TELLING THE TENANTS

A report on written materials produced by Scottish public landlords for their tenants

Prepared by
ROBINA GOODLAD,
Centre for Housing Research, University of Glasgow.
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Scottish Consumer Council
314 St. Vincent Street
Glasgow G3 8XW

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PREFACE

This report is the result of a study of the information which Scottish public sector landlords, including housing associations, issue to their tenants.

The Scottish Consumer Council has for a long time had an interest in the improvement of public housing management in Scotland and in particular in promoting more information for tenants and more tenant participation in housing management. This report is intended to assist tenants and public landlords in pursuing these objectives. It does this by giving a general description of the range of written information provided, with special attention given to the sorts of housing matters covered and how well this information is presented. Attention is drawn to outstandingly good examples of work done by landlords in this area, but with some of the poorer features of information materials issued being highlighted as well. Recommendations at the end of the report suggest what improvements could be made in the provision of information for tenants.

The analysis of information for tenants was undertaken by Robina Goodlad and James Duffy of the Centre for Housing Research at Glasgow University.

Barbara Kelly
Chairman

June 1986
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Special thanks are also due to the representatives from tenants' organisations and to the tenant liaison officers who provided detailed comments and observations on the information materials covered by the investigation.

Additional comments were provided by:

Members of the SCC Housing Committee: Douglas Williamson, (Chairman), Ronald Laing, Archie McCallum, and Helen Millar.

Graham Atherton (Scottish Consumer Council), Katherine Hughes (Welsh Consumer Council), Beti Wyn Thomas (National Consumer Council). Dr Peter Robson, Senior Lecturer in Law, Strathclyde University.

Terminology

In this report the term housing authority is used to include district and islands councils, new town development corporations and the Scottish Special Housing Association. Public landlord is used to include the above, plus housing associations.
1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 The Context

Scottish public sector landlords are now producing more information for tenants in the form of handbooks, leaflets and information packs. This development arises out of the growing professional, political and consumer interest in improving tenant-landlord relations, providing the context for this report.

1.2 Improving Tenant-Landlord Relations

Improving tenant-landlord relations has been an important objective of successive governments and of many housing authorities and tenants organisations since the debate about the need for a "tenants charter" in the 1970s: a debate which had a different outcome in Scotland than in England and Wales. The Tenants Rights Etc. (Scotland) Act 1980 required Scottish public landlords to provide tenants with a written tenancy agreement and to publish their lettings rules and make available a summary at no charge. In England and Wales, landlords were required by the Housing Act 1980 to provide information about tenants' legal rights, tenancy conditions and repair obligations in "simple terms". And, in addition, tenants were given a new right to consultation before housing management decisions were taken.

In response to pressure on the government to give Scottish tenants similar rights the government argued in 1980 that it favoured a voluntary approach: encouraging landlords to develop new approaches and attitudes, and helping to fund the Tenant Participation Advisory Service to assist landlords and tenants to work together. But in 1983 a Scottish office minister said, "tenant participation has undoubtedly been slow to develop in Scotland..... We could reconsider the decision not to legislate.....my position is that the government are quite open".

In a sense it could be said that Scottish public landlords are "on trial": if they do not make significant attempts to improve tenant-landlord relations and to increase tenant participation then the government may well consider extending the information and consultation provision of the English legislation to Scotland.

In practice a growing number of Scottish authorities are adopting policies of encouraging tenant participation, over twenty have or expect soon to have an approved policy. Invariably these policies include the objective of providing information to tenants "as a basis for informed tenant participation" as West Lothian District Council's policy puts it.
1.3 Improving Housing Management

The housing profession has gone through great change in the past ten years or so. A wider interpretation of housing management has slowly developed involving housing staff in housing advice, the administration of welfare benefits, and comprehensive assessments of need. They have also been involved in some changes of approach to the traditional regulatory activities associated with lettings, repairs, rent collection and tenant disputes, in order to remove petty restrictions, increase freedom, and improve the status of tenants. This development has gone hand in hand with a growth in the size and scope of many housing departments and in the training of staff employed in them.

Increasingly, therefore, good housing management has been seen to involve, amongst other things, more frequent contact between tenants and landlord, better communication, and a wider role for local authority housing departments in meeting housing need and informing people about ways of improving their housing circumstances. All of these suggest a stronger emphasis on providing information to tenants and prospective tenants in a non-authoritarian and non-paternalistic way.

1.4 Communicating with Tenants

Changing attitudes to the nature of tenant-landlord relationships and housing management should lead to more communication between the two. But the provision by housing authorities of written information for tenants is only one of several possible media for communication. Others include:

- written information produced by other agencies

- press, radio and television coverage including that stimulated by press releases, for example

- advertising

- word or mouth, including face to face and telephone contact between tenants and elected representatives or officials

- audio visual and visual material

Clearly these media can serve very different purposes, and can be more or less effective in informing or reaching the intended audience. Press coverage of housing authority policies or decisions may not convey the precise or full implications to all tenants. Advertising may be more effective in providing the intended message, but equally may not reach the intended
audience. Audio visual and visual material and oral communication can be very effective but depend on the tenant accepting an invitation to attend a meeting, exhibition or interview or voluntarily asking for information. Written information produced by other agencies may not provide adequate information about matters specific to any one authority.

For these reasons it is not surprising that housing authorities produce written information in addition to what is legally required. Its greatest advantages are that it can be distributed systematically to every household or to particular groups of tenants. It can convey precisely the information the housing authority wishes to convey and it has a potential durability greater than most other forms of communication. It can also extend, replace or complement other forms of information provision, making communication more effective. But written information is not necessarily an easy or effective form of communication. It assumes a literate audience - or a particular degree of literacy; it can be costly to produce and distribute (or make available in other ways); and it may not be read or retained.

1.5 Written information and tenant-landlord relations

Written information has an important place in the range of ways public landlords can communicate with their tenants. But we cannot make a judgement about the overall effectiveness of an authority's communication with its tenants on the basis of written information alone. Each item of information can be analysed for its content and presentation but care needs to be exercised in drawing more general conclusions.

This is clearly understood by some of the public landlords in their replies to the Scottish Consumer Council's request for copies of written information:

"being a comparatively small housing authority, tenants are able to obtain information from the sub-office...or headquarters...it is possible for all tenants to obtain an interview on any of the subjects".
Letter from Eastwood District Council's housing manager.

"...the Association has made a conscious decision to opt largely for verbal information. The next development... will be a sheltered complex for the elderly and (our) approach will be quite different and far more orthodox...." 
Letter from Loretto Housing Association, whose housing is for mentally handicapped people.

The result and conclusions of this study, therefore, cannot be taken to apply to the general state of the communication between landlords and tenants. It is possible that other forms of
communication are used more or less effectively or systematically to evolve a good or bad relationship. But nevertheless it does seem likely that the written information examined here provides a good clue to the state of the communication between Scotland's public landlords and their tenants. Apart from the house itself, written information provides a most tangible expression of the landlord's attitude and approach and is therefore important in determining the nature of the relationship between landlord and tenant.

1.6 Tenants' need for information

The information needs of tenants or prospective tenants vary from time to time depending on tenants' changing circumstances, on changes in policy or procedure by the housing authority, or on the way in which over time tenants come into contact with the housing authority - for instance, when tenants reach the top of the waiting list for housing or as their house comes into a modernisation programme.

Tenants or prospective tenants could therefore be expected to require or seek information as follows:

**TENANTS' NEED FOR INFORMATION**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Broad objective</th>
<th>Information required on</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>to assist in meeting housing needs</td>
<td>rights, policies and procedures in relation to homelessness, lettings, transfers, special needs provision</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>to assist in the use of the home</td>
<td>tenancy rights and conditions, including repair obligations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>to encourage tenant participation</td>
<td>proposed changes to the management or physical structure of the house</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>financial assistance with rent and rates</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>rights and opportunities for tenant participation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>the organisation, policies and procedures of the housing authority</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>proposed changes to houses, tenancy conditions, financial arrangements or management</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The information covered in this investigation is therefore studied to see how far it provides for these needs.
2 THE INVESTIGATION

2.1 Aims of the investigation

The aim of this study was to identify the good and poorer features of information materials for tenants issued by housing authorities and associations and other public sector landlords (i.e. Scottish Special Housing Association, new town development corporations).

We were particularly interested in how successful landlords were in providing tenants with written information which:

* covers the sorts of things tenants need to know about in sufficient breadth and depth
* is reliable and reasonably up-to-date, particularly with regard to any changes in legislation (e.g. Tenants' rights Etc. (Scotland) Act 1980)
* is presented in a readable and attractive form.

Landlords were therefore asked to supply copies of any information they issue to tenants with reference to the checklist of topics given in appendix 1. Tenancy agreements or full statements of allocation schemes were not included, however, since they have already been the subject of other recently published reports. Application forms and standard letters or circulars were also excluded from the study, which was mainly concerned with information presented in tenants' handbooks, information packs and leaflets.

Also excluded were central government publications including those of the Scottish Development Department and Scottish Information Office. In excluding such information we were not unaware of its potential usefulness and importance to informing tenants.

The study of materials supplied was conducted with reference to various criteria derived from another checklist given in appendix 1 and discussed in more detail below. In applying these criteria, we found the National Consumer Council's publication Gobbledygook very helpful. The study also took into account any stated objectives of the landlord. If for example the objective was to produce a short guide to housing benefit, this was judged accordingly.

In addition, landlords were also asked to supply information about the cost of producing tenants handbooks and information packs, and details are included in section 5. A broad cross-section of materials was also read and discussed by a meeting of tenants representatives and tenant liaison officers: their comments have been incorporated into the report. Landlords were given an opportunity to comment on references to their
materials in this report and, where appropriate, their comments have been incorporated.

It has not been thought appropriate to report in every case which landlords did well or badly for each item of information analysed. In many cases it was not possible to reach precise judgements about the quality of information, since single items might be good in some parts (or respects) and not in others. This report instead focuses on the main strengths and limitations of different materials, pointing to particularly good and bad examples in the text, but without mentioning every authority concerned.

2.2 Assessing information for tenants: criteria used

Should the provision of information for tenants be welcomed? What are the implications for tenant – landlord relations? What improvements could be made to the content and presentation of information for tenants?

These questions were the starting points for the SCC's interest in information for tenants. They do not in themselves, however, provide a basis for assessing the material.

A proper assessment has to adopt some criteria for judgement. Our criteria are based largely on the growing importance we attach to communicating with tenants in housing management. They are broadly related to the following questions:

- is the information useful to tenants? Does it help tenants to meet their housing needs?

- Does the information form a basis for informed tenant participation? Is it likely to improve landlord-tenant relations?

These also have implications for the style in which information should be produced – non-authoritarian, non-paternalistic and clearly related to the interests of the tenant or prospective tenant.

The analysis was therefore concerned to assess the extent to which the information would promote one or more of these objectives.

2.3 The response

The Scottish Consumer Council wrote to all housing associations, district and islands councils, housing co-operatives and new town development corporations and to the Scottish Special Housing Association in November 1984 asking for copies of all written information provided by them to their tenants. Copies of any handbooks, information packs, leaflets, circulars or other
information materials available to tenants were requested. A checklist of topics (such as homelessness, repairs, dampness see Appendix 1) was enclosed to assist landlords in replying.

The response was high from housing authorities but not so high from housing associations. By July 1985 (after two reminders) 56 out of 62 housing authorities (around 90 per cent) had replied and 80 out of 125 housing associations (64 per cent). Six district councils failed to reply. A further seven district or islands councils replied but did not send any information for tenants. (see Appendix 2 for full details of the response). The reasons for this were broadly either that booklets made available were "the same as those available in all other areas" (presumably because they were prepared and issued by the Scottish Information Office or other central departments) or "I do not think that there are any information leaflets issued to tenants in this district on any of the matters you mentioned".

Of the 80 housing associations which replied, 25 sent no information to tenants. Typical reasons given were:

"This association has Residential Clubs for the active elderly and Guest House Homes for the frail elderly.... None of the headings on your checklist are really applicable",

and

"Our small Association is only starting out and as yet has no literature organised."

