## East Lothian Council

## Council Housing Estates - Inspection Policy

## June 2008

**\*\* For the purposes of this draft, all phrases in italics are “to be” \*\***

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**Introduction**

This document sets out the policy framework for East Lothian Council when carrying out Estate Inspections. It sets out how we plan to inspect local housing estates and communal areas, and in doing so lays out how we work with other sections and local community groups. The document also describes how we identify and introduce local initiatives.

The estate inspection process involves a significant part of the work carried out by the Community Housing & Property Maintenance Section. This process will be undertaken on a regular basis, at a time agreed by the Local Community Housing Manager and Community Housing Officer. It is therefore vital that we set out a clear policy framework to all staff and customers involved in the process. In doing this, we must ensure that we meet our legal obligations and that we follow best practice. We must also make sure that we continually look to improve our performance in this area.

The Policy is divided into eleven sections:

[Section 1](#Section1) describes the mandate for change and provides context to the development of a new Estate Inspection Policy.

[Section 2](#Section2) states what the policy is intended to do.

#### [Section 3](#Section3) outlines the underlying principles of the policy.

##### [Section 4](#Section4) sets out the legal obligations we must consider in the process.

[Section 5](#Section5) covers other internal policies and procedures, and describes the standards that have an affect on the local estates.

[Section 6](#Section6) considers the different roles and responsibilities of the various sections, individual officers and others involved in the inspection process.

[Section 7](#Section7) sets out the way we prepare for the local estate inspection, further defining Community Housing roles, how we agree the number of inspections and details how this is communicated to all interested parties.

[Section 8](#Section8) covers our policy position in respect of the actual or physical estate inspection.

[Section 9](#Section9) this section covers the period after the inspection (post inspection or follow-up), including follow-up actions, how we communicate the findings to our customers and how we will act on the information.

[Section 10](#Section10) looks at the process of identifying Local Initiative Projects and applying for project funding.

[Section 11](#Section11) This final section looks at continuous improvement in the process by defining the responsibility and methods for performance monitoring, and setting the timescales for review.

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**Definitions**

***“The Policy”*** is the East Lothian Council Estate Inspection Policy.

***“Local Housing Area”*** refers to the council houses managed by one of the six local offices covering the main towns and associated villages and recognised as: Dunbar, Haddington, Musselburgh, North Berwick, Prestonpans and Tranent

***“Local Housing Partnership”*** in the context of this policy is the term given to a group established in each of the local housing areas to discuss local initiatives and improvements.

***“Estate”*** refers to the houses and communal areas within each of the local Community Housing Officer’s patch. The officer’s patch may cover more than one estate.

**The term *“Patch”*** is used to describe the street, location, the amount of stock and the size and style of property covered by each Community Housing Officer.

**The *“Communal Areas”*** apply to the areas shared by everyone. These areas can be found within a tenemental or flatted type building – for example a common stairway or landing area. The term may also be used to describe the backcourts, refuse or bin / store areas, as well as forming part of the landscaping in and around the tenemental or flatted type properties. Within the local estates, communal areas are also identified as play areas, open parkland or shrub areas.

**A *“house”*** is a building or any part of a building, which is occupied as a separate dwelling, and includes any garden or other structure within the boundary of the house.

***“Inspection process”*** refers to the overall process of inspecting an estate from planning the inspection through to follow-up.

The term ***“Inspection”*** describes the process of inspecting an area or patch to ensure the problems or issues are identified and reported to relevant parties as appropriate.

**The “*Inspection area”*** refers to the area being inspected with each housing patch divided into manageable areas.

**An *“Area profile”*** is the term used to describe the make up of each local inspection area and takes into account streets, house types and communal areas within each patch, as well as the problems and issues associated with that area.

**The *“Area Assessment Form”*** describes the document sent out by Community Housing Officers to local tenant and resident groups and used to initiate the estate inspections. When it’s completed the form will help identify the service providers who should be involved in the estate inspection. It will also provide an opportunity to identify any local initiative.

**The term *“Local Initiative”*** is used to describe a solution or improvement to a local area and identified as part of the inspection process requiring an additional funding stream of not more than £30,000.

***“ELTRP”*** is the East Lothian Tenants and Residents Panel. As the umbrella organisation for local tenants and residents associations in East Lothian, ELTRP plays an important and active role in the consultation process.

**A *“Tenants and Residents Association”*** can be formed to resolve a local housing or related issue. Some tenants and residents associations will dissolve after a solution has been found while others remain active and represent the local community in a number of ways.

***“Neighbourhood Volunteer”*** the term used to describe an active local tenant who is willing to offer their time and assistance to build interest or become involved in the local community. This person is generally associated with areas where no active local tenants and residents associations or community groups are operating.

**The term *“Community Groups”*** as used in the document relates to any statutory or voluntary group registered and working in the local area, for the benefit of the local community in general and tenants in particular.

***“Partnership Agencies”*** are those agencies that have agreed to participate in the estate inspection process and may or may not have a statutory duty to provide a service.

***“Our Customers”*** the term used to describe anyone who accesses or uses a service provided by the council. In relation to the estate inspection, our customers will include all local tenants and residents who use any of the facilities available with the local estate.

**East Lothian Council** (ELC) is referred to as ***“we”***or ***“us”*** throughout this policy.

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###### Section 1: Background

##### Background

The Community Housing and Property Maintenance Section have embarked on a comprehensive programme of Business Change to address service failures identified by both Communities Scotland (the regulator for housing services) and our customers. The current failures within the estate inspection process are of real concern to tenants and residents who have to live in areas where they have identified the need for improvement and action.

As a result a key element of this programme centres around improving the way we involve customers, other sections and external agencies in the estate inspections process. It has been recognised that closer involvement with local tenants and residents and community groups during this inspection process can benefit the local community by bringing a sense of pride back to the local area.

As part of our commitment to tenant participation ELTRP have been involved in developing this policy framework at its inception through to consultation and final adoption.

