

TENANT APPROVED

tenant talk

Falkirk Council Tenants' Magazine
Summer 2015 Edition No.3

PRide Awards 2014
Best External
Publication

CIPR

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£85m Investment in Your Housing





Hello and welcome back to Tenant Talk.

With this third edition of the magazine, we (the Editorial Panel) have some news to share with you.

After considering the responses to the Customer Satisfaction Survey, in which 77% of those who took part told us that the magazine was their preferred method of finding out what is happening in Housing Services, the decision has been taken to increase the production of the magazine. You will now receive a new edition of Tenant Talk every 3 months, bringing you even more news and information about your service.

Alongside the generous response from you, our readers, Tenant Talk has also received recognition on a national scale. We were honoured to receive the gold award for Best External Publication at last October's CIPR PRide Awards (Scotland). This was awarded by the Chartered Institute of Public Relations (CIPR), which is the recognised professional body for the public relations sector. You can read more about this on page 12.

These achievements are something we can all be proud of, as this is your tenant magazine, and is informed by the views of our customers.

If you have any suggestions about what you would like to see included in the magazine, please contact us by email at inspector.tenant@falkirk.gov.uk, or call 01324 590796.

Alternatively, you can write to us at Community Engagement Team, Suite 3, The Forum, Callendar Business Park, Falkirk, FK1 1XR.

Tenant Talk Editorial Panel:
Pearl Hastie, Liz Godfrey,
Mary MacDonald, Liz Jardine,
Natalie Terry.

£85m Investment in Your Housing



Improvements are making their way to tenants' homes, with the value set to reach £51m over the next three years.

Kitchen and bathroom replacements, roofing, roughcasting, and electrical work will be carried out with the aim ensuring all of our housing stock continues to meet the Scottish Housing Quality Standard. There will also be investment into energy efficiency for properties, and the installation of Carbon Monoxide detectors. This also ties in with our aims of meeting the Energy Efficiency Standard for Social Housing by 2020.

Another £34m will also be invested into delivering new and additional homes to help meet housing need.

Further progress will be made with our house building programme, with 89 new homes set to be created over the next two years, while money will also be spent on buying back ex-council properties. We hope to bring in around 80 to 90

properties a year through this method, in a push to increase our housing stock.

Councillor Gerry Goldie, spokesperson for Housing said: "Investment is vitally important in our housing stock, and we are only able to fund improvements from the rents we charge.

We have identified what the priorities are by speaking to a group of tenants who meet with the Property & Asset Management Team regularly to discuss how money is invested in our properties. The recent Tenant Satisfaction Survey of over 1000 tenants has also helped us identify what our tenants feel are the important issues."

In addition to our customers, needs are also identified through our Stock Condition Survey and Asset Management Database.

Content Bainsford resident Margaret Meek Interview Page 8

What you thought of Housing Services: Tenant Survey Page 6

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All change for Right to Buy

Do you know your right to buy your home is changing?

If you rent your home from us, then you will probably have a Scottish Secure Tenancy. If you are a Scottish secure tenant, you may have the right to buy your home at a discounted price.

This will depend on the circumstances of your tenancy, including when your tenancy started and what kind of property you live in. The level of discount you can receive will also vary depending on how long you have been living in your property.

The end of Right to Buy will come into effect on the 1st August 2016, which means you still have over a year to register your application to buy. This is due to a two year notice period that the Scottish Government has given to tenants across Scotland, including those in the Falkirk Council area. The notice period will end on the 31st July 2016. Any applications submitted on or up to this date will be processed in the usual way.

If you would like to find out more information on your right to buy, or require an application form, you can drop into or call your local One Stop Shop, email chs@falkirk.gov.uk, or take a look at our website www.falkirk.gov.uk

Eye On: Our Buy Back Scheme

- This scheme was approved in February 2013, with the view to purchase 100 one and two bedroom ex-council properties over two years.
- The agreed budget was set at £5M per year, with a target of buying 50 properties each year.
- In the first year, 69 properties were purchased in total.
- 77 properties were purchased in the second year.
- Approval has now been given by Executive to continue the Buy Back Scheme into its third year, with an increase to a £18M budget, and a target of 240 properties to be bought over the next three years.
- The properties bought through this scheme will increase our pool of homes for rent.