The apparent dearth of information from some public landlords was surprising. At a minimum all public landlords should have at least sent the free summary of their lettings policy required under the Tenants' Rights Etc. (Scotland) Act 1980 (as amended for housing associations by the Local Government (Miscellaneous Provisions) (Scotland) Act 1981.

Public sector landlords appear to be increasing the amount of written information produced for tenants. Ten housing authorities told us of plans to produce an information pack or handbook and several others intend to revise or extend their present written information.
THE INFORMATION FOR TENANTS

"Very sensible"...

"Will be read because of its practical contents"

"Not a serious attempt to think about what a tenant needs to know. Mostly about what not to do."

"Does not go into enough depth." "...only covers items which tenants are responsible for".

These comments by tenants illustrate the importance of the quantity and quality of written information for tenants.

3.1 How much information

The Housing Authorities sent 214 items of information, in leaflets, information packs, handbooks, booklets and broadsheets - an average of four each. These are described in this section, some reference is made to similar material produced by housing associations.

Certain material issued by public landlords but not described in this report should be mentioned here. Several authorities also sent copies of standard letters.

One authority sent 81 items of information, including, for example, 13 relating to the National Mobility Scheme and seven relating to homelessness. Many - perhaps all - authorities use leaflets from other agencies such as the Scottish Office, Department of the Environment, DHSS, regional council social work or water departments, and voluntary agencies, such as Womens Aid. One very commonly used leaflet was the Scottish Information Office leaflet "Now it's easier to buy your council home".

Many authorities sent copies of their tenancy agreements. While these remain the most important written account of tenant landlord relationships they are not described here since they have already been discussed elsewhere. In the case of lettings policies we include summaries, or full statements of policies where summaries do not exist.

The average of four items per authority hides a great variety of provision. In any case the important questions relate not to the number of items, but to the content and quality of the information. However, it was clear that some housing authorities appear to have devoted very little or no attention to producing written information, and it was not only the smallest authorities of whom this could be said. Other than issuing standard letters and written leases to tenants, a few of the larger landlords appear to have produced hardly any leaflets or other publications of their own for tenants, although some have said that they intend to do so.
The biggest public landlords in Scotland - Glasgow and Edinburgh District Councils and the SSHA - sent around 15 items. Medium to smaller authorities such as Stirling and Roxburgh sent around six items. But the great majority - 35 authorities - sent up to three items: seven sent none; fourteen sent one; eight sent two; and five sent three. These did not always include copies of the written information on letting policies required under the Tenants Rights Act. It was disappointing to receive hardly any information intended for use at an area or estate level among the larger authorities. Most of the material from the SSHA, for example, was produced at a national level.

3.2 What form of information?

The information was not always easily categorised, but broadly fell into five formats:

**leaflets:**
usually one sheet of paper, sometimes folded, sometimes better categorised perhaps as a notice or circular, but in practice a clear distinction between these and leaflets was impossible to determine.

**booklets:**
two or more sheets of paper, usually stapled or bound in some way, and dealing with one topic, such as modernisation or housing benefit.

**handbooks:**
varying from eight pages upwards and dealing with several aspects of tenancy in a variety of page size and bindings.

**packs:**
especially a collection of leaflets on different aspects of housing, placed in a wallet or folder.

**broadsheets:**
intended to convey information in a style reminiscent of newspapers or magazines.

The most common form of information was leaflets: just over three quarters of the 214 items. Around fifteen per cent were booklets. Around 3 per cent each were handbooks (8) and packs (8). And one broadsheet was received (several others were received from housing associations).

3.3 Purpose and range of the information

By far the most common purpose or objective of housing authorities was to convey information to tenants about their tenancy conditions, the use of their home, and its repair and maintenance. About three quarters of the leaflets and booklets were about these matters. About one quarter were generally intended to help people to understand matters to do with their housing and dealing in the main with letting policies. A tiny number - four leaflets - were intended to encourage tenant
participation or inform tenants or prospective tenants about opportunities for participation.

There was a contrast here between the leaflets and booklets on the one hand and the handbooks and packs on the other. The handbooks and packs were more likely to contain information relating to participation, as well as information on the use of the home and on meeting housing needs (as described in section 1.6 above). Housing associations, in contrast, were much more likely to include information on participation in their handbooks or packs, and somewhat less likely to include information on meeting housing needs.

Information on tenants rights was sparse (and occasionally misleading); petty or trivial restrictions or conditions were imposed, for example, on the use of dustbins or on the installation of a telephone. And the tone and style of much of the information on the use of the home was grudging, legalistic or authoritarian. The emphasis tended to be on what tenants couldn't do rather than on what they could. For example, Berwickshire District Council requires tenants to apply for permission to erect television and citizen band aerials, and then asks them to sign an "undertaking" which lists eight or nine regulations such as "The District Council reserve the right to require the removal of the installation at any time without undertaking to defray any of the cost of such removal", and "The District Council shall not be liable to the tenant or to any person deriving right from the tenant for any damage occasioned to the aerial irrespective of the nature or cause of said damage."

"Assisting people to meet their housing needs" is a positive way of describing information on lettings policies, sheltered housing and so on. But some of the information created the impression that it was designed more to frustrate people than to help them understand housing matters. To some extent this appeared to reflect the particular policies of the housing authorities concerned, but equally in many cases the information gave no impression that it was intended to be helpful, informative or encouraging. Compare, for example, the title of a booklet produced by Glasgow District Council "Your home in Glasgow: a guide to obtaining a council house" with that of a leaflet produced by Strathkelvin District Council and similar to several others "Summary of house letting regulations for admission to waiting lists and allocation of houses". (Strathkelvin has since explained that it will be rewriting or withdrawing this and other leaflets currently in use.)

Much of the information was apparently intended to be self-contained, but often contained helpful references to names and addresses where more information or advice could be obtained. This was a serious omission from a few landlords' information materials. References to other written information were most frequently made to tenancy agreements, and rarely to other written material.
Amongst the leaflets and booklets, the most common topics were
rents, lettings, improvements by landlord or tenant, and frost
precautions. Table 1 sets out the incidence of topics dealt with
in more than two leaflets or booklets. The table does not
provide, of course, a full account of the provision of written
information by housing authorities, excluding as it does
handbooks, tenancy agreements, Scottish Information Office
leaflets, and so on.

The handbooks and packs, in contrast, usually contained
information on a range of topics including those listed in table
1. But handbooks and packs varied in the number of topics they
dealt with, from around six topics to at least a dozen.

In comparison with the leaflets and booklets, the handbooks were
more likely to contain information on repairs, tenancy
conditions, and condensation, and in addition sometimes contained
information on homelessness and on the housing authority itself.

3.4 The Topics

Rents

Fewer than half the housing authorities - 22 - sent us copies of
leaflets or booklets about rents. Most of those - over three
quarters - were on housing benefit, and only one was specifically
on arrears. The remainder were on how or where to pay rent, or
on rent rises. Most handbooks and packs contained information on
how to pay rent, on the existence of housing benefit and on the
importance of doing something about arrears before they mount up.

Lettings

Two dozen housing authorities provided leaflets or booklets on
lettings, and a further dozen included some information in
handbooks or packs. Most of the 35 booklets and leaflets were
summary or full descriptions of the lettings rules, and a further
six items were specifically on transfers and exchanges.

One booklet was a fairly detailed guide to filling in the
authority's application form and provided information on the
lettings policy and process. Three leaflets were about local or
special lettings procedures, and three were about changes to
lettings procedures or policies.

Modernisation/improvement

Almost half of the 22 leaflets and booklets on modernisation and
improvement provided general information to tenants about the
work to be done. Other leaflets provided information on tenants,
grants schemes (or "schemes of financial assistance", as some
authorities put it), particularly for central heating. The
remaining leaflets dealt with matters such as rewiring,
decoration allowances, or removals.

15
Tenants improvements/alterations

Most leaflets and booklets here were headed "conditions" "requirements", "regulations" or "rules". Most dealt with matters such as garages, sheds, pigeon lofts, greenhouses, porches and fencing. But five dealt with heating installations, sink units, television aerials, citizens' band aerials, and even with the "conditions applicable to permission granted to instal an electric cooker". In dealing with matters of this kind, handbooks and packs were more likely to be positive in telling tenants what they could do rather than what they could not.

Frost/burst pipes

These leaflets gave tenants advice about how to prevent burst pipes in winter. Some were a bit dated - produced in the aftermath of the severe weather of a few winters ago. Some provided more information than others, for example on why certain fires should not be lit when pipes and tanks are frozen. Some authorities gave advice about leaving heating on in an empty house, which appeared to take no account of the difficulty many tenants would face in paying for such heating. Others qualified such advice with information on the efficiency and cost effectiveness of a very little heating.

Repairs

Fifteen authorities sent leaflets or booklets about repairs and another dozen or so included such information in handbooks or packs. Most of this information described tenants' and landlord's responsibilities, with a strong or exclusive emphasis on tenants' responsibilities. Three leaflets described the repairs system or more simply how to report a repair. Two leaflets set out a scale of charges for repairs carried out by landlords but which were the responsibility of tenants.

Tenancy conditions

Most of this information aimed to restrict or control tenants in the use of their houses or gardens and related to matters such as pets or lodgers, caravans and, in Argyll, boats in gardens and the use of dustbins. Glenrothes new town, for example, requires tenants of maisonettes to seek permission to instal a window box. (Glenrothes has explained that this is for safety rather than aesthetic reasons, as some maisonettes overlook pedestrian or play areas.) Some handbooks and packs presented this sort of information more positively. But much clearly depends on the style and content of tenancy agreements.

Safety and advice on use of home and appliances

These leaflets and booklets gave advice on fire precautions and outbreaks, insurance, door entry systems, white meters and heating installations. One booklet - from Renfrew - provided
available information for councillors and housing staff on asbestos but also made it available to tenants.

Special housing

Most of this information dealt with sheltered housing, describing particular schemes, or listing provision in an area, or explaining what sheltered housing is. A leaflet from East Kilbride new town described a hostel for young single people, and an SSHA leaflet dealt with "family support housing". Few handbooks and packs provided information of this type (apart from those produced by "special needs" housing associations).

Dampness and condensation

Most of these leaflets appeared to see the problem of dampness as invariably stemming from condensation and suggested turning up the heating, opening the windows and moving furniture six inches from the wall, for example. Some of the handbooks and packs took a more practical view of the difficulties and gave clear and detailed advice and explanation with an acknowledgement in one or two cases that the fault did not always lie with the tenant.

Right to buy/sales

Three of the five items here were from new towns or the SSHA and a fourth from Eastwood District Council (Livingston new town also includes several leaflets about the right to buy in its information pack). Aberdeen District Council's booklet, in contrast, concentrates on the possible disadvantages of buying a council house. Many authorities however appear to use the Scottish Information Office leaflet "Now it's easier to buy your council home".

Ending a tenancy

Three leaflets provide advice or information for tenants moving out of their houses voluntarily. The fourth provides a "warning" that the landlord may be about to start eviction proceedings but provides little helpful information or advice about avoiding court proceedings.
Table 1

Topics dealt with in leaflets and booklets of housing authorities

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Topic</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Rents (inc. rates, arrears, benefits)</td>
<td>37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lettings (inc. transfers and exchanges)</td>
<td>35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Modernisation/improvement</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tenants improvements/alterations</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Frost/burst pipes</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Repairs</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tenancy conditions</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Safety and advice on use of home/appliances etc</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sheltered and/or special accommodation</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dampness and condensation</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Right to buy/sales</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ending a tenancy</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Miscellaneous</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* Base: 56 housing authorities.
3.5 Single or serial publications

We were interested in whether public landlords were communicating regularly with tenants through written information such as newsletters. We found very little sign of this amongst housing authorities, more indication amongst housing associations.

A number of housing authorities produce leaflets or booklets which require regular updating. By far the most common among these were housing benefit information leaflets. In addition one or two examples were found of leaflets that would be issued or made available each year: for instance a notice relating to a garden competition, and leaflets on frost precautions (many of which referred to "last winter's severe frost").