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# **Section 2: Purpose of the Policy**

##### The Estate Inspection Policy will:

* Replace our current Policy on Estate Walkabouts introduced in 2000.
* Explain the legislative background to the management of estate inspections.
* Describe the underlying principles of our approach to the management and maintenance of the local estates.
* Give direction and consistency to our position in terms of both the management and maintenance of local estates.
* Define timescales prior to inspection and for feedback and completion of work after the estate inspection takes place.
* Provide the framework to in time introduce estate standards that reflect the needs and aspirations of the local community, which will encourage future investment in local estate areas.
* Establish clearly the responsibilities of both ELC and our customers throughout the estate inspection process.
* State the types of communication to be adopted in our approach to estate inspections.
* Ensure Tenant Participation is a vital element of estate inspections. As part of our commitment the Estate Inspection Policy will ensure that local tenant groups and individual tenants are given every opportunity to participate in the estate inspection taking place in their local area.
* Provide the basis for the identification of local initiatives and the process to be adopted to ensure local initiatives reflect the needs of the local community.
* Open up ways to ensure continuous improvement in the estate inspection process is achieved, working towards a greater involvement of others in the delivery of the service and in improving the local area.

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##### Section 3: Principles of the Policy

The following principles underpin the Policy:

* To recognise the lead role the local Community Housing Officer plays in the estate inspection process, ensuring that input from other sections and community groups contribute to the success of the inspection.
* To develop an area profile that will be used to prioritise each inspection area within the Officer’s patch. The priority awarded will be agreed in conjunction with the local area manager and will equate to the maximum number of inspections to be undertaken in each area.
* To ensure that all our customers and other partnership agencies involved in the process have an equal opportunity to participate in shaping how the estate inspection process is delivered.
* To explore issues and points of concern within a local area and to develop positive relationships and trust between tenants and our representatives through regular estate inspections.
* To develop a unified approach to achieving effective, meaningful and regular communications between customers and other partnership agencies. We want to ensure all aspects of estate inspections are fully covered so that we can target issues and identify the responsible section or appropriate agency to be involved in the process.
* To ensure that our customers and other partnership agencies have an opportunity to feed into the process for identifying local initiatives and get involved in planning future local initiative activities.
* To improve the services provided to our local communities and to consider ways in which we can continuously improve on the delivery.

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###### Section 4: Legal Framework

#### We must ensure that we are legally compliant in all aspects of our work. There are a number of legislative requirements that we have considered in the development of our Estate Inspection Policy.

#### 4.1 Legislation

[The Housing (Scotland) Act 2001](http://www.opsi.gov.uk/legislation/scotland/acts2001/106) requires the local authority to put in place a [Local Housing Strategy](http://www.eastlothian.gov.uk/content) (LHS). The LHS sets out the council’s plans for future investment in the housing stock and for developing a process of encouraging tenant and resident involvement in housing issues and to incorporate this into a successful approach to sustainable communities. The LHS is also linked to the council’s Community Planning process and the Corporate Plan for Community Involvement.

The Housing (Scotland) Act 2001 also places a duty on local authorities to consult with their tenants in respect of housing and related services and policies. Tenant involvement is recognised as a vital element in our consultation process.

The [Local Government in Scotland Act 2003](http://www.opsi.gov.uk/legislation/scotland/acts2003/20030001.htm), requires local authorities to establish a means of consulting service providers and user groups to ensure that there is no duplication of services in the local area and that all service activities are following Community Planning guidelines.

Under the [Environmental Protection Act 1990](http://www.opsi.gov.uk/ACTS/acts1990/Ukpga_19900043_en_3.htm) the local authority must carry out regular inspections and tackle issues such as litter and dumping waste. It must also remove identified waste material found in and around local estates.

The [Dog Fouling (Scotland) Act 2003](http://www.opsi.gov.uk/legislation/scotland/acts2003/20030012.htm), also requires us to regularly inspect and / or patrol the local public and communal areas and to issue fixed penalty notices to owners who allow their dog to defecate and fail to remove immediately the faeces from the place.

#### 4.2 Regulators

The [Local Government Act 1992](http://www.opsi.gov.uk/acts/acts1992/Ukpga_19920019_en_1.htm) (as amended) sets a duty for us to publish statistical data relating to our performance in line with Statutory Performance Indicators (SPI’s).

Under the Local Government in Scotland Act 2003, we have a duty to secure Best Value in all aspects of our work. Best Value is continuous improvement in the performance of our functions, and is monitored by Audit Scotland.

Similarly, under the Housing (Scotland) Act 2001, [The Scottish Housing Regulator](http://www.scottishhousingregulator.gov.uk/) carries out the Regulation and Inspection of local authorities to ensure that high standards are maintained in all aspects of the housing service.

**4.3 Regulatory Standards**

The policy also acknowledges proposals to develop Community Environmental Standards, which, if introduced, will see local authorities measured against agreed community environmental targets laid down in the Statutory Performance Indicators.

**4.4 The Scottish Housing Quality Standard**

The [Scottish Housing Quality Standard](http://www.communitiesscotland.gov.uk/stellent/groups/public/documents/webpages/cs_006672.hcsp) (SHQS) as defined by The Scottish Executive in 2004, sets out a decent homes standard, which all socially rented accommodation in Scotland must meet by 2015. The requirements of this Standard are clear and highlight the need for local authorities to consider ways to improve the standard of its stock. The SHQS also extends to the common access or shared access areas.

The SHQS also require local authorities to produce Regeneration Strategies to ensure Neighbourhoods have a sustainable future. This requires local authorities to take into account neighbourhood and estate issues and to consider tenant priorities, which may include wider community safety schemes.

#### 4.5 Health and Safety

The [Health & Safety at Work etc Act 1974](http://www.communitiesscotland.gov.uk/stellent/groups/public/documents/webpages/cs_014235.hcsp) is the basis of health and safety law in the United Kingdom. This sets out a general duty for us to consider the health and safety of all employees, sub-contractors and members of the public in all aspects of our work. The Management of [Health & Safety at Work Regulations 1999](http://www.opsi.gov.uk/si/si1999/19993242.htm) make explicit requirements that we must meet to manage health and safety under the 1974 Act. The main thrust of these regulations is that we carry out risk assessments in our places of work, and that we provide adequate health & safety training to our employees.