Guess Where? Win £50

If you think you have the answer, return this completed form for the chance to win a £50 shopping voucher for Asda. All correct answers will be entered into a prize draw, and the winner and two runners up will be drawn at our 'Charter Chat' event on the 25th of June.

Answer: _____

Name: _____

Address: _____

Tel No: _____

You must be 16 years of age or older to enter. Please leave your contact details so that we can get in touch with you if you win a prize. **All submissions must be entered by 19th June 2015.**

You can submit your answer by posting the completed form to the following address: Community Engagement Team, Suite 3.1, The Forum, Callendar Business Park, Falkirk. FK1 1XR.

Winners will be contacted personally, and will be announced in the next edition of Tenant Talk. Winners may be invited to have their photograph taken for Tenant Talk.

If you would like more information, you can contact the Community Engagement Co-ordinator on 01324 590796, or email inspector.tenant@falkirk.gov.uk

Tenant Talk Competition Winners!

Congratulations to the winners of our two featured competitions in the last edition of Tenant Talk!

Well done to Elizabeth Johnston, Mary Stephen, Laura McArthur, Gordon Irvine, Terry Buchanan, M Barr, K Johnstone, Doreen Moir, Lorna Watson, and Margaret-Anne Nicholls for guessing the link words correctly. Each of the winners received £10 voucher for Cineworld Cinemas.

Thank you to all of the local children who entered our 'draw the face on the pumpkin' competition. We had some excellent entries, and a lot of effort went in to creating the drawings. A very special well done to Jayme O'Reilly, Alana MacAllister, Sky Nicholls, Lewis Rowe, Amy Irvine, Kyle O'Reilly, Carla Morgan, and Cara Connolly. Each of the winners were awarded a £25 voucher for Smyth's Toy Store.



More options for you

Applicants on the waiting list for a council property may find that they have more options when searching for a home.

After a review of our Allocations Policy, which was done in consultation with tenants and applicants last year, one of the major changes to the policy is that properties are now being allocated equally to Home Seekers, Home Movers and Home Starters.

This change came into effect on the 1st April 2015, and reflects the reduction in the number of Home Seekers (those with homelessness priority) over recent years. This also brings our policy in line with what you, our customers, have told us.

Other changes which have come from this policy overview include a change to our appeals process from a three stage to a two stage process, to mirror our complaints procedures.

We will also be asking our customers their views on how we allocate properties in high rise flats, and how

Key Points:

- As at 31.03.15 there were 11,134 applicants registered for Home Spot
- 1,634 properties were let from 1 April 2014 to 31 March 2015
- Properties are advertised for Seeker, Mover, or Starter - if no eligible bids are received the property will be re-advertised the following week for All Groups. All applicants are then eligible to bid and the property will be let to the applicant who has the highest priority banding for the longest time.

we tackle our low demand properties. This will be reported in a future edition of Tenant Talk.

We would like to thank everyone involved in the consultation process last year, and hope to engage with our customers again in future consultations.

If you would like further information, please contact the allocations team on 01324 503200, or email them at allocations.team@falkirk.gov.uk.

Aim of the Allocation Policy:

- To give priority to those with the greatest housing need
- To make best use of the housing stock
- To give applicants more choice

Locals Make a Difference

Each of the 13 groups in the Falkirk Council area was given a £2000 grant to help them make improvements to their community. This grant was also given to the group of tenants at the Travelling Persons' Site, Castings Hostel, and Grangemouth Neighbourhood Office, as Grangemouth currently does not have any registered tenant groups.

Some of the community projects have now been completed. Read on for more on what the local people in your area have been up to.