Only one housing authority, Glasgow, sent us a copy of a periodical publication - its "points bulletin", an occasional issue of the council's publicity newspaper containing details of the number of points currently needed for different types of housing.

Housing associations are more likely to issue regular or occasional newsletters. Thirteen sent us copies and several told us of plans to produce one. Several housing associations also mentioned that they issued their annual report to all tenants and tried to use it as a way of providing information of interest to tenants on the association's work.

The impression created was that councils only occasionally thought that it was valuable to produce a leaflet or booklet. They did not appear to have had any coherent or systematic approach to the regular communication of printed information.

3.6 Reliability

Information for tenants obviously should be accurate and not misrepresent the position of tenants or landlord.

In our analysis we took on trust that the statements of the landlords' policies, for example, in relation to repairs or allocations, were accurate. We checked, however - where appropriate - whether the information was reliable as a statement of the law, and whether the information - or advice - was feasible or practical from the tenant's point of view.

Generally the information was reliable, as one would hope. But this broad picture of reliability was marred by:

- a much more widespread tendency to state tenants' obligations and landlords rights in detail while failing to state tenants' rights and the landlord's obligations.

- in a few instances, failure to take account of changes brought about by the Tenants Rights Act either not
mentioning these changes or by continuing to issue information which had become out of date as a result of the Act.

3.7 Legal misrepresentations

Information issued by at least two or three housing authorities appears to misrepresent the law.

At the time of our survey, Cumnock and Doon Valley District Council had been issuing to tenants "standard conditions of tenancy", dated April 1976, which are out of date as a result of the Tenants' Rights Act. Follow-up enquiries resulted in the district council agreeing to make interim amendments to these pending a major revision of its conditions of tenancy. Apart from the failure to draw up the tenancy agreement required under the 1980 Act, this council includes as an addendum to its conditions of tenancy some notes and advice to tenants which contravene the letter and spirit of the Tenants' Rights Act on several occasions and most seriously at the end of a section on lodgers and subletting:

"Failure to observe all or any of the above Conditions will involve the immediate eviction of the tenant."

The council has now agreed to remove this section from its notes and advice to tenants and to amend the clause on "prohibition of subletting" in its conditions of tenancy, thus bringing it into line with the Tenants' Rights Act. The council also proposes to strike out "April 1976" from its conditions of tenancy and enter a new date on its missive of let. While this was one of the most striking examples of a failure to update information for tenants, several other authorities continue to imply in their lease and information that eviction lies entirely at the discretion of the landlord.

Orkney Island Council's leaflet on "Repairs to Council Houses" listed "replacement of broken sinks, w.h. basins and w.c. pans" as being the responsibility of tenants, while not stating at all the circumstances in which the landlord would be responsible. The council has since acknowledged the inadequacy of its information for tenants and is now preparing information material which should accurately state the tenant's legal position.

Another tenants' handbook, issued by Moray District Council, somewhat ambiguously listed repairs to "sanitary, washing and kitchen fitments" as being carried out by the council but "charged to the tenant", although it is now understood that the council will be rephrasing this information and the relevant clause in its lease to make it clear that this will only happen for repairs not due to fair wear and tear.
Several authorities list replacement of broken or cracked glass as the tenants' responsibility, failing to take into account the case of Edinburgh District Council v. Mrs. Hastie, which found that windows were to be treated as part of the structure and exterior and therefore the responsibility of the landlord.

3.8 Tenants' rights and landlords' obligations

Information on tenants' obligations and landlords' rights was very common (and very informative) in leaflets, and booklets.

For example:

"If you re-sell your house within 5 years of the date of purchase, you will be obliged to repay a proportion of the discount..."

*Eastwood District Council's "Sale of Council Houses" leaflet.*

"No transfer will be granted where an applicant fails to keep his house and garden in a condition considered satisfactory by the Council or fails to attend to repairs which, in terms of the Council's standard conditions of tenancy, it is his responsibility to carry out".

*Gordon District Council's "Information for tenants who have applied for transfer"*

In relation to repairs several authorities described extensively the tenant's responsibilities but gave quite sparse or - in Orkney and Cumnock and Doon Valley's cases - no details of landlord's responsibilities.

Statements of tenants' rights and landlords' obligations were much scarcer. One good example is:

"The right to take in lodgers or sub-let. If you have sufficient room, you can take anyone in as a lodger to live as a member of your household. You may also sub-let part of your house to someone who will live independently from your household. You will, however, require the written permission of the Corporation which will only be refused if there is a good reason such as your home becoming overcrowded..."

*Livingston's new town "Information Pack".*

Livingston's pack, along with Falkirk District Council's and several housing association handbooks, stand out in clear contrast with the rest of the literature because of their description of tenants' rights and landlords' obligations.
3.9 Tenants' Rights Act

The Tenants' Rights Etc (Scotland) Act 1980 provided public sector tenants in Scotland with a new set of important rights apart from the well known right to buy. The other provisions of the Act are apparently not so well known among tenants, and so it was disappointing to find that a number of authorities did not mention important rights tenants have under the Act.

Most frequent were failures to mention:

- the requirement that permission to sublet would not be "unreasonably" withheld.
- the provision that the landlord may reimburse the tenant for improvements made to the house.
- the rights of tenants in relation to security of tenure.

Compare, for example:

"The Council has an obligation as landlord to improve the general quality of its housing stock and advises tenants that if any tenant obstructs modernisation and improvement works by unreasonably refusing to move into either the temporary accommodation, or in the case of displacement, the alternative permanent accommodation which the Council has provided, the Council will commence termination of tenancy proceedings which could lead to the eviction of the tenant concerned".

Gordon District Council's "Modernisation and Improvement of Local Authority Houses" booklet.

with

"As a Council tenant you have security of tenure and the right to a written lease stating the terms and conditions of your tenancy. Being a secure tenant means that in law you have the right to stay in your home. The Council cannot force you to leave without firstly receiving permission from the court to do so. It would only do this if you break any of the conditions of your secure tenancy".

Falkirk District Council's "Tenants Handbook".

And finally, the implications of the signing of a tenancy agreement between landlord and tenant, which is supposed to ensure that variations are agreed not imposed; for example:
"The items mentioned in schedules 1 and 2 may be varied at the discretion of the landlord from time to time provided such variations do not exclude the landlord’s statutory duties of repair".
(Schedules 1 and 2 list respectively the tenants and landlord's responsibilities for repairs).
Edinburgh District Council's "Notes for Guidance" for new tenants.

3.10 Feasibility and practicality

Some circulars, leaflets and handbooks attempted to give tenants advice about living in their home, coping with emergencies or dealing with the landlord. Much of this information was useful, practical and feasible, for example, Kincardine and Deeside District Council's list of emergency repairs telephone numbers (in their tenants' advisory booklet). But some was inappropriate, impractical, unnecessary or so unlikely to be followed as to be risible.

For example:

"Do not place any material in the bin likely to cause damage to it. Wash bottles, tins, etc. before placing in the bin."

Argyll and Bute District Council's leaflet on "use of dustbins".

"A useful tip for stopping condensation on the w.c. cistern in the bathroom is to make a towelling jacket for the cistern".

Clydesdale District Council's leaflet on "Condensation".

3.11 Triviality

While not strictly our concern, we were interested to see the trivial nature of some of the information or advice offered to tenants and some of the obligations placed on them. This has been commented on in relation to tenancy agreements in an earlier SCC report. We found, for example, that in Berwickshire permission is required to instal a telephone.
4. PRESENTATION

"The whole layout is very dry and drab. Tenants would not be encouraged to read......."

"Well produced visually"

"Print too small....."

"Overall, well presented"

"Unattractive....."

"Graphics - quite good"

"Very badly produced"

These comments from tenants who looked at some of the leaflets and handbooks illustrate some of the reasons why the presentation of information can be as important as the content. The reasons are:

- attractive presentation including good layout attracts and holds interest
- clear presentation ensures legibility
- good plain English helps ensure ease of comprehension
- appropriate appearance, tone and style create a favourable impression of the landlord's attitude.

4.1. Attracting attention

The need to attract the reader's attention was appreciated by only a few public landlords. Effective ways of doing this with written information are through the use of colour, headlines, and illustrations. Each needs to be used with care, but with some public landlords virtually none was attempted. One good example was Hamilton District Council's leaflet "Applying for a council house".

The most common method was the use of headlines to help readers find their way through a text by breaking it into manageable sections each dealing with a named aspect of the subject. For example Bield Housing Association's tenants' handbook.
APPLYING FOR A HOUSE

Your guide to obtaining a Council Home in Hamilton District
2. Rent

2.1 What you pay — The monthly charge which is made consists normally of four parts.

a) basic rent — this is the simple rent for the occupation of the house. From this BIELD has to pay for management of your property, maintenance of the house, and loan charges.

b) service charge — this helps to pay for the provision of services such as warden service, cleaning communal areas, and lifts.

c) heating charge — this covers the cost of heating and hot water to the house. In certain schemes different arrangements apply and tenants are billed directly by the gas or electricity board.

d) rates — the local authority assesses the rateable value for your house and each year sets a rate in the pound. BIELD collects the rates on behalf of the local authority.

2.2 How you pay

a) by rent book — every tenant is issued with a rent book.

A bank rent book can be used at any bank, although banks other than the Royal Bank of Scotland may make a charge unless you have an account with them.

A post office rent book can be used at any post office.

There is one payment slip for each month.

When paying your rent you should clearly print your name, the date, and the amount being paid. The slip should be signed by the person who actually makes the payment at the bank or post office. Always obtain a receipt by completing the counterfoil fully and making sure that it is stamped officially. In the event of any queries about your rent this is your only evidence of the payments you have made. It is advisable to keep old rent books.

b) by standing order — many tenants have chosen to pay by standing order for convenience. If you have a bank or National Girobank account you can pay using this method. If you do not have an account it is easy to open one. Each month your bank will automatically transfer your rent to BIELD at the right time, as long as there are sufficient funds in the account. You can pay into the account whenever this is suitable rather than make a special trip to pay your rent. To arrange a standing order all you have to do is complete and sign a simple form which BIELD will provide on request and then pass on to your bank.

2.3 When you pay

Whichever method of payment you choose the rent is due on the fourteenth of each month, or as soon after as possible. Payment before the fourteenth is, of course, acceptable.

2.4 Help with your rent

The local authority in each area operates a rent allowance and rate rebate scheme to assist tenants with rent and rates. The detailed arrangements between District Councils and Regional Councils vary in different parts of the country. However, the whole of the basic rent and service charge, and
All housing authorities made some use of headlines but several authorities used only a headline at the top of one or more densely-printed pages of text.

For example, Cunninghame District Council's leaflet on condensation is headed:

"AN IMPORTANT MESSAGE TO ALL TENANTS
(Please Read This With Particular Care)
CONDENSATION"

This leaflet does at least mention the subject it deals with but Motherwell District Council's leaflet on eviction is headed only:

"NOTES FOR THE GUIDANCE OF TENANTS".

This is not a very helpful, informative or lively heading, nor sometimes is the common practice of putting the housing authority's name at the top before a subject heading.

For example:

Dunfermline District Council
HOUSING DEPARTMENT

is the heading of a leaflet giving advice on dealing with debt.

Compare: Livingston's leaflet on tenancy conditions from its information pack.

Another common feature was the absence of any visual emphasis on the headline. This can be done through underlining, or using a bold type face, or by using a larger size of print or even by surrounding the headline with space. In common use were headings written entirely in capital letters. These are not as easily read as lower case lettering and so should be avoided as much as possible. One of the simplest methods of making materials more attractive is through the use of lettraset for headings. Compare for example, Cleghorn Housing Association's newsletter with Roxburgh District Council's notice of charges for repairs.

Many authorities hardly ever used colour. A few used it to good effect, sometimes by printing onto coloured paper (although care needs to be taken in the choice of colour and tone). Others used it more extensively, for example, the SSHA and Glasgow District Council's leaflets.