4.6 Equalities

The 2001 Act places a duty on us to meet equal opportunity requirements when carrying out our housing functions. Equal opportunity is defined in the [Scotland Act 1998](http://www.opsi.gov.uk/ACTS/acts1998/19980046.htm), and refers to all areas of equality.

Under the [Disability Discrimination Act (DDA) 1995](http://www.opsi.gov.uk/acts/acts1995/1995050.htm), we as landlords must not discriminate against disabled people in the management of our tenancies. In addition to this, the [DDA 2005](http://www.opsi.gov.uk/acts/acts2005/20050013.htm), places a duty on us to promote disability equality through the delivery of our services.

The Race Relations Act 1976 makes it unlawful for us to discriminate against any individual, on racial grounds, in the services that we provide. [The Race Relations (Amendment) Act 2000](http://www.opsi.gov.uk/acts/acts2000/20000034.htm) mirrors the DDA 2005, in that we must *promote* race equality in carrying out our functions.

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###### Section 5: Related Policies, Procedures & Standards

The estate inspection process touches on many areas of our services. For instance, the Antisocial Behaviour Policy sets out the way we and others will tackle issues relating to Antisocial Behaviour, for example graffiti, dog fouling, as well as noise and other neighbour related problems. The Estate Inspection Policy recognises the many related policies and services that have been designed to meet the needs of the community and outlines some of the main links below.

#### 5.1 Policies

All of our tenants have either an [East Lothian Scottish Secure Tenancy (SST)](http://www.eastlothian.gov.uk/documents/contentmanage/ELSST-6662.PDF) or an East Lothian Short Scottish Secure Tenancy (SSST), which sets out their rights and responsibilities under the Housing (Scotland) Act 2001.

The rights and responsibilities of those housed in temporary accommodation by the Council are also stated in an ELC Occupancy Agreement.

The repairs responsibilities are set out in the [Tenants Handbook](http://www.eastlothian.gov.uk/documents/contentmanage/TENANTS%20GUIDE%20SECTION%20THREE-12493.PDF) and included in the *ELC Repairs and Maintenance Policy.* Whilst repairs to individual tenancies are not considered part of the inspection process, repairs to communal areas should be recorded and the appropriate action identified as part of the inspection.

It is expected that all staff undertaking work, as part of the estate inspection procedure will have received health & safety training appropriate to their workplace/s. Appropriate risk assessments have been carried out for job roles, job locations, and specific risk issues. Furthermore, we have corporate and more specific departmental safety policies in place.

We have produced a [Tenant Participation Strategy](http://www.eastlothian.gov.uk/documents/contentmanage/TP%20Strategy%202007-2010%20Art03-19382.PDF) in conjunction with [East Lothian Tenants & Residents Panel](http://www.eastlothian.gov.uk/content/0%2C1094%2C656%2C00.html). This sets out how we will ensure that tenants continue to shape our housing policies and services.

##### The [Voids Management Policy](http://www.eastlothian.gov.uk/documents/contentmanage/Voids%20Management%20Policy-16041.PDF) details how we manage empty properties. The way, in which we deal with outgoing and incoming tenants, is also a contributing factor in the local estate. The introduction of an effective Voids Management Policy will reduce the time taken to allocate a property and contribute to the overall appearance of the local area.

The number of empty properties can have a negative impact on a local area, however the standards adopted in the Voids Management Policy will ensure that each local area will have few empty properties for any length of time. This in turn will help ensure that in an area where there is a high turn over of property the likelihood of this impacting on the local environment will be kept to a minimum.

To ensure there is little impact on the area, empty properties should be identified and brought back into use as soon as possible. The minimum lettings standards laid down in the Voids Management Policy have been agreed and put in place to reduce the time empty houses are left vacant and to allow the allocation process to be completed within a reasonable timescale, reducing the risk of refusal and lessening the impact on the local area.

#### 5.2 Procedures

As part of the overall Business Change Project, detailed Estate Inspection Procedures are accessed using Nimbus Control-ES software.

We follow the *Estate Inspection procedures* when planning and conducting an estate inspection.

We follow the *Post Inspection Review procedures* when following-up after an estate inspection has been carried out.

We follow the *Local Initiative Process procedures* when identifying and requesting Local Initiative funding.

Any recharges resulting from work carried out on behalf of tenants, are contained in the ELC Recharges Procedure, the Tenants Handbook also contains further information on this, and again in the ELC Repairs and Maintenance Policy.

#### 5.3 Standards

#### Each local area will be measured or graded against a number of standards. In general the first of the standards applied will be the visual appearance of the local estate. Other standards also used as part of the grading system include:

* The quality of Greenspace / hard / soft landscaped areas
* Input from the Elected Member based on enquiries / complaints
* Tenants and Residents Groups, and Tenants concerns
* Feedback from completed Area Assessment Forms

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**Section 6: Role****s and Responsibilities**

This section outlines the roles and responsibilities of the various departments and sections within East Lothian Council in respect of estate inspections. It should be noted that the various departments and sections of the Council have a range of responsibilities beyond those outlined in this policy.

**6.1 Corporate Responsibility of East Lothian Council**

At a Corporate level our aim is to safeguard, promote and improve the social, economic, environmental and democratic wellbeing of all the people of East Lothian and for future generations.

To achieve this aim we will:

* Ensure we deliver quality services in a quality environment and contribute to the sustainable development of the area;
* Work to address and reduce deprivation, disadvantage and inequality within the local community;
* Work with others to achieve more for the area and act as the natural focus of civic life in East Lothian, giving leadership and voice to the community's concerns, ensuring its views influence local, national and, if necessary, international agencies

**6.2 Community Housing & Property Management**

Within the Council, the Community Housing & Property Maintenance Section has the responsibility for developing and delivering the Estate Inspection Policy. This will help underpin our corporate aims and objectives, for example, through tenants and residents identifying the need for change and helping deliver solutions to bring about improvements in their area(s).