Denny

Local children in Denny have benefitted from a new cycle lane, which has transformed a disused grassy area in Denny Town Centre. Macara Park Tenants' and Residents' Association are behind the project, and have put their £2000 grant towards the overall costs of the cycle path, which was also part funded by Carnegie UK. The project was promoted by the group with an official open day in April this year.



Tamfourhill

Benches have been purchased by Tamfourhill Tenants' & Residents' Association to make the play park area outside the Community Centre a more social space. This reinvigorated area also benefitted from a fun day, held by the group, to draw attention to the space, while also highlighting the history of the area. Part funded by Barnados, the fun day was held on World Heritage Day, and included activities such as treasure hunts, a memory gathering wall, and a visit from a Dig It! Scotland team who held an archaeological dig for kids. There was also face painting, a bouncy castle, ball pit, petting zoo, and an appearance from members of the cadet corps, as well as Animal Man's Mini Zoo, and Shetland ponies courtesy of Fantasy Pony Parties.

These projects have helped to inspire communities and groups right across the Falkirk Council area. With the introduction of the Make A Difference project awards panel due later this year, groups will have the chance to keep the momentum going by applying for small grants for local projects from the panel. If you would like more information on local tenants' and residents' groups, or about how to apply for a grant from the Make a Difference Panel, please contact the Community Engagement Team by emailing inspector.tenant@falkirk.gov.uk, or calling 01324 590796. You can also get more information at your local One Stop Shop.

Callendar Park

Callendar Park Tenants' & Residents' Association have been busy working with their local Neighbourhood Office to spruce up their community hall. With the new hall completed, the group used the grant to purchase furniture and furnishings for the suite of rooms. The community hall was officially opened by Provost Pat Reid last September, with Councillors Meiklejohn and Alexander also in attendance. The community hall is now used by the group to hold a number of events for tenants and residents in Callendar Park, with everything from keep fit classes to card making keeping locals entertained.



Want to know more about how your Housing Service is performing? Inspector Tenant returns to give you the latest news on consultations and tenant scrutiny.

Empty Property Standard

Following a consultation with our customers about the condition in which we let out our properties, we are delighted to announce that we have a new Lettable Standard for Council Housing. Thanks to your feedback, we now have an agreed standard that must be followed for all our properties being prepared for tenants to move in to. For more information, the Your New Home leaflet has all the information on what you can expect when you get the keys to your new property. You can pick this up at your local One Stop Shop.

Customer Led Inspection Report

We are happy to report that the Customer Led Inspection Report on Estate Management has been published. The findings and recommendations made by tenants and resident volunteers can be found online, or by picking up a copy of the report at your local One Stop Shop.

If you would like more information on what to expect when moving in to one of our properties, or on our Customer Led Inspections, you can contact inspector.tenant@falkirk.gov.uk, or call 01324 590796. Information will also be available from your local One Stop Shop.

Calendar Events

Tenants' & Residents' Forums
20th May, 26th August

6 - 8pm
Municipal Buildings

At your local Tenants' & Residents' Forum, customers from across the Falkirk Council area gather to discuss topical issues related to the Housing Service, and make sure we are performing well as your landlord. Come along to one or more of these open events.

For further information visit www.falkirk.gov.uk, or contact 01324 590796.



Rent payment - made easy

Did you know there are several ways to pay your rent? You can choose the option that suits you best, to make it as easy as possible. Pay:

- By direct debit
- Online at www.falkirk.gov.uk
- At a One Stop Shop
- By telephone
- By post
- By bankers standing order
- At any Post Office

To find out more about different ways to pay your rent, contact us by telephone on 01324 506999 (Falkirk area) or 01506 778778 (Bo'ness), or email revenues1@falkirk.gov.uk. All of these methods can also be used to pay your Council Tax.

Nominate Your Neighbour

Do you have a neighbour that goes the extra mile? Maybe they do your grocery shopping every week, or walk the dog while you're at work.