All the information packs and most of the handbooks used colour to some extent. One of the most colourful leaflets we looked at—Glasgow district council's booklet Your Home in Glasgow—was not very easy to read, however, due to the way several colours were used on black paper.
LIVING IN LIVINGSTON

INFORMATION ABOUT YOUR TENANCY CONDITIONS

Introduction
Your main rights and responsibilities as a secure tenant of the Development Corporation are contained in the Tenants' Rights Act (Scotland) Act 1980. Information leaflets on the Act are available from the Housing and Community Development Department, Lammermuir House. The missive of let offered to you by the Corporation and accepted by you constitutes a binding agreement between you as the tenant and the Corporation as the landlord. It sets out the terms and conditions of tenancy.

Terms and Conditions of Tenancy

These are the set of rules drawn up to safeguard both the tenant and the landlord. They are designed to be as clear and as helpful as possible so that all tenants can enjoy their homes to the full. It is important that your home is treated with respect and that no resident causes problems for others living in the community.

Your Rights and Responsibilities

1. Security of Tenure
   This means that your tenancy is for as long as you wish—unless there is a breach of the agreement, in which case the Corporation can take action to evict by going to the Sheriff Court if this is justified on one of the fourteen grounds set out in the Act. If the Corporation takes this action you will receive formal notification of the grounds and the case will be heard in the Sheriff Court.

2. The Right to Succession
   If a secure tenant dies then a wife or a husband automatically takes over the tenancy provided that they have been living with the tenant. It is also possible for the tenancy to pass to other adult members of the tenant's family.

3. Rent and Rates
   Rent is what you pay to the Corporation for living in the house. The total charge which you pay monthly includes rates for your house, water, gas, electricity supply, property insurance, and maintenance. Rent is reviewed annually.

4. The right to take in Lodgers or Sub-let
   If you have the written permission of the Corporation you can take anyone in as a lodger to live as a member of your household. You may also sub-let part of your house to someone who will live independently from your household. You will however require the written permission of the Corporation as your landlord to do either of these things. This permission will only be refused if there is a good reason, such as your home becoming overcrowded. If you receive a rent rebate or are on housing benefit, taking in lodgers or sub-letting is likely to affect the rent you pay or the benefit you receive.

5. The right to improve your home
   Tenants have a right to carry out alterations or improvements to their homes. You must however get the Corporation's written consent before starting any work. This consent will only be refused if it is felt that what is proposed is unreasonable or structurally unsatisfactory, or unsafe or does not meet the requirements of planning or building regulations. You should note that you may also need planning permission and / or building control approval for certain works. Notes of guidance and application forms for Corporation Consent are available from Lammermuir House.

6. The right to buy your home
   The right to buy your home is available to almost every secure tenant of the Development Corporation has the right to buy their house. Information on discounts, house prices, and how the system works is available from the Legal Department (Tel. 414177).

7. Repairs and Maintenance
   The responsibility for looking after your house is split between the Corporation and you as the tenant. The Corporation are responsible for the outside and structure of the house, space and water heating installations, water, gas, electricity supply systems, and sinks, basins, baths, and sanitary fittings. However, you as the tenant in residence have a duty to report anything which needs doing. There are also a number of minor repairs which are the responsibility of the tenant. In particular any defect or damage resulting from accident, neglect, or misuse by yourself, a member of your household, or your visitors is your responsibility. Further details of the repair service operated by the Corporation are given in the leaflet "Repairs to Your Home".

8. Decoration and general care of the house
   You must ensure that the house is kept in a reasonable condition. It is your
In accordance with the District Council's Missive of Let, the charges shown overleaf will be made to tenants about to give up a District Council or SSHA house where units or fittings have been damaged or neglected by the outgoing tenant.

The charges relate to all District Council houses being vacated whether it be a permanent termination or one where a transfer to a different size of house is required. When the pre-termination inspection takes place you will be told, where possible, of any charges for which you are liable although this does not relieve you of responsibility for damaged fixtures and fittings, redecoration etc. which may become apparent on the final inspection when the house has been vacated. The account for work required following the pre-termination inspection must be paid prior to giving up the tenancy of the house. No transfers will be permitted until the receipt for the necessary replacements has been shown to the Letting Officer. The account for work required following the final inspection will be forwarded to you for payment in due course.

Tenants should ensure that textured type paint should be stripped from walls. All cookers and fridges, etc. should be removed and in the interests of safety, tenants are reminded that when they vacate a Council house, steps must be taken to seal off gas feed pipes when appliances are removed. Tenants should also ensure that all pipes for automatic washing machines including waste pipes are sealed.

Tenants are reminded that when Council houses are vacated, the outgoing tenant is responsible for leaving the house in a clean and tidy condition. All rubbish must be removed from the house and garden.

Lino and carpets, including tacks and staples should be lifted and the floors swept clean.

Toilets, sinks and baths should be washed down.

Garden sheds, greenhouses and garages must be removed and the site cleared.

Tenants are reminded that all keys must be returned to the House Letting Section on termination of tenancy. Missing keys will be charged individually, with a minimum charge of £2.00 for replacement of keys.

Any tenants who fails to fulfil these reasonable conditions will have the cost of any cleaning undertaken by the Council rendered to them.
What is Cyclical Maintenance?

Over the next few months, you'll probably hear Cleghorn staff talking about 'cyclical' maintenance. This means that different parts of each tenement are checked at regular intervals so that the property can be kept in good condition and possible problems spotted before they cause inconvenience to tenants.

Each part of the tenement has its own 'cycle' for maintenance. For example, roofs will be inspected every year to find loose or missing tiles or repairs required to flashings or gutterings.

Windows, closes and stairs will be repainted at least every 4 years, and fires will be checked at regular intervals.

You will, of course, be consulted about any work taking place in your block, and given the chance to decide on colour schemes, etc.

This 'preventive' maintenance is in addition to the normal repair service, and emergency and routine repairs will still be carried out as and when required.

In the pipeline

Cleghorn is busy acquiring, improving and building property.

The men behind the Association's development work are Fred Cochrane and Brian Gegan. For this edition of the Newsletter they report ........

The latest project to be completed is at West Port. Eighteen family flats have been provided above workshops and retail units. Cleghorn and the Scottish Development Agency have worked together on the West Port scheme and hope to co-operate on other projects in the near future.

The improved houses at Thomson Street were completed in April and people have moved in.

Also in Thomson Street the Association's first new-build scheme has gone out to competitive tendering. Work should start on the site by late summer. The development will provide 9 houses for larger families.

The 3 tenements in the Hawkhill are nearing completion, as is the Ryehill Church project. All the major structural work has been carried out.

Demolition of the Blackness School is going ahead. Although it is sad to see familiar landmarks disappear, its good to know that it will be replaced by a sheltered housing scheme. At the moment work is going ahead 'behind the scenes' with Architects drawing up plans for the new development.

Staff at Bellfield Street will be pleased to show you plans of the new schemes in the pipeline, so do come along and ask.
Only a few authorities used illustrations. The most commonly used were cartoons and line drawings such as those in Falkirk District Council's information pack, and Grassmarket Area Housing Association's handbook.

We came across very few information materials which contained photographs. A unique leaflet from Stirling District Council included a photograph of the housing officer responsible for one of the seven area teams into which the council's estate management staff are split.

4.2 *Keeping attention*

Attracting attention is only the start. The authors of information for tenants must then keep the reader's attention and if possible develop it into an interest in the written text.

Four different aspects of keeping the readers attention are considered here: intelligibility, legibility, layout, and style. Failure to consider any one of these could damage the reader's comprehension.

4.3 *Legibility*

It is important that a reader's attention is not diverted from understanding a text to the actual business of reading it. Here the size of print is important.

Around two thirds of the tenants' information was printed in 10 point type. This is considered the most appropriate size for most reading purposes and was therefore to be welcomed. A number of items, around 15 per cent, including handbooks for tenants of sheltered housing developments, were printed in 12 point print or larger. A similar number were printed in 8 point, which was less easy to read and so should generally be avoided. Two leaflets were printed in 6 point: Dundee and Moray District Councils' house letting rules. Both describe complicated systems for qualification and allocation but the reader's comprehension is hardly assisted by the small size of print. To their advantage on the other hand, their print is clear, unlike a number of booklets, in which the print was faded or blurred. The tenants' handbook from Dunfermline District Council for example, is printed in larger – 8 point size but is less legible.

A variety of techniques including off-set litho printing, duplicating and photocopying had been used to produce the literature. None of these seemed necessarily inappropriate, but again some instances of faded or blurred text were found, for example Tollcross Housing Association's Tenants Handbook, which is soon to be replaced by a new more clearly printed, handbook.
WHAT IF I HAVE A COMPLAINT AGAINST MY NEIGHBOUR -
WHAT CAN I DO?

If you have a complaint it is often easier for you to resolve it yourself without involving the Council.

If this cannot be done you should:-

1. Make an appointment to visit your Area Housing Office to discuss it with the Area Manager.

2. If your Area Manager feels that your complaint is of a serious nature, they will advise you that you must put it in writing.

3. Putting your complaint in writing means that:-
   a) It is recorded.
   b) It makes it easier for the Council to be fair and deal more effectively with your complaint.

4. If others share your complaint, it would be useful for you to get together and write individually or as a group stating clearly your reasons for complaining.

What will happen then?

A Housing Assistant will then visit you in your home or meet your group to discuss your complaint and try to resolve it.

WHAT IF I HAVE A COMPLAINT AGAINST THE COUNCIL -
WHAT CAN I DO?

If you have a complaint against the Council, you should:-

1. Make an appointment to see your Area Manager to discuss the matter.

2. If you are not satisfied, put your complaint in writing.

3. If others share your complaint it would be useful for you to get together as a group and write to the Council stating clearly your reasons for complaining.

If you are still not satisfied, you should contact your local Councillor at his/her weekly surgery or by letter.

As a last resort you can complain to your local ombudsman. There are standard forms available from the Director of Administration and Legal Services, or from the ombudsman's office, at:

The Secretary,
Commission for Local Administration in Scotland,
5 Chandwick Place,
EDINBURGH
EH2 4RE

If you are unsure how to proceed you can take the matter up with your Community Council, Tenants Association, or Citizens Advice Bureau.

What if I am still not satisfied?

At all times the Council will try to resolve the matter with you. However, in certain instances you may have the right to take legal action against the Council. In this event, it is important that you seek legal advice.

There is a list of advice agencies who can help you in the leaflet, “Useful Addresses and Telephone Numbers” in the handbook.

A list of councillors’ names and surgery times is available from your Area Housing Office.
Procedure

All requests for transfers and exchanges are to be submitted in writing, to the Grassmarket Area Housing Association, Housing Management Sub-Committee, who will make a decision in accordance with the following policy:-

Transfers: a transfer will normally be permitted where;

i) it is in the tenants' interest, and

ii) it makes no less good use of housing stock

Exchanges:

a) between GAHA tenants: an exchange will normally be permitted under the same conditions as that for transfers above;

b) between a GAHA tenant and a tenant of another landlord: an exchange will normally be permitted providing:

i) it is in the interest of the GAHA tenant;

ii) it makes no less good use of GAHA housing stock;

iii) the tenant proposed for the GAHA property falls into the priority category as a present or former resident of Grassmarket Area, as defined by GAHA's letting policy;

iv) the tenant proposed for the GAHA property is, on interview and on investigation, acceptable to GAHA and prepared to accept the conditions of a GAHA tenancy.

Before doing a mutual exchange, you should satisfy yourself about the terms and conditions of the tenancy.

In exceptional circumstances, the Committee reserves the right both to refuse applicants for transfer or exchange or to grant an exchange involving a prospective tenant who does not fulfill the priority qualification. In both cases, the decision must be referred to the full GAHA Committee for approval.
What if I have complaints about the Housing Service?
First of all you should bring this to the attention of the Senior Housing Officer for your area to give him or her a chance to deal with the problem. If you are still not satisfied then please write to the Director of Housing explaining why you are dissatisfied and ask him to investigate.