In an effort to reduce deprivation and inequality at a local community level, regular estate inspections will generate improvements to the local environment and in turn encourage future investment.

Procedures are in place that will underpin the Policy to ensure the effective operation of the estate inspection process. The Community Housing & Property Maintenance Section will set out the inspection timetable, organise, arrange each inspection and facilitate the involvement of others in that inspection.

The Community Housing & Property Maintenance Section will monitor the outcomes of each inspection and produce action plans where necessary to address any issues that are identified and to ensure continuous improvement.

**6.3 Environmental Services**

The Environmental and Consumer Services Section has a wide remit in protecting and enhancing the conditions for the residents of East Lothian and of the environment of East Lothian and beyond.

The Service handles a wide range of issues including: noise, dust, odour, smoke, drainage, abandoned vehicles, refuse dumping, pests and vermin and housing disrepair (private sector). They also monitor air quality, radiation and contaminated land and problems encountered are tackled to obtain improvements.

Many of the areas covered by Environmental Services form part of the local estate and, as such, the Community Warden and Environmental and Consumer Services have an important role to play in the estate inspection process. It is therefore vital that these services are involved in the estate inspection process.

Their attendance on the estate inspection will be by invitation from the Community Housing Officer and will be based on the concerns identified by the local Community Housing Office, local tenants and residents associations and other service users.

**6.4 Landscape and Countryside**

The Landscape and Countryside Division is part of the Community Services Department and is responsible for carrying out a wide range of functions including grounds maintenance, community support and litter management activities.

The Landscape and Countryside Division also assists in the development of new facilities such as play areas, community parks and burial grounds and provide a public service that impacts on every single member of the East Lothian public.

It is recognised the Landscape and Countryside Division is responsible for a number of areas which also form part of the local estate inspection and it is important that their involvement in this process is maintained. Their attendance on the estate inspection will be by invitation from the Community Housing Officer and will be based on the concerns identified by the local Community Housing Office, local tenants and residents associations and other service users.

**6.5 Transportation**

Our Transportation Division is responsible for the management and maintenance of the public road network including bridges, culverts and street lighting columns throughout East Lothian.

The Transportation Division also provides winter maintenance cover as well as transport services, road safety improvements, road development control and design services and aim to provide the people of East Lothian and visitors, with a high quality service.

Similar to the other sections mentioned the Transportation Division has an important role to play in the estate inspection process. Their attendance on the estate inspection will be similar to those referred to in 6.3 and 6.4.

**6.6 Elected Members**

Elected Members represent both the local authority and the constituents in their local ward, and are seen by many as the link between the community and the council. Through local councillor surgeries, constituents, both active and non-active in the community, will have the opportunity to raise issues with their local councillor that can be fed into the estate inspection process.

As more than one Elected Member covers each of the inspection areas, the Community Housing Officer will ensure any issues identified by the Elected Members are transferred onto the appropriate form. Elected Members are not required to take part in the actual estate inspection, information on outcomes will be provided by the Community Housing Officer.

Elected Members have a role to play in identifying local issues and possible improvements and will be able to put these suggestions forward to the local Community Housing Office.

**6.7 Tenants and Residents Associations and/or other Local Groups**

It is not possible to ensure each of the inspection areas will have an active Tenants and Residents Association or other community group. Furthermore it is not always possible to ensure that other voluntary groups active in the area will be willing to take part in the inspection process; it is nevertheless essential to ensure that procedures are in place that will allow individuals and groups to participate in the estate inspection process should they wish to.

Local Tenants and Residents Associations and tenant involvement are generally seen as the key to the success of this policy. The local group will undertake the lead role in identifying issues around the local estate and will also have significant influence in any suggestion put forward to bring about an improvement to the local area.

In the absence of an established tenants group or community group, efforts will be made by Community Housing staff and ELTRP to promote Neighbourhood Volunteer schemes and promote individual tenant involvement.

As a key partner tenant involvement in the estate inspection is seen as vital to its success although the local Community Housing Officer will lead the process.

**6.8 The Estate Inspection – Core Group**

The make up of the Core Group will be dependent on the issues identified in the completed assessment form or, where none are available, the Community Housing Officer’s knowledge of the area. The group will report to the local Community Housing Officer and will assist the Community Housing Officer in carrying out the inspection. As well as the role and responsibilities outlined above, each member of the group will be responsible for feeding back information on the inspection outcomes to other officers and / or residents.

**6.9 Other sections / services involved in the Inspection**

It’s clear that the inspection process involves a number of sections outwith the Community Housing and Property Maintenance Section. For example, local Community Planning structures have been established to bring together a greater number of service providers to consider local needs.

Each of the identified sections and/or services will be encouraged to work within an agreed standard and timescales. The Estate Inspection policy will allow the Community Housing Manager to take further action to ensure that delays in tackling identified issues are kept to a minimum.

The policy will also ensure that regular updates on outcomes will be provided by other departments and reported back to the local groups prior to future inspections being undertaken.

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**Section 7: Pre-Ins****pection (Preparation)**

The Community Housing Manager and Community Housing Officers in each of the local offices are responsible for the management and implementation of the Estate Inspections process for their particular area.

This section of the policy looks at the Pre-Inspection phase and identifies the preparation aspects that will be carried out before the inspection is carried out.

**7.1 The Community Housing Manager –**

Community Housing Managers are responsible for the day-to-day management of the local area Community Housing Offices and the staff employed there. The Community Housing Managers also ensure that local tenants and residents groups and other community groups in their area have an opportunity to raise their concerns about local estate issues with community housing staff.

**7.2 Community Housing Officers –**

Seen as the link between the Community Housing and Property Maintenance Section and the local community, the Community Housing Officer is responsible for the effective management of the stock and tenancies in their housing patch. They will also monitor the overall appearance of the local estate.

The local Community Housing Officer will be responsible for defining the estate inspection areas and for initiating the inspection process.