If you have a great neighbour who deserves recognition for their efforts, you can nominate them for a Good Neighbour Award. Simply write in or call us with your stories, and we'll try to make sure that your good neighbours are recognised.

Contact us by:
Writing to Community Engagement Team, The Forum, Callendar Business Park, Falkirk, FK1 1XR.
Calling us on 01324 590796.
Emailing us at inspector.tenant@falkirk.gov.uk

What you thought of Housing Services

Tenant Survey

Did you share your views with us?

Over 1000 tenants had the chance to tell us what they thought of their Housing Service through a telephone survey carried out in autumn 2014. Those who took part in the survey, which was carried out by independent company Research Resource, were given the chance to tell us their views on planned rent increases, and the way the service communicates and works with our customers.

The survey found that 77% of our tenants were satisfied with the overall service we provide as their landlord. This shows an increase from 75% in the previous survey, carried out in winter 2013/14.



Your Views on Rents

We asked your views on the proposed rent increase of 3.6%, which meant a rise of £1.99 per week for the average household. We found that 62% of you were satisfied with this increase, with those dissatisfied main concerns being pre-existing financial difficulties.

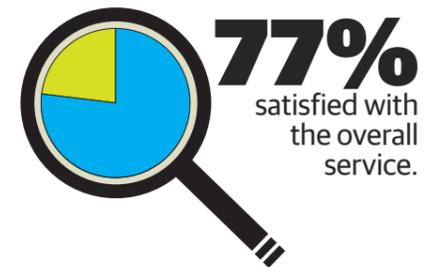


82% of you also told us that you felt the rent you paid provided good value for money, which is a significant rise from 69% in the previous survey.

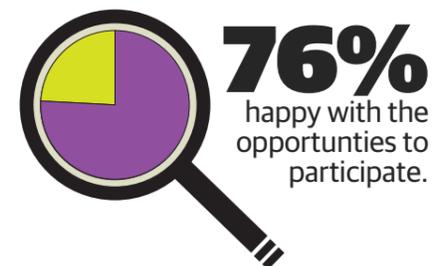
The rent increase of 3.6% came into effect on the 1st April 2015, making the average weekly rent £55.41.

Your Views on Communication

When it comes to communicating with your landlord, 72% of you said a personal letter would be a good way to get in touch with you when the issue is about your own tenancy, while 42% said this about the telephone.



When letting you know about decisions, changes to services, and events, 78% were happy with a personal letter, with 77% favouring the tenant magazine as a way to find out this information. In response to this, you will now receive a new edition of Tenant Talk magazine every three months.



You were also asked if you were satisfied with the opportunities available for participation in our decision making process. Of those asked, 76% told us that they were satisfied with these, which is a great increase on the results from the previous survey, which came in at 49%.

The results of this survey will be used to inform our next strategy on how we relate to and involve our customers.



The experts can help you by reviewing the money you have coming in and going out and help you explore your options for dealing with debt.

Time to talk about debt

If you are struggling to pay your rent or have other money worries, free and professional help is out there.

Falkirk Council provides free, confidential and impartial debt advice as do the three local Citizen Advice Bureaux in Denny, Falkirk and Grangemouth.

These organisations have helped over 1,000 people with debt issues and joined forces recently in a campaign to encourage local people in Grangemouth to seek money advice.

The experts can help you by reviewing the money you have coming in and going out and help you explore your options for dealing with debt.

If you are a Falkirk Council tenant, you can also seek help from Tenancy Sustainment Officers by contacting your local neighbourhood office. These officers are trained to help you tackle your financial problems.

Council Leader Craig Martin said: "We are aware of a growing number of local people who are struggling to make ends meet and who have been affected by welfare reform changes which have led to benefit reductions.

"We are working closely with our partners in the Citizens Advice Bureaux to help people avoid getting into debt but we also want to help those who may already have debts mounting as this can be a real source of worry and distress.