Which areas do each of the Teams serve?
Area 1  Stirling St Andrew  St Andrews
Area 2  Stirling Central  Joype Street
         Craig
         Muiralla
         Camphillaven
         Muirside
Area 3  Stirling South  Rosehill
         West of Main
Area 4  Stirling North  Lennoxtown
         Camper
         Kirkton
         Kilmacolm
Area 5  East Stirling  East End
         Bainsford
         Stirling Town
Area 6  Stirling Rural  Stirling Rural
Area 7  North & West District  Stirling
         North
         West
         South
         Central
         Rural
         Rural

The Senior Housing Officer for Area 2 is

Fiona McGregor

Issued By:
Stirling District Council
Housing Department
G. **EMERGENCIES**

Cont'd.

vii) **Stair Lighting**

The telephone number is 552 - 6921 or 778 - 8613.

viii) **The Following Day**

Inform the Association of what happened as soon as the office opens so that we can carry out any remedial works that may be needed.

H. **GENERAL ADVICE**

I. **Floors**

Pipes for water and gas and electricity cables run under some of your floorboards so care should be taken not to drive nails or screws into the floorboards. When laying carpets or lino use small tacks.

2. **Condensation**

Condensation is the water produced when warm moist air, vapour or steam comes into contact with any cold surface - windows, walls, floors. If allowed to continue it can damage clothes, bedding, floor covering, decorations and the house itself. It can be the cause of mould growth on walls and ceilings.

Moist air which causes condensation can come from cooking, bathing, washing and drying clothes as well as from paraffin heaters and fire-less gas heaters. Even breathing produces vapour. It is not very difficult for the moist air to travel from one room to another e.g. from a bathroom to and even a bedroom.

Condensation can be reduced in the following ways:

i) See that all rooms are always warm and kept properly ventilated.

ii) When cooking keep the door shut and window open.

iii) When bathing, washing and drying clothes keep the room door shut and windows open.

iv) If you use a fireless heater or fire-les gas heater to cure the window is one a light. This may sound slightly out
The literature was usually printed in lower case lettering and in only one type of lettering. Occasionally the eye was "tripped up" by too many different types and sizes of lettering, as in the leaflet on frost from Kirkcaldy District Council.

Other difficulties are caused by too much use of capitals, italics or other similar types of lettering. Gordon and Hamilton District Councils’ leaflets on frost precautions and letting rules illustrate this.

4.4 Intelligibility

We examined the tenants' information for ease of comprehension. We looked for examples of clumsy English and legal and technical language. We found quite a lot. Over half the leaflets and booklets contained some, and a smaller proportion, around one third, of the handbooks and packs did so.

Some unfortunate examples of commonly used words were:

- dwellinghouse
- termination
- executed
- necessitates
- repossession
- occupancy
- occasioned

In each case better everyday words such as 'house', 'end', 'carried out' could have been used.

But it is not just the use of occasional long or difficult words which deters comprehension. So does the combination of inappropriate words into complex phrases and sentences such as:

"Notwithstanding the foregoing provisions"

Argyll and Bute District Council's lettings booklet.

"Parties to a mutual exchange continue to pay the rent and rates of their houses, without a break as determined by the specified effective date from which the exchange is deemed effective".

Moray District Council.

"To prevent some of the instances that can occur during a severe winter, you are advised of certain precautions that can be carried out and the need to familiarise yourself with the actions that can be taken should severe frost damage be experienced".

Renfrew District Council's leaflet on frost.
A burst pipe – what to do!

In the event of a burst pipe within your house –

- Turn off the main cold water supply at the stop-cock.
- If a hot water pipe or the attic storage tank bursts, turn off the stop-cock and open all your taps until the system is drained.
- Switch off any electric or gas water heaters or back boiler heating units and allow coal fires to die down.
- In the event of burst pipes affecting electrical installations, switch off the electricity supply at the fuse box.
- Contact your Area Housing Office immediately, or if outwith office hours, phone the emergency service. The addresses and telephone numbers are listed below.
- Mop up surplus water as quickly as possible.
- Again, please remember that in severe weather conditions it may be some time before your repair can receive attention. So please follow the above advice and have patience. Help will arrive as soon as possible.

TELEPHONE NUMBERS

Emergency telephone number for essential repairs outwith office hours – Tel. Kirkcaldy 65333

AREA HOUSING OFFICES

Kirkcaldy & Dysart
Town House – Tel. Kirkcaldy 61144 ext 64
Dunean Drive – Tel. Kirkcaldy 4875

Levenmouth Area
(Buckhaven, Methil, Methilhill, Leven, Windygates & Kennoway)
Wellesley Road, Methil – Tel. Leven 23117
Carberry House, Leven – Tel. Leven 26828
New Road, Kennoway – Tel. Kennoway 863

All other areas
7a East Fergus Place, Kirkcaldy – Tel. Kirkcaldy 61144 ext 32
108 High Street, Burntisland – Tel. Burntisland 2208
Wallagate Road, Cardenden – Tel. Cardenden 720065
Norman Place, Leslie – Tel. Leslie 741259
Betson Street, Markinch – Tel. Markinch 758319

In the event of frozen pipes

- If no frost precautions have been taken and your house has been unoccupied during a spell of severe frost, DO NOT switch on the immersion heater or light a fire or boiler until it is certain that the system is completely free of ice.

Similarly, DO NOT switch on the immersion heater or light a fire or boiler if the system is frozen, until a plumber says that it is safe to do so.

- When attempting to thaw your own pipes, BE VERY CAREFUL, KEEP ALL TAPS OPEN AND ALWAYS REMEMBER THE FIRE RISK.

Thaw out by placing a safe type of portable heater near the pipe, or by pouring hot water or placing cloths soaked in hot water over the pipe.

Salt and hot water may help to thaw out frozen waste traps.

- In the event of your system being frozen, contact your Area Housing Office immediately, or if outwith office hours, phone the emergency service.

Telephone Kirkcaldy 69333.

Precautions – prevention is better than the cure

- Ensure that you know how to turn off the water supply to your house.

- Familiarise yourself with the location of the main stop-cock in your house and test periodically.

- It is normally situated in the kitchenette or bathroom of cottage-type houses; in the ground-floor flat of flats; or in the garden ground adjacent to the house.

- If you cannot locate the stop-cock, or if it is defective, contact your Area Housing Office immediately.

- Check that all water taps can be fully turned off.

- If any taps, WC cisterns or overflow pipes are defective or dripping, advise your Area Housing Office immediately.

- The lagging or insulation of all pipes and cold water storage tanks to keep off cold draughts can help considerably.

- Although the District Council is currently carrying out this work in some Council houses it will be several years before the programme is complete.

- If your house has not yet been insulated and you wish to carry out insulation yourself, contact your Area Housing Office for advice. You may qualify for a grant.

- Try to keep the house warm at all times.

- Never leave your house unoccupied for more than 24 hours during the winter months without shutting off the stop-cock and draining the whole of the water system unless you live in a ground-floor flat, in which case the closing of the stop-cock would affect your neighbour’s water supply.

- If you do shut off the stop-cock, REMEMBER to turn on the water when you return and before you light your fire or boiler.

- Draining the system may not be necessary when heating systems with a time control are kept operating during short periods when the house is unoccupied.

- You can prevent the WC tap from freezing by dissolving a handful of salt in half a litre (1 pint) of hot water and pouring it into the pan.

- If you are to be away from your house for more than 24 hours during a cold spell, notify your Area Housing Office who will advise you on precautionary measures against frost damage.

- ALWAYS advise where a key can be obtained in an emergency and leave an address and telephone number where you can be contacted.

- REMEMBER – You are responsible for taking all reasonable precautions to prevent freezing.

Good neighbours

Some people, particularly the elderly, sick or disabled, may be unable to help themselves if faced with frozen or burst pipes.

You may be able to help these people prevent damage in emergency situations.

BE A GOOD NEIGHBOUR

In very severe weather, keep in touch with your neighbour and see if you can be of assistance.

Notify the Housing Department if a house appears to be unoccupied.

The importance of insurance

It is your responsibility to be properly insured. Decoration and household effects, etc., can be severely damaged as a result of flood damage. If you are not insured seek advice from a recognised insurance society immediately. If you are already insured, remember the effect of inflation. The cost of buying household items is rising each year and you should ensure your insurance is adequate to meet the replacement cost at today’s prices.

BE ADEQUATELY INSURED AGAINST ALL RISKS

THERE IS NO SUBSTITUTE FOR PRECAUTIONS – PREVENTION IS BETTER THAN THE CURE

Printed by ALLEN LITHO Kirkcaldy
DIRECTOR OF HOUSING

PETER DONALDSON

PLEASE RETAIN THIS NOTICE FOR FUTURE INFORMATION

BY RE-CHARGE AGAINST THE TENANT.

THE ADDITIONAL COST INVOLVED IN DEALING WITH THE REPAIR AS AN EMERGENCY.

IF A CONTRACTOR IS CALLED OUT FOR A ROUTINE REPAIR THE COUNCIL HAVE INSTRUCTED

NORMAL OFFICE HOURS.

ONLY GENUINE EMERGENCIES SHOULD BE REPORTED TO THE CONTRACTORS OUTLINING

APPROPRIATE CONTRACTOR FOR THEIR AREA ON THE LIST SUPPLIED OVERREAL.

REPAIRS OUTSIDE NORMAL OFFICE HOURS TENANTS SHOULD BE ALLOWED TO CONTACT THE

COUNCIL DISTRICT OFFICE IN CASES OF GENUINE EMERGENCY.

EMERGENCY REPAIRS OUTSIDE NORMAL OFFICE HOURS

CAUSE BY NEGLIGENCE MAY BE CHARGABLE TO THE TENANT.

TENANTS SHOULD NOT HOLD DAMAGE TO PROPERTY AND REPAIRS TO BURST PIPES

SUPPLY AT THE MAIN.

IN THE EVENT OF SELF REPAIR LEAKAGE FROM BURST PIPES SWITCH OFF THE ELECTRICITY.

SUPPLY TURNED OFF.

IF A BURST OCCURS THE COUNCIL SHOULD BE NOTIFIED IMMEDIATELY AND WATER

MUST BE TURNED OFF AND THE SYSTEM DRAINED.

IF HOUSE IS TO BE UNOCCUPIED OR UNHEATED FOR A TIME THE WATER SUPPLY

DURING EXTREME WEATHER CONDITIONS.

TENANTS MUST TAKE ADEQUATE PRECAUTIONS TO PREVENT DAMAGE TO PROPERTY.

FROST PRECAUTIONS
1. Hamilton District Council has made rules governing the letting of its houses and these are listed in the booklet "House Letting Rules." The following is a summary of these Rules and advises briefly how the District Council deals with applications for housing and allocation of houses and is to be applied from 1st October, 1984.

2. Applications for housing are accepted from married couples or single parent families where the applicant is over 16 years of age or from single persons aged over 18 years. Application forms are available from District Council Housing Department offices during normal office hours.

3. The following are the principal allocation groups and their method of determination of priority.

   a) CATEGORY A — Sub-Tenants List: priority according to date of application.
      Applicants who qualify in terms of the Housing (Homeless Persons) Act 1977.

   b) CATEGORY B — Persons living in older or other tenemental property: priority is on a
      points scheme based on overcrowding, lack of amenities and date of application.

   c) CATEGORY C — Persons seeking a transfer of house in three groups:
      C1 — Overcrowded: points scheme based on overcrowding and date of application.
      C2 — Underoccupation: date of application.
      C3 — Adequately housed: date of application.

   d) CATEGORY D — Miscellaneous applications:
      D1 — Condemned or Clearance Properties: priority to allow systematic clearance
           of houses.
      D2 — Medical Recommendations: made by District Medical Adviser.
      D3 — Sheltered/Disabled Persons’ Housing: allocations based on need following
           consultation with Social Work Department.
      D4 — Tied Houses: minimum length of tenancy of three years required.
           Servicemen: completed five years service.
      D5 — Incoming Workers: application made to Director of Housing.
      D6 — General Needs: persons in housing need not previously covered — application
           will be considered at discretion of Director of Housing.

