

REPORT TO: POLICY COMMITTEE ON 5 MARCH 2008

SUBJECT: HOUSING REGULATION - INSPECTION

BY: DIRECTOR OF COMMUNITY SERVICES

1. REASON FOR REPORT

- 1.1 This report presents the Policy Committee with details of inspection of the Council's Housing Services which is to be carried out during 2008.
- 1.2 This report is presented to the Committee in terms of sections A(64) and A(65) of the Council's administrative scheme relating to housing management, allocations, property management and homelessness functions of the Council.

2. RECOMMENDATION

2.1 It is recommended that the Policy Committee :-

- (i) **notes this report;**
- (ii) **notes that briefing sessions will be arranged prior to the onsite stage of inspection for Elected Members and other services involved in the provision of housing services; and**
- (iii) **agrees that further reports be presented as inspection progresses.**

3. BACKGROUND

- 3.1 The Housing (Scotland) Act 2001 established a single regulatory regime for all social rented housing. For the first time, this regime included local authority housing service provision. Over the past few years, the regulatory body – Communities Scotland – has reported on inspections of 18 local authorities on behalf of Scottish Ministers. While Communities Scotland will not continue in its present form beyond April 2008, the Scottish Government has indicated that housing regulation and inspection will continue through an independent external assessment of the effectiveness of housing service delivery. The housing regulatory body will be known as the Scottish Housing Regulator.
- 3.2 The approach to inspection is set out in the revised Guide to Inspection published in July 2007. This outlines that the inspection regime for social landlords is based on published Guiding Standards and Performance Standards. The regulator assesses how well social landlords are meeting performance standards and also focuses on outcomes for service users. In carrying out an Inspection, the regulator asks two key questions –
- How good are the services we have inspected?
 - How well are these services being managed for improvement?

- 3.3 Grades are awarded for housing management, property maintenance and asset management and homelessness services. Grades summarise inspection judgements as follows –

Grade A – excellent
Grade B – good
Grade C – fair
Grade D – Poor

Where an area of work is assessed as ‘fair’ or ‘poor’, the social landlord must prepare an improvement plan for submission to the regulator. The inspection process is therefore an opportunity to seek further continuous improvement of service provision.

- 3.4 A copy of the Guide to Inspection has been placed in the Members’ Library and is also available through Communities Scotland’s website. The inspection process covers three stages –

Preparation – this involves the submission of key information and an inspection submission by the social landlord. In this submission, the landlord is asked to provide performance commentaries, backed up by evidence. The regulator will also seek views on performance from other parties – for example, agencies and bodies, contractors and other scrutiny and funding bodies. The regulator reviews the submission prior to the on-site stage.

Onsite fieldwork – this may involve touring estates, observing meetings, reviewing information gathered on customers’ views, talking to service users, service managers, front line staff, elected members and partners. During the onsite stage, the regulator provides feedback about key issues and findings.

Reporting - the regulator issues a draft report, within six weeks from the end of the inspection on site stage. An opportunity to comment on the draft is provided, within fairly tight timescales. A final pre-publication inspection report is made available to the social landlord two weeks before publication. The regulator then publishes the report and sends a copy to each Registered Tenant Organisation in the area.

- 3.5 Social landlords are required to make the inspection grades and overview section of the Inspection Report available on request. Landlords are also expected to report the findings to tenants and other stakeholders.

4. INDICATIVE TIMESCALE FOR INSPECTION

- 4.1 To date, the Council has not yet featured on the published annual programmes for inspection. However, the regulator has indicated that inspection of the Council’s housing services will take place in either June or September 2008. It is not anticipated that the timescale will be confirmed until early March 2008.

- 4.2 A June inspection date will require the key information and performance assessment to be submitted during April 2008. Given the short timescales involved, work has already progressed although a revised format for the submission is awaited from the regulator.
- 4.3 It is intended that a more detailed report on inspection be considered by the Housing Sub Committee on 19 March 2008.
- 4.4 Once the date of the on site stage of the inspection is known, it is suggested that further briefings take place for Elected Members and other Services involved in the provision of housing services.

5. SUMMARY OF IMPLICATIONS

(a) Corporate Development Plan/Community Plan/Service Improvement Plan

Improving the quality of housing service provision is a priority within the Service Improvement Plan for housing.

(b) Policy and Legal

There are no policy or legal implications arising from this report.

(c) Resources (Financial, Risks, Staffing and Property)

The inspection process will place further demands on staff within the Housing Service. At this stage, additional resources to assist in the process are not sought.

(d) Consultations

Consultation on this report has been carried out with the Chief Executive, the Director of Community Services, the Property Manager, the Principal Solicitors, the Principal Accountant (Deborah Brands) and managers within the Housing Service.

6. CONCLUSION

- 6.1 **This report has set out a broad outline of the approach to inspection of the Council's housing services. It indicates the indicative timescale for this inspection for the Council.**

Author of Report: Jill Stewart, Chief Housing Officer
Background Papers: Held by CHO
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