / Proposed Change | Action / Policy Changes |
|------------|---|---|
| 1. | Clearer guidance on permission for pets in Council homes. | Text added to explain that all relevant circumstances will be considered in order to reach a reasonable decision |
| 2. | Tenants will be reluctant to report pest infestations in case they face being charged. | Charges no longer apply - policy amended to reflect this. |
| 3. | Does not say that housing officers should strive to bring all areas up to standard / how the policy will be monitored and enforced. | Estate inspection pro-forma added (Appendix 1 of Policy) to ensure regular environmental audits are recorded and monitored. |
| 4. | Does not cover inconsiderate parking of cars and caravans and use of lock-ups as storage. | Text added regarding acceptable parking of cars and caravans and the rules regarding use of lock-ups. |
| 5. | Police Scotland provided a written statement of their commitment to working in partnership to deliver the policy. | Policy amended to include statement from Police Scotland. |
| 6. | Would like clarification on allocation of lock-ups and garage sites. | Text added following additional consultation on this issue. |

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| 7. | Would like more detail on Conflict Resolution Services in respect of neighbour disputes and anti-social behaviour. | Text added re Mediation Services and Falkirk Investigation Response and Support Team (FIRST). |
| 8. | Easier to understand if you hear it explained in detail. | Draft Policy was discussed at Tenants' & Residents' Forum. |
| 9. | Contents page with A-Z guidance would make it easier to read. | Contents page and A-Z index added. |
| 10. | Generally happy with whole document but would like it debated at the consultation group. | The next Customer Led Inspection will focus on Estate Management. The Tenant Involvement Group are being supported by the service to progress this. |

5. KEY ELEMENTS OF THE HOUSING ESTATE MANAGEMENT POLICY

5.1 The revised policy is contained in **Appendix 1**. Its aim is to:

Ensure our estates and common areas are attractive, well maintained and safe places in which to live, where we work together to deliver Service Standards set in partnership with the Community.

5.2 The policy makes it clear to customers the range of services already being provided by Falkirk Council. The policy objectives are to enable Council tenants and other residents to:

- Get involved in improving their neighbourhood;
- Have peaceful enjoyment of their homes; and
- Access a range of Council services to maintain high standards within their homes and neighbourhoods.

5.3 Once approved, any new housing developments that the Council build will also take account of the aims and objectives of the policy.

6. REGULAR GRADING OF ESTATES

6.1 The revised policy also benefits from an Estate Inspection Proforma which will be used both to form a comparative baseline for estates across Falkirk and for on-going monitoring of the condition of our estates. The Estate Inspection Proforma covers issues including paths, drying areas, roadways, lighting, grassed areas, parking areas, alleyways, boundary fencing, boundary walls, ditches, garage areas, trees, shrubs, flats internal communal areas, flats external areas and any other issues.

- 6.2 Regular estate inspections will be instigated using the Proforma and the outcomes will be recorded and monitored with clear times to action issues identified. The Proforma will allow for grading of estates, enabling the right resource allocation and thereby uplifting the overall standard of estates across the Falkirk Council area.
- 6.3 The Estate Management Proforma is designed for use during regular estate inspections by Neighbourhood Officers and is contained in Appendix 1 of the Housing Estate Management Policy. Its aim is to help ensure that neighbourhood environments in the Falkirk Council area are continually improving through joint working between officers, elected members and the community. Alongside these regular inspections, every year estate walkabouts will be carried out and outcomes of the estate inspections and progress made provided to attendees. In addition, a survey of the condition of all open spaces is also being carried out by the Estates Management Division.
- 6.4 Discussions are also taking place with colleagues in the Governance Division to identify ways in which the Council's ability to tackle the problem of overgrown and untidy gardens within the Council area can be maximised, such as strengthening the terms of the Tenancy Agreement for all new tenants and, in relation to privately owned property, considering the use of Amenity Notices in terms of S.179 of the Town and Country Planning (Scotland) Act 1997 in appropriate cases.

7. EQUALITIES & POVERTY IMPACT ASSESSMENTS

- 7.1 The stakeholders affected by the policy are: Council tenants, other residents, and partner organisations involved in delivering services in local neighbourhoods.
- 7.2 No negative impacts of the policy were identified through the consultation.

8. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

- 8.1 There are no financial implications arising from the policy as all services are already in existence and will be met from existing budgets. Staff resources for estate inspections will be met from existing resources. Resources for promotional materials in respect of close cleaning, estate audits and policy leaflets will be met from the existing Tenants and Residents Participation budget.

9. CONCLUSION

- 9.1 Consultation is now complete on the Housing Estate Management Policy and a number of changes have been made reflecting feedback from participants. These changes will improve the policy for service users and ultimately enhance the quality and management of neighbourhood environments across the Council area.

10. RECOMMENDATION

Members are requested to:

- 10.1 Approve the Housing Estate Management Policy (Appendix 1),

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DIRECTOR OF CORPORATE & NEIGHBOURHOOD SERVICES

Date: 3 June 2013

Ref:

Contact Name: Jennifer Litts, Head of Housing Management ext: 0789

LIST OF BACKGROUND PAPERS

1. Report to Housing & Social Care Committee, 14 February 2012, Housing Estate Management Policy

Any person wishing to inspect the background papers listed above should telephone Falkirk 01324 500789 and ask for Jennifer Litts.