PUBLISHED LISTS WILL BE DRAWN UP BY THE DIRECTOR OF HOUSING SHOWING
THE NAMES AT THE TOP OF EACH HOUSING LIST IN CATEGORIES A, B AND C.
THESE LISTS WILL BE DISPLAYED IN THE HOUSING OFFICE.

4. Refusals: the refusal of housing deemed unjustified by the Director of Housing subjects the applicant to a penalty of 12 months from date of refusal or six months in the case of a Category A applicant.

5. The above is an extract from the House Letting Rules and it is pointed out that the above is not
   conclusive. Reference should be made to the full House Letting Rules where there may be further
   conditions or procedures laid down by the District Council which could affect a housing application.

6. The District Council may at any time alter its House Letting Rules and cannot be held responsible
   for any loss or grievance suffered by an applicant in connection with any change.

39
A frequent unhelpful practice was the way Acts of Parliament were named:

"In addition to such basic repairs as are the obligation of the District Council under Section 8 of the Housing Scotland Act 1966, as stated in Clause 8(a) of the secure Tenancy Lease, the District Council will"........

Lochaber District Council's leaflet on repairs and responsibilities.

and

"Where a tenant has died, a request to succeed to the tenancy will be dealt with in accordance with section 3 of the Tenants' Rights Etc. (Scotland) Act 1980 subject to any additional entitlement granted by the Council."

Orkney Islands Council's leaflet

compared with

"If a secure tenant dies then a wife or a husband automatically takes over the tenancy provided that they have been living with the tenant. It is also possible for the tenancy to pass to other adult members of the tenant's family provided they have been living with the tenant for the previous twelve months. In any case... you should let your Area Housing Officer know and discuss the matter". Livingston new town's pack.

We used the 'Gobbledygook Index' on a sample of the tenants' information. The index was devised by the Plain English Campaign to test the approximate level of difficulty of a piece of writing. It is a fairly crude measure and a low score does not guarantee simplicity or clarity. But the Plain English Campaign consider it a moderately useful indicator. It deals with word and sentence length, and not with other features, such as sentence structure and size of print, which can also help to make reading easy or difficult. The Gobbledygook Test is described in Appendix 4.

The Gobbledygook scores we obtained varied from 19 to 48. An acceptable score would be up to 30 (the popular newspapers tend to produce scores of 25 to 30). The lowest score of 19 was given to the SSHA's leaflet on "fire":

"Your safety depends on how your household observes some basic precautions. Make sure every member of your family reads this. Fire so easily causes tragedy - it is your duty to avoid the causes of fire".

40
Compare the direct, clear style of these three sentences with this sentence from Aberdeen District Council's leaflet on "Owner occupiers and council housing:

"Should it be found, however, that the accommodation to which the applicant moved warrants an increase in the number of points, such additional points shall not be awarded until the expiration of a period of 6 months from the date on which the applicant reported the change to the Housing Department, unless otherwise decided by the Director of Housing who has discretion to waive any additional waiting time if he is convinced that the worsening of the applicant's position has not been voluntary."

and Strathkelvin District Council's leaflet "Summary of house letting regulations" scored 43:

"The House Letting Regulations are determined by the District Council and administered by the Director of Housing including the selection and allocation of all tenancies to make best use of available housing stock".

There was little consistency in the scores obtained by individual housing authorities. For example Aberdeen District Council scored 24 for one booklet and 48 for another. The author of the first booklet could probably teach the author of the second one how to write in a more readable style.

The handbooks and packs achieved a similar range of scores, usually between 30 and 35, with a few over 40.

4.5 Layout

The tenants' information was sometimes badly presented on the page, with narrow margins, long paragraphs and densely printed text.

Narrow margins were the most common fault. As a general guide, one-third of a page should be devoted to margins, but over half of the material we examined had narrower margins. Glasgow District Council's booklet on rewiring and insulation was a good illustration of this, whereas Motherwell's leaflet on central heating grants (why not call it that?) broke several rules of layout and style.

Much of the material had more words to a line than the average reader finds it easy to digest. Around nine to twelve words in a line are considered suitable, but some of the material exceeded this, and a few items contained fewer than eight words in a line. Another difficulty was lines being printed very closely together.

Sometimes the material gave no clue as to its contents apart from a title or heading. Even a short leaflet can be improved by the use of appropriate sub-headings and paragraphs to break the
INTRODUCTION

As a District Council tenant your home is to be included in a programme which will bring the electrical wiring system up to modern standards. At the same time the chance will be taken to carry out some insulation work which will help reduce heat loss from your home.

The following is intended as a guide to the work which will be carried out and the services provided by the Council and the contractor to ensure the minimum of disturbance to your home.
MOTHERWELL DISTRICT COUNCIL
SCHEME OF FINANCIAL ASSISTANCE TO DISTRICT COUNCIL TENANTS
FOR THE INSTALLATION OF CENTRAL HEATING SYSTEMS
NOTES FOR INFORMATION OF APPLICANTS

Motherwell District Council have agreed, subject to the undernoted provisions, to give financial assistance (hereinafter referred to as "a grant") to tenants of District Council owned dwellinghouses for the installation of central heating systems which comply with the attached specifications;

1. The scheme has been operational from 2nd September, 1981 and is not applicable to tenants who have installed or were in the course of installing central heating at that date;

2. A limited sum of money has been earmarked by the District Council for the operation of the scheme during the current financial year, i.e. until 31st March, 1985 and applications will therefore be dealt with on a "first come, first served" basis until the limit of that expenditure has been reached;

3. A tenant proposing to install central heating requires to obtain the District Council's consent in terms of the Conditions of Tenancy to carry out alterations to the dwellinghouse. An application form for such consent may be obtained from the Director of Housing, Civic Centre, Motherwell. Approval for this purpose is not the same as grant approval.

4. An application form for grant may also be obtained from the Director of Housing, Civic Centre, Motherwell and, on completion, should be returned to the Director of Housing;

5. An applicant for grant must be the tenant of the dwellinghouse and have obtained the consent of the District Council, as landlords, to carry out the alterations to the house (See Note 4);

6. An applicant must not start work until notified by the District Council by letter that the application for grant has been successful and the estimate approved;

7. It shall be the responsibility of the applicant to obtain competitive estimates for the work and to make all necessary arrangements for the installation of the system. Each estimate must provide for a period of 12 months' maintenance by the contractor following completion of the installation. On satisfactory completion of the work, the agreed contribution will be paid by the District Council;

8. The level of contribution by the Council towards the cost of the installation works will be restricted to £500 or 50 per cent of the lower of the two estimates received, whichever is the less, and will be payable direct to the contractor following the issue of the final account for the work. The works must, however, be completed to the satisfaction of the District Council in accordance with the required specification and inspection by officials of the Council will therefore normally be necessary;

9. The cost of any connection charge for the supply of fuel to any form of heating system will be included in the cost of the installation works;

10. The Council will not make a contribution under this scheme in the event of a tenant (a) entering into an agreement with the supplier/contractor to pay by instalments or (b) obtaining credit facilities involving a security over the installation to meet the balance of the cost of the works;

11. The Council will not be responsible for meeting any redecoration etc. costs incurred by the tenant arising from the installation of any particular heating system;

12. A central heating system, when installed to the satisfaction of the District Council will become the property of the Council as a fixture within the dwellinghouse (other than in the case of installation of electric storage heaters) and at the conclusion of the contractor's maintenance period will be covered by the maintenance service provided by the Council subject to payment of the appropriate maintenance charge by the tenant;

13. The installation of the heating system will require to be carried out by contractors recognised by the appropriate national bodies for the fuel to be used i.e. C.O.R.G.I., S.F.A.S and B.E.A.B., all to a specification approved by the District Council. An applicant will require to obtain at least two competitive estimates for the installation of the system;

14. In addition to considering applications for assistance from tenants of properties with no central heating at present, the Council will also be prepared to consider applications from tenants either wishing to extend a partial heating system or to replace a previous central heating system which has irrevocably broken down, e.g. electric underfloor heating. However, applications to convert one whole house heating system to another of a different fuel will be excluded from the scheme. Similarly, applications to install a partial central heating system will also be included. In respect of Electric Off-Peak White Meter installations the grant will include radiant or convector heaters in kitchens and bathrooms where it is not possible to install storage type heaters;

15. The Council will not consider an application for grant from tenants who have already made application in terms of the Tenants' Rights Etc. (Scotland) Act 1980 to purchase the Council property which they occupy, and

16. In the event of a house being purchased by the tenant within a period of 5 years following the installation of a central heating system the Council will recover a proportion of the grant given to the tenant on the following basis:- Year 1 = 100 per cent; Year 2 = 80 per cent; Year 3 = 60 per cent; Year 4 = 40 per cent and Year 5 = 20 per cent.

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material into identifiable pieces. Some of the longer booklets, handbooks and packs were without a contents page or adequate description of the contents. Headings such as "general information" or "Tenants' Rights Act" could have been avoided - they do not convey useful information to the reader.

Occasionally information on one topic was dealt with in totally different parts of a handbook or pack. For example, Hamilton District Council's tenants handbook dealt with repairs in three separate parts, only two of which were mentioned in the index at the front.

4.6 Tone and Style

Tenants and public landlords should now expect to enjoy a more equal relationship based on respect for each others' rights and obligations. We looked for signs of this on the part of the landlords in the tone and style in which information for tenants was written. We have already seen how one-sided some of the information is, and in a previous study the SCC showed how tenancy agreements were often written in a patronising and authoritarian way.

It is true that a lot of the legal, technical and other information which landlords give to tenants is not always easy to convey in a direct and sympathetic style. But despite these difficulties some landlords are trying. Falkirk District Council's and Livingston development new town's packs each provide several examples of what is possible. Others do not appear to be, however, and some are in danger of being counter-productive by the tone they sometimes adopt. They appear to believe that all their tenants deliberately and wilfully neglect their house, flaunt their tenancy conditions, disturb their neighbours, and seek to take legal action against landlords. Landlords should consider how statements such as the following ones will affect their relationships with tenants:

"Gardens - The Conditions of Tenancy state that the plot of ground must be kept in tidy and in orderly condition. Tenants failing to comply may be served with a Notice of Termination of their let."

Ettrick and Lauderdale District Council's leaflet
"Information for tenants"*

* The council has since commented that this leaflet was last updated in 1983 but is "clearly now in need of further revision".
compared with

"If you do break any of your tenancy obligations every effort will be made to discuss the implications of the breach with you".

Falkirk District Council's pack leaflet "Losing Your Home"

It is doubtful whether either piece of advice will entirely prevent breaches of tenancy conditions, but the procedure implied by Falkirk seems more likely to achieve both a remedy and a better relationship.
5. TENANTS HANDBOOKS AND PACKS

5.1 Why tenants' handbooks and packs??

A growing number of public landlords in Scotland are now issuing tenants handbooks or packs - 17 housing authorities and 37 housing associations sent us theirs (see Appendix 3). These include some small rural landlords such as Kincardine and Deeside and Moray District Councils. Another 12 landlords told us they intended to produce a handbook or pack.

This development appears to have been influenced by:

- the convenience to a landlord of providing information in a single document

- the belief that written information in booklet form or packs is a helpful and effective form of communication with tenants.

- the need to explain tenants' legal rights and obligations, as set out in the lease and statutes in plainer language.

These are illustrated by three extracts from the introductions to handbooks:

- "Over the years various information leaflets and letters have been issued... it was felt that this information could be brought up to date in booklet form"
  Kincardine and Deeside District Council

- "This handbook is intended for your information and guidance... we hope you will find it of practical help in getting maximum benefit from your tenancy."
  Sandyford Housing Association

- "... this handbook is intended to explain and expand the terms of the (tenancy agreement)"
  Gorgie Dalry Housing Association

A slightly higher proportion of housing associations (28 per cent) than housing authorities (22 per cent) have produced handbooks or packs. This is probably a reflection of their relatively recent history: most have developed fairly rapidly since the mid-1970s, simultaneously with the developments in housing management already described. Housing authorities on the other hand appear to have had a more ad hoc approach to information provision, building up a collection of leaflets, for instance, as the need appeared to arise.
We came across a few neighbourhood handbooks or packs, including one interesting and well produced handbook produced by an SSHA area office (North Glasgow), although it would appear that very little information for tenants is issued at area or estate level elsewhere.