**7.3 Defining the Patch size, location**

Not all areas share similar problems or characteristics. More often than not the issues identified in one area may be completely different to those in another street or block. Local knowledge plays a large part in defining the area and in carrying out the estate inspection. In general, each area should allow the visual inspection to be completed within a reasonable timeframe.

The Community Housing Officers, in conjunction with the Community Housing Manager, will divide their patches into smaller, more manageable areas. This will reduce the time taken to inspect an area and allow a more focused inspection to be carried out.

**7.4 Agreeing the number of Inspections**

As part of the inspection process each of the inspection areas will be graded to determine the number of inspections to take place each year. The Community Housing Manager and Community Housing Officer will carry out an initial visual appraisal of each area as part of this process. However the eventual outcome will be based on a number of factors, including all or some of the standards mentioned earlier.

**7.5 Publishing the Inspection Programme schedule**

Once the grade and the corresponding number of inspections for each inspection area has been agreed, the local Community Housing Manager / Community Housing Officer will ensure the information is made available to the various local groups and active individuals in the area.

Ideally inspections will be undertaken during the spring, late summer and autumn months, and feed into the planned maintenance and improvement programmes for the area.

Whilst the programme of inspections will be governed by the grade awarded, the timing of each inspection will depend on the availability of staff and others to attend.

Community Housing Managers and Officers will produce a timetable of estate inspections for their patch. The overall timetable for each area will be made available to local groups and displayed in the Reception Area at each local Community Housing Office.

**7.6 Pre – Inspection Communication**

Communication during the estate inspection procedures will focus on finding out what the issues are. This will allow service users and community groups to identify their concerns and to feed into the inspection process.

More than one format of communication may be required to achieve successful outcomes and there is no compulsion on any customer to complete one of the forms. Pre-inspection communication can also include any one or a mixture of the following formats: -

* **Meetings:** - Public etc.
* **Written:** - Newsletters, *Homefront,* etc.
* **Telecommunication:** - Telephone etc.

**7.7 Notification of an Inspection**

With the timing of the Inspection agreed, the Community Housing Officer will send out notification and an Area Assessment Form to local groups to start the Inspection process. This process will commence: -

* **Six** **weeks prior to the inspection:** the Assessment Form is made available inviting local groups, individual tenants etc, to complete and return to the local office.
* **Four weeks prior to the inspection:** completed Assessment Forms collated, and used to identify who should attend the estate inspection.
* **Two weeks prior to the Inspection:** the Community Housing Officer informs others of date, time, meeting place or gathering point, area covered and an estimate of how long the inspection will take.

In areas where no active groups are operating, neighbourhood volunteers will be encouraged to take part. A register of local neighbourhood volunteers will be available at the reception area in local offices to give individual tenants an opportunity to register their interest in taking part in the process.

**7.8 Deciding who attends**

The Community Housing Officer will be responsible for establishing a core group of attendees for each inspection area. The group will normally include Community Housing Officer, a representative from the local Tenants & Residents Association or a neighbourhood volunteer, other members will depend on the issues identified and the availability of staff.

**7.9 Actions before an estate inspection**

Where other sections identified are unavailable to attend, the Community Housing Officer will forward the information onto them, highlighting the issues raised asking for a detailed response in terms of action and timescale.

Feedback from all other sections will be made available to the group at the time of the Inspection or as soon as possible thereafter.

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**Section 8: Esta****te Inspection**

This section looks at the actual estate inspection.

In time the introduction of the grading system and Estate Standards will assist in identifying areas of concern, allowing the Community Housing Officer to concentrate efforts in areas with a higher level of reported problems.

**8.1 Identifying Issues**

The completed Area Assessment Form will enable the Community Housing Officer to identify major issues or areas of concern, also the other departments or sections to be included in the estate inspection.

**8.2 Identifying Roles and Behaviour of inspection team members**

**Identifying the Core Group and their role: -**

* **Community Housing Officer:** takes the lead role and records the issues raised. Other members of the group report to this officer for information and advice on the action needed.
* **Elected Member:** is aware of issues around the local estate and will be able to put forward proposals through the Community Housing Officer: their involvement in the Core Group is not always necessary.
* **Tenants and Residents Representatives:** help to identify areas of concern. The Tenants and Residents representative would also assist in passing information to other residents on outcomes.
* **Repairs Officer:** the issues identified may mean the Repairs Officer is routinely required on the planned inspection.
* **Landscape & Countryside, Cleansing, Transportation and Environmental Services Officers:** In a similar role to that of the Repairs Officer, representatives would be invited to attend the estate inspection when appropriate. However the information on the identified issues will be forwarded onto them to allow them to feedback to the group on their planned course of action.
* **Antisocial Behaviour Officer:** The link between the Community Housing Services and our Police Liaison Officer. Would respond to cross-tenure housing-related incidents of antisocial behaviour, in accordance with our Antisocial Behaviour Policy and Procedures.
* **Community Warden:** working in the community, this officer would be the link between Environmental Services and Community Housing. They would be made aware of the issues and would be able to take steps to address these before the inspection takes place.

From time to time other sections or departments would be invited to take part in an estate inspection, however their involvement will be by prior arrangement and will be at the discretion of the Community Housing Officer.

**Behaviour of the group during the inspection:**

* It is not envisaged that the group’s activities or behaviour will cause concern, nevertheless whilst carrying out an estate inspection, the group will act in a reasonable manner and avoid confrontation at all times.
* The Community Housing Officer has overall responsibility for the group and where a member of the group acts in a disruptive or abusive manner the Community Housing Officer will call a temporary halt to the inspection and ask the member to leave the group. Should the member refuse to leave, the inspection will not continue. As an alternative the Community Housing Officer may complete the inspection using the information contained in the Area Assessment form.

**8.3 Carrying out the Inspection**

The Estate Inspection is based on the visual appearance of the area. It is not possible to undertake an inspection of a more physical nature. The Community Housing Officer should ensure members of the group do not put themselves or others at risk by attempting to carry out more than this visual inspection.