5.2 Handbooks, packs and leaflets

Most authorities and associations with a handbook or pack had little or no written information in other formats. This applied particularly to housing associations (although several of these, on the other hand, produced regular newsletters).

This suggests a fairly narrow perception by the landlord of the information needs to be met. Housing authorities in particular have a wider responsibility to assist people in meeting their housing needs, and so it was surprising that separate leaflets or newsletters did not appear to exist on aspects of housing such as homelessness, lettings or special needs. It was also surprising that these topics were not always dealt with in handbooks and packs.

Handbooks and packs for existing tenants serve a different purpose than leaflets for people in housing need. We would expect housing authorities to provide both sorts of information and to include both in information for existing tenants whose housing needs can change.

5.3 Handbook, pack or leaflets

Having decided to issue more information to existing tenants, the landlords need to decide on whether to issue a handbook, pack or leaflets. Nearly all the housing associations concerned have favoured handbooks, whereas only around half the housing authorities have. There seem to be no over-riding considerations in favour of one format rather than another however. The relative advantages and disadvantages of both are summarised here.

Durability

Both packs and handbooks can be more durable than more flimsy leaflets. Handbooks are likely to be more durable than packs, although the wallets for Link Housing Association and Livingston new town's packs, for example, were more durable than some handbook covers. Great durability is not always necessary however, for information which goes out of date quickly.

Updating

Both packs and handbooks can be replaced or updated in part if a loose leaf format is used for handbooks. Some landlords prefer to issue a new handbook every two or three years; others would prefer to renew parts more frequently, although there was little
MORAY DISTRICT COUNCIL

TENANTS' HANDBOOK

please keep in a safe place

Department of Housing & Technical Services
October, 1992

KIRKCALDY DISTRICT COUNCIL

Tenants Information Pack

Department of Housing & Technical Services
October, 1992

CUMBERNAULD RESIDENTS' PACK

TENANTS HANDBOOK

Isle of Bute Housing Association Ltd.

INTRODUCTION 1-6
TENANTS RIGHTS 7-17
RENT & RATES 18-24
REPAIRS 25-36
GENERAL INFORMATION 37-43
evidence that this was actually being done. Rewriting and distributing new material is not always easy - and tenants may not always take the trouble to insert updated material.

Visibility

Packs and handbooks are more likely than leaflets to be kept and used from time to time. On the other hand they may be put in a safe place and forgotten.

Preparation

Packs may be more easily produced than securely bound handbooks if the contents are built up over time, as Clydebank district council is doing - their pack contains four leaflets and more are planned.

Binding

The most common cover and binding for handbooks was a card cover with metal stitching (stapling), and for packs a card wallet or folder (Glossy card, which can be wiped, is preferable). An alternative binding for packs was plastic covers, as in the Cumbernauld new town, and WPHT Tay Valley and Maryhill Housing Associations packs. A few landlords used a plastic slide binding for handbooks to make it easy to renew pages. This had the disadvantage of making it difficult to open the handbook completely and keep it open without holding on to it. Moray District Council's handbook was of this type, and an additional difficulty with this one was the narrow margins on the inner sides of the pages.

5.5 Content

Despite differences in the stated purpose, most packs and handbooks contained a similar range of information about matters such as tenancy conditions, repairs, lettings, rent, safety in the home, the use and maintenance of appliances, and useful telephone numbers. A few concentrated exclusively or largely on one or two of these matters but those were usually packs which the landlords intended to extend.

Packs and handbooks broadly contained more even-handed information on tenants' rights and landlord's obligations as well as tenants' obligations and landlord's rights. Nearly all the information on tenants rights was found in handbooks or packs.

Several housing associations handbooks included information on the landlord itself; what the association is, how it is managed, office opening hours, and occasionally who the staff are. Central Govan Housing Association's handbook for instance came with an organisation chart tucked into the cover and showing staff names, positions and job titles. A few housing associations also used the opportunity to encourage tenants to
become members of the association. Very few of the housing authority packs or handbooks contained any information about the authority itself other than telephone numbers and office opening hours.

Since packs and handbooks often contain a lot of information it is important that they are easy to refer to. For this a good contents page, as in Bield Housing Association's handbook, and sometimes a good index are important: some contained neither. Also valuable is good organisation of the information into appropriate sections. Some of the handbooks dealt with aspects of repairs, for example, in two separate parts. Equally confusing is the inclusion of unrelated information under a heading; Clydebank District Council's pack contained information on transfers under the heading of "finance", for example.

5.6 Presentation

In general, handbooks and packs were better written and presented than other literature for tenants. This is shown for example, by the greater use of colour and illustrations and the more direct, emphatic style. They nearly always addressed the reader as "you" rather than "the tenant".

But some were disappointing. One housing association's handbook for example, consisted of six pages, the greater part of which were devoted to a list of 17 "conditions of let and regulations to be observed by tenants". Ten of those started "the tenant shall not......" or "the tenant shall......" The seventeenth read: "When a tenancy is terminated the tenant will be responsible for removing all unused counterfoils from their Rent Giro Book". A replacement for this handbook is now in preparation.

5.7 Cost

The cost of printing the handbooks and packs varied from "negligible" to £2.20 each (1984 prices). Very few cost over £1.00 (see Appendix 3 for individual unit costs). The average cost of those produced by twelve housing associations was around 85p, and by eight housing authorities 40p. The difference in price was not due to the size of handbook or quality of printing. Larger public landlords were likely to achieve a lower unit price through large print runs. Housing associations mentioned printing as few as 50, or as many as 3,000 copies, whereas housing authoritiesprinted from 1,600 to 20,000. And housing authorities seemed more likely to be able to take advantage of their own organisation's printing department, which absorbed some of the production costs. One authority - Hamilton - used a publishing company to draft their handbook and arrange advertising revenue, bringing the cost down to 25pence a copy (in 1983).

The cost of production is, of course, much greater than the cost of printing alone. Public landlords are unlikely to be able to
calculate accurately the cost of planning, writing, editing, consultation, liaison with printers and so on which go to produce a handbook. But most public landlords appear to consider this a cost in staff time worth incurring because of the eventual savings in staff time. One housing association claimed that while it took time to prepare their handbook they hoped this would result in better informed tenants who could use their direct contact with staff to deal with other, perhaps more individual, problems.

5.8 Consultation

Few housing associations consulted tenants - other than those who are members of their management committee - in the preparation of their handbook or pack. Two housing associations told us of particular efforts to consult ordinary tenants. The Isle of Bute Housing Association, for example, carries out a survey of tenants after they have lived in their renovated houses one year and the association tried to ensure that frequent queries were answered in the handbook. Buchanan Street Residents housing association carried out a survey of selected tenants to ask their views on the proposed format of their handbook.

Housing authorities also rarely consulted tenants in the preparation of packs and handbooks. East Kilbride District Council consulted tenants organisations about the style and content of their draft information pack. Falkirk District Council also did this and invited representatives to attend a meeting to discuss and comment on draft leaflets.
6. CONCLUSIONS

6.1 Written information for tenants has an important place in the job of housing management, complementing other forms of communication between landlord and tenant. Its main purposes are:

- to help people meet their housing needs (eg. in obtaining suitable housing)
- to assist tenants in the use and enjoyment of their homes (eg. information about repairs and maintenance)
- to promote and put into practice tenant participation in housing management
- to ensure that tenants have a proper understanding of their legal rights and obligations
- to assist the landlord in the efficient management of the housing stock

Written material has the practical advantage of conveying the information the landlord wants to get across to tenants in a more permanent and precise form than the spoken word. It must however be clear and interesting enough for tenants to read.

There is a clear distinction to be drawn between information produced for distribution to each tenant, and information for use on request or in advice centres and so on. Sometimes the same leaflets can serve both needs, but not always. There was a surprising scarcity of the second sort of information particularly on topics such as homelessness.

6.2 Housing authorities, housing associations and some new town development corporations are now showing increasing interest in the production of written information for tenants, notably in tenants' handbooks, information packs and newsletters. Some of the most recently produced materials have reached a high quality. Particularly outstanding were the information packs produced by Falkirk District Council and Livingston new town.

Both were successful in presenting information in a readable and interesting form. They were clearly and sympathetically written, attractively laid out and illustrated, and very informative—they included clear descriptions of tenants' rights and landlord's obligations. Falkirk was also one of the very few authorities (East Kilbride was another) to consult tenants about the style and content of their information materials before publishing them. Other landlords could learn a great deal simply by looking at the materials produced by Falkirk and Livingston before preparing or revising any of their own.
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There are a number of other landlords who have produced tenants' handbooks and information packs, which contain various features worth commending. Housing associations are particularly in the forefront in this respect, with at least 37 of them now having some sort of tenants' handbook or information pack, compared with 17 district councils. This could be because many housing associations are new and reflect recent approaches to housing management. However, there are signs that district councils are rapidly catching up, with nine of them saying that they are already producing or intend to produce a handbook or pack for their tenants.

Especially commendable among housing associations were the handbooks produced by Bield (good use of headings), Central Govan (useful information about the landlord), and Grassmarket Area (good line drawings). Several others succeed in getting across to tenants their legal rights and the landlord's obligations. Handbooks produced by housing associations were also generally more readable than those produced by housing authorities.

Even landlords which did not issue a handbook or pack still produced some leaflets with commendable features, such as some of the ones produced by Glasgow, Gordon, and Hamilton District Councils. As one would expect of Scotland's two major cities, Edinburgh and Glasgow supplied a lot of different items of written information for their tenants. However, it is encouraging that some of the smaller to medium-size authorities such as Roxburgh and Stirling were also issuing a number of items. (Stirling was unique in having a leaflet with a photograph of its area housing officers!)

6.3 The amount and quality of much information for tenants was nonetheless disappointing. Although nearly all district councils (90 per cent) supplied the researchers with some of their own information, twelve either failed to reply to our enquiries or wrote back to say that they did not provide anything. Some housing associations explained that they were too small, newly established or specialised to provide the materials we were interested in. Quite a lot of landlords included central government publications in their supply of literature: for example, on home improvements and tenants' rights.

A lot of the information was poorly written and arranged, and used longer words, sentences and paragraphs where shorter ones would have done. Many densely printed text and made little use of sub-headings and illustrations. Equally disturbing was the tone and style of some of the materials. Sometimes they were written in a grudgingly legalistic or negative manner, as if tenants could not be trusted to act responsibly. Quite a lot of materials failed to mention any legal rights tenants have, though this was less common with handbooks. Others made only passing mention of the law without saying what the law meant. Some authorities produce written information which was seriously misleading or legally inaccurate.
The SCC was not altogether surprised by these findings, since they largely repeat the results of a similar study of written tenancy agreements Terms of Tenancy (SCC, 1983).

Nevertheless we would have expected these general information materials to be easier to read than the legal sort of document looked at in the earlier study. It is interesting to note that in England and Wales, where tenants have a statutory right to information under the 1980 Housing Act, landlords must publish their information "in simple terms".

6.4 There are indications, on the other hand, that tenants do welcome written information from their landlord. However limited the information, it probably does go some way towards improving landlord-tenant relations. A lot more could be done, however, to make sure that materials match tenants' needs. Although important matters like rents, housing allocations, modernisation and improvements are covered by a lot of the information materials, too few cover other important matters like homelessness, the right to buy, and sheltered housing.

Landlords could make better use of written information to publicise their policies on tenant participation, where these exist. We are pleased to see that West Lothian, East Kilbride and some housing associations cover tenant participation in their information packs or handbooks for tenants and understand that a few other authorities propose to do so. Nonetheless despite the growing number of housing authorities with an interest in tenant participation, surprisingly few have taken steps to produce materials to promote it.

6.5 The SCC is aware that landlords face real difficulties in communicating with their tenants - what to say, to which tenants, by what method and how often? Moreover, written information, as has already been said, is only one means of communication. Face to face contact on the doorstep, at reception desk, or in interviewing or committee rooms; presentations at public meetings, using audio-visual materials such as slides and videos; and the spoken word over the telephone all have their uses.