The route taken during the inspection will depend on a number of factors such as the type of issue raised, the availability of specialist staff and the number of council owned properties in the area. Local knowledge of the area will also be an important aspect of the route taken. In areas with low numbers of council owned property, the completed area assessment form will be used in place of the visual inspection. In areas with no council owned property, Community Housing has no input or responsibility for property in these areas, therefore no inspection will be undertaken; however the information would be passed to the appropriate section(s).

**8.4 Recording of Issues, including photographic evidence**

The Community Housing Officer will prepare a schedule for the group based on the information contained in the completed Area Assessment Forms. During the inspection, the Community Housing Officer will record the inspection and the action necessary. Feedback from other sections will be incorporated into the schedule and allow the Community Housing Officer to provide the group with a full record of the meeting.

Photographic evidence will also be used to provide a visual record of issues. This type of evidence would be vital in identifying health and safety issues such as roads or fencing in a dangerous state of repair or where immediate work is required to rectify a problem.

**8.5 Actions and Timescales to progress issues identified**

The role of the Core Group in agreeing actions and timescales is fundamental to the success of the estate inspection process. It is accepted that a significant number of the issues identified will come under the remit of other departments or sections. These sections must ensure that the actions identified are carried out within a reasonable timescale and that effective communications are in place should difficulties in meeting timescales arise, or if the nature of the work has to change.

Although responsibility for communicating progress lies with the section carrying out the work, where it is felt an action is outstanding or has been unduly delayed, the local Community Housing Manager can further the progress of this action and request a reason why this has not been fulfilled.

While every effort will be made to address an outstanding action, it is recognised that other priorities or emergency work will impact on issues identified and this could result in a delay. Should an action remain outstanding at the time of the next inspection, the Community Housing Manager will raise this and obtain an update from the section concerned.

**8.6 Dealing with other issues during the Inspection**

Every effort will be made to identify issues before the estate inspection takes place. Where an issue is identified during the inspection as being the responsibility of a member of the inspection group, this should be noted and the appropriate action agreed at the time of the inspection.

Where the issue is outwith the remit of the group, the Community Housing Officer will record this and ensure that the information is passed onto the appropriate section along with details of the action required.

If an issue requires immediate attention or has health and safety implications, the officer will take notes and advise the appropriate section for immediate action. If there are no health and safety implications, the issue will be picked up as part of the officer’s day-to-day duties or carried over to the next planned estate inspection, if appropriate.

If a member of the public approaches the inspection group to report a non-communal repair or other work relating to an individual tenancy, the Community Housing Officer should provide the appropriate contact details.

Repairs to individual tenancies remain tenants’ responsibility and are not covered by the Estate Inspection Policy.

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**Section 9: Post** **Inspection (follow-up)**

This section looks at the actions following the inspection. This includes communicating the results and agreed actions to local groups, elected members and higher management.

**9.1 Follow-up Community Housing Manager / Community Housing Officer**

Follow-on meetings between the Community Housing Manager and Housing Officers will be introduced to collate the information on the outcomes of each estate inspection.

The meeting will provide the Community Housing Officer with an opportunity to discuss any local initiative put forward, raise awareness of planned actions and identify issues where additional input from the Community Housing Manager is needed.

**9.2 Post-inspection communication**

The inspection record produced by the Community Housing Officer will focus on the issues identified during the Inspection, the outcomes achieved and the solutions put forward or agreed to address the concerns raised.

An Inspection Programme Report will be produced for each local area office. This will identify progress against the inspection programme as well as highlight actions needed to improve the overall area. This report will be presented to the Local Housing Partnership Meetings.

**9.3 Monitoring Progress**

The inspection records will provide the basis for ongoing monitoring. It should be noted that this process is not about monitoring the performance of staff. It is about monitoring the progress of actions and improvements to the local area.

The grade awarded to each inspection area is not seen as permanent. The monitoring process will enable a review of the area to take place to ensure the appropriate grade is maintained.

**9.4 Follow up on Improvements or Local Initiatives**

The Community Housing Officer will collate the Local Initiatives identified during the estate inspection process and those included as part of the area assessment before forwarding these to the Local Housing Partnership . The Community Housing Manager will also have an opportunity to discuss the needs of the local areas and the value of each local initiative before the Initiative is submitted.

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**Section 10: Local In****itiatives scheme**

The Tenant Participation Strategy sets out the Community Housing and Property Management commitment to tenant involvement in all aspects of its service areas. In this section, the Estate Inspection Policy looks at the process for involving tenants and others in identifying possible improvements to the local area. The section will also cover the process for funding from the local initiative budget and how information on the outcome of the application will be fed back to the local group, the elected member and / or others involved in the local initiative project.

**10.1 Identifying the Local Initiative Projects**

Local Initiative Projects can play a vital role in the overall appearance of the local estates. The Local Initiative can be seen as a benefit to the local community and it is anticipated that on most occasions the project will require additional funding to achieve success.

The local initiative project can be identified during the estate inspection by the core group / inspection team recognising the need for an improvement to a local area. It may also be suggested before an inspection as part of the area assessment form.

**10.2 The Area Assessment Form**

The Area Assessment Form will give local tenants and residents groups, individual tenants or neighbourhood volunteers the opportunity to put forward suggestions for improvements to their local area. The Community Housing Officer will also have a degree of local knowledge through their daily contact with local tenants, which will provide them with an opportunity to put forward suggestions for consideration.

As part of the estate inspection process the Community Housing Officer will collate the completed area assessment forms and identify suggested improvements for consideration under the local initiative scheme.

To ensure continuity throughout the district, the Community Housing Officer will work with local groups operating in that area to complete the local initiative and funding request application form (see [appendix b](#appendixd)).

In areas where there are no active groups operating, or where there are no neighbourhood volunteers available, the Community Housing Officer and / or the local elected member will have an opportunity to put forward the suggested improvement to the Community Housing Manager. If the criteria is met the Community Housing Manager would ask the Senior Projects Officer to carry out a feasibility study on the project.

**10.3 Project Feasibility**

Once the projects application has been submitted, the Senior Project Officer will complete the design requirements and obtain the approvals needed. At this stage all design options will be considered along with the indicative costs of the initiative / project.

Once the project proposals have been considered and meet the appropriate criterion, the Senior Projects Officer will produce a report on the project. This will be sent with the application to the Local Housing Partnership to agree the proposal within the appropriate guidelines and prioritise each project. The partnership will also consider the order in which the projects will be undertaken.

**10.4 Local Housing** Partnership

A Local Housing Partnership consisting of the Community Housing Manager, Local Elected Member, Tenant representatives, Support Service Staff, will be established in each of the local area offices. The Local Housing Partnership will meet on a quarterly basis to review the local initiatives put forward and determine the priority for each. This team will also monitor the progress of ongoing projects. The Local Housing Partnership will also be able to co-opt other members (such as specialist / technical officers) onto the team should the need arise.

In areas where there are no active Tenants and Residents Associations an individual tenant may be invited to be part of the Local Housing Partnership. It is important that any individual tenant is given the skills and confidence to partake in these meetings through appropriate capacity building.

**10.5 Local Initiative Funding**

Local initiatives projects are seen as Capital Improvements ‘minor works’ and limited to a maximum cost of £30K per project. The type of projects put forward will be those that meet a local need or aspiration or help to resolve a local issue. In all cases the initiative will require funding through a Local Initiatives budget heading.

Larger projects identified through the Local Initiative process, such as those estimated to be in excess of the local initiative budget, could be seen as Major Environmental Improvements and will be separately approved and funded, if appropriate, by the relevant service area(s).

The local Initiative application form ([appendix b](#appendixd)) will become the feasibility and funding request and will be used as part of the prioritising process. The form is designed to allow the local group, the Community Housing Officer and others to draw up a rough plan of the proposed initiative. It will give an indication of the problem identified and the benefits that would be obtained from the initiative.

After the feasibility study has been carried out by the Senior Project Officer, the Local Housing Partnership will meet to consider all initiatives put forward for funding.

As local initiative projects vary it is not possible to state precisely what type of local project would achieve funding, however local initiative projects with ongoing revenue costs will not be considered.

**10.6 Project Management**

The Senior Project Officer will undertake the management of individual projects. The Local Housing Partnership will undertake the monitoring of all approved projects. The Senior Project Officer will move the project through the various stages of the process up to the completion. The Local Housing Partnership and local Tenants and Residents Associations will continue to play an active role in monitoring progress against the agreed timeline.

Tasks associated with the management of the local initiative project and undertaken by the Senior Project Officer include: -

* Working in conjunction with the Local Housing Partnership to produce a final design for the project
* Seeking permissions where necessary
* Notification of works
* Providing appropriate information to enable Local Housing Partnership / Local Office to carry out tenant / resident consultation
* Procurement of equipment / resources
* Budget cost control
* Monitoring of project development and reporting on a regular basis to the Local Housing Partnership

**10.7 Feedback on Local Initiatives**

The feedback on Local Initiatives will be provided at various stages in the submission. The Local Area Housing Manager will notify groups of projects that fail to meet the criteria. The Senior Project Officer will notify the Community Housing Manager / Officer on the outcome of the feasibility study on the project. Other feedback will be available from local offices.

The Local Housing Partnership will also contact the Community Housing Officer, and local group to advise on the successful and unsuccessful initiatives. A breakdown of the reason why a local initiative project was refused will be provided. This will allow local groups to re-assess the initiative and funding submission taking on board the reasons for refusal, so that they can submit a fresh application at a later date.

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###### Section 11: Continuous Improvement

While effective performance management should have a positive effect on the ongoing operation of the estate inspection process, it is important to ensure that actions are put in place to achieve continuous improvement through the life of this Policy.

#### 11.1 Equalities

## In monitoring our performance, we will relate the feedback to the racial and ethnic groupings, recognised disabilities, social groupings and other relevant personal attributes of our customers. In doing this, we will ensure that any disparities in service delivery can be identified and remedied.

#### 11.2 Health & Safety

#### We will continue to encourage our employees to report all incidents occurring during the inspection process, whether or not they have resulted in injury at the time. Community Housing Managers will encourage staff to take a proactive approach to Health and Safety and to report all incidents in an effort to prevent possible injury to others in the future.

We will provide employees with Health & Safety training appropriate to the role they play in the inspection process.

#### 11.3 Training

The Policy and its associated procedures will be launched with full training for all relevant staff. We will also provide sufficient training for all new employees. Regular refresher training on aspects of estate inspection as it relates to Health and Safety will also be provided for current staff, the frequency of which will be determined at the next review of the Estate Inspection Policy.

Through the performance monitoring process we will have an opportunity to identify areas of improvement in staff training needs. Through the Employee Development Review process, staff will have the opportunity to raise their concerns and any additional training needs. Community Housing Managers will ensure training needs are met where possible.

#### 11.4 Review

In light of the proposed changes in departmental structure, and any changes planned or otherwise in the Tenant Participation Strategy, it is felt that the Estate Inspection Policy and Procedures should be reviewed twelve months after the date of its launch.

Following this first review, the policy will be reviewed every three years, or to reflect any relevant legislation which is introduced within this time.