Written information nevertheless has a central role to play if landlords wish to communicate effectively with tenants. Printed material alone can be retained and referred to with confidence. Moreover, as the research has shown, such information can be written in plain language and clearly presented so that it can be read and understood by most people - not just those with a high degree of literacy.

There is, however, no straightforward answer to what is the "best" way in which to produce written information for tenants - in handbooks, packs, leaflets, or newsletters. Different approaches may be suitable in different places, depending on the
resources and expertise available to the landlord and the needs and preferences of the tenants. The best starting point is for landlords to have a dialogue with their tenants on what sort of information is needed. Landlords therefore should consult tenants and residents groups and community councils to get their help.
RECOMMENDATIONS

Recommendation 1.

Landlords should consult their tenants regularly about the provision of written information. Tenants should have the opportunity to comment on the landlord's overall policy and priorities in providing information, and also to comment on the drafts of particular documents before they are finalised.

This consultation should be carried out with representatives of local tenants' and residents' associations and community councils. It may also be appropriate from time to time to consult members from other voluntary groups which represent tenants with particular needs, such as elderly and disabled people.

Recommendation 2.

Landlords should set aside a specific sum of money in their budget each year for publishing information for tenants. It is very much in the landlord's interest that tenants are well informed, and for example know how to report repairs, or apply for housing benefit. As this research has shown, the amounts of money involved need not be very large, and the existence of a budget would encourage a systematic approach in a cost-effective way. Economies could be effected by landlords sharing ideas and expertise with each other. The existence of an annual budget would also be a useful mechanism for ensuring that the provisions of information is reviewed regularly. This is important because laws and regulations change from time to time, and new needs arise.

Recommendation 3.

Landlords should designate an officer to take overall responsibility for the provision of written information for tenants. This officer would be responsible for the organisation of consultation with tenants and co-ordinating the work of those involved in preparing, checking and distributing the materials — writers, designers, lawyers, tenants, press officers and administrators.

Some of the work involving writing and designing could be commissioned from outside experts, such as the language and layout service of the Plain English Campaign. As the report indicates, there is some evidence of the "wheel being re-invented" each time a leaflet is produced on, for example, housing benefit. Other work might best be done in close collaboration with or on behalf of other public landlords.

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Consideration of the information material that has already been produced by landlords such as Livingston new town and Falkirk District Council would be an excellent starting point for other landlords in this report.

Whatever the strategy adopted for producing written information, it is sensible to have one official with specific responsibility for it.

Recommendation 4.

Landlords should make special efforts to ensure that their information for tenants is easy to read. This is an extremely important recommendation, not least because many people whose work requires them to write believe that they already write in clear, plain language. The overwhelming evidence from the research is that this is not the case. Most of the material reviewed could have been made much easier to read had it been properly edited.

Most of the material could also have been much easier to read and refer to had the design and layout been improved. It is generally accepted that "design" is a specialist skill, requiring formal training and experience. Unfortunately, it is not so generally accepted that writing plain language for people who may have reading difficulties is also a specialist skill. People who are professional producers of the written word may not always recognise the limits of their skill. For example, from the research it was clear that some lawyers who write leaflets for public landlords were so concerned with stating the law with precision that they did not use ordinary words which all tenants could understand. The material reviewed also showed that it is perfectly possible for non-lawyers to write about what a law means for tenants and for a lawyer to check that draft for accuracy. Regardless of who writes and edits the material, tenants should always have a chance to discuss a draft before it is published.

Recommendation 5.

National bodies like the Tenant Participation Advisory Service, the Institute of Housing and the Scottish Federation of Housing Associations should consider ways in which they could encourage landlords to produce landlords readable and comprehensive information for tenants. There is a need for training courses and workshops for officials who have responsibility for producing information materials. It might also be desirable to run a competition to see which landlords produce the best information for tenants, on the same lines as the Chartered Institute for Public Finance and Administration has done with public sector organisations' annual reports. This would be one way of highlighting and promoting best practice.
NOTES AND REFERENCES

1. Mr. Allan Stewart, MP, speaking at the Scottish Grand Committee, 
Hansard, 1 February 1983.

2. Training for Tomorrow, Scottish Housing Advisory Committee, 
Scottish Development Department, HMSO, Edinburgh, 1979.

3. In Bradford a sample survey found that while 77 per cent of 
tenants claimed still to have a tenants handbook two months after 
it had been delivered, 50 per cent could not find it and 20 per 
cent could not remember receiving it. Reported by Peter Cooper, 
in "Making the most of tenants handbooks", Housing, Vol. 19 No. 4, 
April 1983.

4. See Terms of Tenancy, Scottish Consumer Council, 1983; 


6. Terms of Tenancy, op. cit.

7. Edinburgh District Council vs Mrs. Hastie, reported in the 
Scots Law Times, 1981 (Sheriff court) 92.

8. Terms of Tenancy, op. cit.

9. op. cit.
APPENDIX 1

Checklist of topics sent to public landlords by the SCC when requesting copies of any information materials (handbooks, information packs, leaflets, circulars, etc) issued to tenants.

Allocations scheme  
Rents, rates and other payments (inc. housing benefits)  
Homelessness  
Transfers and exchanges  
Sub-letting  
Right to buy  
Sheltered or other special accommodation  
Repairs, maintenance and improvements (inc. DIY)  
Dampness and condensation  
Safety in the home and other precautions  
Grants and other assistance (e.g. for repairs)  
Tenant participation  
Complaints and appeals  
Any other information

The analysis checklist

CONTENT

Type of information : pack, handbook, leaflet, booklet, circular, other material.  
Topics covered.

Description : no. pages :  
bound cover :  
format/size :  
single or serial publication :

Purpose/objective :

Extent of information : full/medium/small  
guides to further information  
too much detail  
omissions  
to be used alone or with other media

Reliability : legal  
other
PRESENTATION

Attracting attention: use of colour
headlines
illustrations
overall effect

Style: patronising
authoritarian
sympathetic

Organisation and layout: logical sequence
appropriate units
guide to contents
index (where appropriate)
c-1/3page
width of margins
words in a sentence (18-29)
words in a paragraph (up to 75)
justified to right.

Intelligibility: gobbledegook index
use of gobbledegook
legal/technical jargon

Legibility: size of print (8-12pt.)
clarity
limited use of capitals, italics,
type faces.
APPENDIX 2: Response to SCC survey

Landlords which replied to the SCC survey and sent relevant material:

(a) District/islands councils

Aberdeen
Angus
Argyll and Bute
Banff and Buchan
Beairsten and Milngavie
Berwickshire
Clackmannan
Clydebank
Clydesdale
Cunninghame
Dumbarton
Dundee
Dunfermline
East Kilbride
Eastwood
Edinburgh
Ettrick and Lauderdale
Falkirk
Glasgow
Gordons
Hamilton
Inverclyde
Inverness
Kincardine and Deeside
Kirkcaldy
Kyle and Carrick
Lochaber
Moray
Motherwell
Nairn
Nithsdale
North East Fife
Orkney
Perth and Kinross
Renfrew
Ross and Cromarty
Roxburgh
Skye and Lochalsh
Stewartry
Stirling
Strathkelvin
West Lothian

(b) Scottish Special Housing Association

(c) New Town Development Corporations

Cumbernauld
East Kilbride
Glenrothes
Livingstone
Irvine

New Town
Development
Corporations

District councils which replied but sent no relevant material

Annandale and Eskdale
Cumbernauld and Kilsyth
East Lothian
Shetland
Sutherland
Western Isles
Wigtown

District councils which did not reply

Badenoch and Strathspey
Caithness
Kilmarnock
Midlothian
Monklands
Tweeddale

* preparing handbook.
APPENDIX 3

A

Handbooks and information packs produced by Scottish housing authorities and associations (unit costs of production, where known, given in parenthesis).

HOUSING AUTHORITIES/NEW TOWNS

Handbooks

- Clackmannan District Council*
- Cunninghame District Council
- Dunfermline District Council (17p)
- East Kilbride Development Corporation* (not seen) (0.85p)
- Hamilton District Council* (2.5p, printing free)
- Inverclyde District Council* (for sheltered housing tenants) (3.3p)
- Kincardine and Deeside (revised annually)*
- Moray District Council
- Scottish Special Housing Association (for Woodside area, Glasgow North)

Information packs

- Clydesbank District Council
- Cumbernauld Development Corporation
- Dundee District Council (for the Whitfield area)
- East Kilbride District Council* (50p)
- Falkirk District Council*
- Kirkcaldy District Council
- Livingston Development Corporation* (62p)
- West Lothian District Council

HOUSING ASSOCIATIONS

Handbooks

Albyn
Ark
Bield (29p)
Margaret Blackwood
Bridgeton and Dalmarnock (20p)
Buchanan Street (1.04)
Castle Rock
Central Govan (£2.20)
Cleghorn* (28p)
Edinvar
Elderpark*
Fountainbridge
Gorgie Dalry*
Grampian
Granton
Grassmarket* (£1.06)
Hanover (42p)
Hillcrest (58p)

Isle of Bute
Key
Kirkcare
Langstane
Linthouse*
Lowlands
MHA
Partick*
Port of Leith (£1.00)
Queens Cross (£1.00)
Sandyford
Servite
Tay Valley
Tollcross
WPHT
West of Scotland (£1.00)
Yorkhill

*under revision
HOUSING ASSOCIATIONS

Information packs

Link
Maryhill

B Scottish housing authorities and associations with handbooks and pack in preparation.

HOUSING AUTHORITIES

Banff and Buchan
Cumbernauld and Kilsyth
Dumbarton
Glasgow
North East Fife
Renfrew
Stirling
Western Isles
Wigtown

HOUSING ASSOCIATION

Charing Cross and Kelvingrove
Govanhill
Williamsburgh
The Gobbledygook Test*

This test measures the approximate level of difficulty of a piece of writing. It is a rough measure because it deals only with word length and sentence length: many other variables, like sentence structure and size of print, help to make reading easy or difficult. Never write just to please the test: a low score does not guarantee simplicity or clarity.

Follow the instructions to work out the level of difficulty of the text, remembering that:
- Numbers and symbols are counted as short words
- Hyphenated words are counted as two words
- A syllable, for the purpose of the test, is a vowel sound. So advised is two syllables, applying is three.

Instructions

1. Count a 100-word sample.
2. Count the number of complete sentences in the sample and note the answer in the Sample A column.
3. Count the total number of words in all the complete sentences and note it in the Sample A column.
4. Find the average sentence length by dividing the answer for instruction 3 by the answer for instruction 2.
5. Count the number of words of three or more syllables in the full 100 words. This gives the percentage of long words in the sample.
6. Add the answers for instructions 4 and 5. This gives the test score for the sample.
7. Repeat with two more samples, B and C.
8. Add the three test scores.
9. Divide by three to get a final average score.
10. Compare your score with the results below.
(The lower the score, the more comprehensible the material is likely to be.)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sample A</th>
<th>Sample B</th>
<th>Sample C</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>2</td>
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<td>3</td>
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<td>5</td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Test scores $A + B + C = $
Average of $A, B & C = $

Sheet C ........................................... 20
Woman magazine .............................. 25
Sun ............................................. 26
Tit Bits ....................................... 28
Daily Mirror .................................. 28
Daily Express ................................ 29
Daily Mail .................................... 31
Standard letter, BF 405,
(Dept. of Health and Social Security) .... 33
Morning Star .................................. 34
Daily Telegraph .............................. 34
The Times ..................................... 36
The Guardian ................................ 39
'Cars'
(Office of Fair Trading leaflet) .......... 40

Notes to British Visitor's Passport Application Form .......................... 45
Standard letter
(Dept. of Employment) ...................... 49
'Conditions of Use'
(Application for an ACCESS card) ........ 49
(The calculations on newspapers were made on 14 July 1980.)

*Adapted from R. Gunning's FOG (frequency of gobbledygook) formula. The formula is considered the best for testing material for adult readers.