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Area Assessment Form Appendix a

Tenant Resident Group details: Housing Officer:

## Street / Area covered Completed form to be returned by:

|  |
| --- |
| **General Appearance: - Housing issues relating to Communal Areas / Shared Access Property** |
| Area covered | Issue Identified(Tick box) | **Comments**  | Area covered | Issue Identified(Tick box) | **Comments**  |
| **Communal Property / Area’s** | Access / Footpaths | *Broken**Dangerous* *Safety issues* |  |  | Fencing / Gates to common areas | *Damaged Dangerous**Safety issue* |  |  |
|  |  |
|  |  |
| Security door /entry system | *Damaged**Vandalised* *Missing* |  |  | Garden Huts / Pigeon Lofts | *Dangerous* *Encroaching onto common area* |  |  |
|  |  |
|  |
| Fire Doors | *Damaged* *Vandalised**Missing* |  |  | Trees on common areas | *Dangerous* *Safety issues**Vandalised* |  |  |
|  |  |
|  |  |
| Lighting to common areas | *Broken* *Dangerous* *Safety issues* |  |  | Lock-up / Garage areas | *Damaged Dangerous**Vandalised* |  |  |
|  |  |
|  |  |
| Stairs | *Rubbish dumped**Vandalised* *Not cleaned* |  |  | **Please state any other issue/s relating to your area:** |
|  |
|  | □ Damaged □ Dangerous □ Vandalised □ Safety issues □ Missing□ Overgrown □ Blocked □ Neglected□ Problem area □ Hazardous □ Unsafe □ Harmful □ Abandoned □ Dumped□ Smashed  |  |
| Render / Walls | *Damaged* *Loose* *Safety issues* |  |  |
|  |
|  |
| Drying area / Green | *Vandalised**Overgrown* |  |  |
|  |
| Bin store / Refuse area | *Damaged**Vandalised* *Not cleaned* |  |  |
|  |
|  |
| Roofs -Slates /Tiles -Chimneys | *Damaged*Missing / Loose *Safety issues* |  |  |
|  |
|
| Guttering /Rhones | *Blocked**Damaged**Missing* |  |  |
|  |
|  |
| Downpipes / Overflows |  *Blocked**Damaged* *Missing* |  |  |
|  |
|  |

|  |
| --- |
| **General Appearance relating to: - Environmental issues, Transport, Landscape & Countryside** |
| Area covered | Issues Identified(Tick box) | **Comments**  | Area covered | Issues Identified(Tick box) | **Comments t** |
| Non Housing Issues  | Footpaths / Pathways | *Un-even slabs**Pot holes**Weeds* |  |  | Roads / Road Condition | *Un-even surface**Pot holes**Hazardous* |  |  |
|  |  |
|  |  |
| Grass Verge | *Overgrown**Neglected**Weeds/ litter* |  |  | Lamp Posts / Street Lighting | *Damaged Dangerous**Vandalised* |  |  |
|  |  |
|  |  |
| Shrubs / Bedding Areas | *Vandalised Neglected**Weeds / litter* |  |  | Abandoned Vehicles | *Removal notice on vehicle* |  |  |
|  |
|  | *No notice fixed* |  |
| Play Areas | *Needing repair**Neglected**Damaged* |  |  | Bus Shelters | *Damaged Dangerous**Vandalised* |  |  |
|  |  |
|  |  |
| Public Access or Open Space area | *Problem area**Neglected**Weeds / litter* |  |  | Bottle Bank areas | *Damaged**Vandalised**Not cleaned* |  |  |
|  |  |
|  |  |
| Cleansing: Drains Refuse / Litter | *Blocked**Litter problems* |  |  | **Overall how do you rate the appearance of your local area?** |
|  | 1. ⬜ = **Good:** *little or no graffiti, no dog fouling or paper lying around, common / open areas are well maintained*
2. ⬜ = **Fair:** *there are some areas of graffiti, a few bits of waste paper / litter, some issues with dog fouling, common /open areas are ok.*
3. ⬜ = **Poor:** *large amount of graffiti, waste paper and dog fouling causing problems in / around the area, common / open areas look neglected*
 |
| Rubbish Dumping / fly tipping | *Problem area**Occasionally* |  |  |
|  |
| Anti-Social Behaviour Issues |
| **Issues identified** | Tick box | **Comments** |
| Vandalism / Graffiti | *Problem area**Occasionally* |  |  |
|  |
| Criminal activities | *Problem area**Occasionally* |  |  |
|  | **Suggestions / Improvements to Local Area**Please state: your proposal: |
| Under age drinking /Substance abuse | *Problem area Occasionally* |  |  |
|  |
| Abusive behaviourHarassment | *Problem area**Occasionally* |  |  |
|  |
| Dog Fouling | *Problem area* |  |  |
| *Other issues:* |
| Contact details: Name: Address: Phone: |

##### Local Initiatives - Suggested Improvements Date Submitted to Local Initiative Team: Appendix b

|  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Local area office involved | Community Housing Manager involved | Community Housing Officer involved | Local Elected Member Involved | Tenants and Residents group Involved | Date Submitted to Local Initiative Team |
|  |  |  |  |  |  |
| Brief description of Initiative including the purpose / benefits obtained, area and streets covered: - | Any additional reports in support of this project? |
| Yes | No |
| Any additional or ongoing costs associated with this project? |
| Yes | No |
| If yes what are those additional costs?  |
|  |
| Any additional information in support of this application: - | Has the project has met the criteria for funding? | Yes | No |
| Priority award recommended by CHO: | H M L |
| Date to Senior Projects Officer: |  |
| Signed offArea Manager: |

Project plan: - (preliminary sketch / drawing of project).

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| --- |
| **Project – Feasibility –** Outcomes |
| Detailed drawing preparedPlanning consent required | Yes | No  | Full Scheme / Work Approved Part Scheme / Work Approved | Yes  | No  | Proposed Start Date: |  |
| Yes  | No  | Yes  | No  |
| Full cost of project to be met within this financial period / budget | Yes  | No  | Project outwith tendering process | Yes  | No  | Proposed Completion Date: |  |
| Costs / Project Approved | Yes  | No  |
| Reason for refusal or change to funding request: -  | What if any additional information has been sought form Local Office?  |
| Additional information on: - feasibility of project; planning objections etc. |
| Signed:  | Contact details of project officer etc: - | Level of Priority agreed by Local Initiative Team |
| Print name:  | High □ Medium □ Low □ |
| Designation: | Additional contact: | Date Local office notified: |  |

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| --- | --- |
| **Estimate of costs involved:** | **Final breakdown of costs incurred:** |
| Estimated total: |  | Sub total: VAT: Total: |  |
|  |  |
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