"The campaign aims to raise awareness of the services available locally and will help get the right advice to the right people in the right way at the right time."

The 'We Don't Bite' campaign was initially launched in Grangemouth



We can help if you have debt and we don't bite.

Our advice is:

- FREE
- CONFIDENTIAL
- IMPARTIAL
- INDEPENDENT

We will discuss your options with you to help find the right solution for you. So if you're worried about debt, please talk to us.

which has a well established range of council offices, the Grangemouth CAB and other organisations which can provide advice and support.

For those facing homelessness, our Money Advice Team can offer support. They will explore every option available to try to help you from becoming homeless. They can be contacted on 01324 503600.

For more information on money advice contact:

Debt Advice Team
Tel. 01324 506735
Email: debtadvice@falkirk.gov.uk

Grangemouth & Bo'ness CAB
Tel. 01324 483467
Email: bureau@grangemouthcab.casonline.org.uk

Margaret Meek Interview

A long term Bainsford resident with over four decades of community volunteering experience. Margaret's here to explain why she is so involved, and why you should be too.

You're a busy lady. What are the housing related groups you are involved in at the moment?

Right now, I regularly attend Housing Service's Tenants' & Residents' Forum. I've also recently completed work on the Customer Led Inspection on Estate Management, which is available in One Stop Shops if anyone would like to read it.

So Margaret, how long have you been involved in community work?

I've been working with what is now the Community Learning and Development service for over 40 years, and had 45 years service when I left CVS (Community Volunteer Service) Falkirk in 2008. I've been involved with various Housing Service related groups since the late 90's.

Wow, what a wealth of experience! Can you tell us a little more about what you've been involved in over the years?

I've taken part in a whole range of things, such as setting up Dawson Ward Tenants' & Residents' Association in 1997, and acting as a founding member of the Langlees, Bainsford and New Carron Village Community Council in 2003. I'm also a longstanding member of the Citizen's Panel, and a regular volunteer for various Housing Service groups.

Margaret, can you tell our readers why you think they should get involved?

They should get involved to make sure their voice is heard. It's also for the good of the community. We can have lovely houses inside and out, but tenants and residents need to get involved and participate to keep the community going. By getting involved, we can help to influence and improve Council services for the people who live here.

With such a long and diverse history of participating in local groups, we'd like to know what you enjoy most about working alongside Council and other services to improve your community.

What I enjoy most about working on these projects is the feeling that I am really helping other tenants and residents in the community. That has always been my main goal and concern. It's not just about houses, it's really about people. There is a real need for this type of action in the community. It's good to know that you can help to make a real difference.

Tenants step up to scrutiny



Local tenants and residents were given the opportunity to take part in scrutiny training.

The Stepping Up To Scrutiny training helped customer volunteers, local elected members, senior managers, and Housing Service staff to understand that scrutiny is about allowing our customers to inspect our performance, ask for evidence on the results we report, and suggest ways to deliver our services effectively.

This training programme was delivered earlier this year by the Chartered Institute of Housing (Scotland), and was tailored to the needs of Falkirk Council customers. The intention of this programme is to help tenants and their landlords to develop effective scrutiny arrangements, to reflect the Scottish Social Housing Charter.

As a result of the training, some tenant and resident volunteers have opted to set up a scrutiny

panel. If you are interested in joining this scrutiny panel, or for more information, please contact the Community Engagement Team on 01324 590797 or email inspector.tenant@falkirk.gov.uk



How can you get involved?

Falkirk Council's Inspector Tenant is here to help you tell us how Housing Services could improve its performance.

With your involvement, you will be able to tell us what you think about the services we provide, make suggestions on how we could do better, and check out how we are performing.

Inspector Tenant has various ways that you can get involved and help Housing Services keep you informed.

- Tenants' & Resident's Forum
- Open Days
- Questionnaires & Survey
- Exhibitions
- Comment Cards
- Consultation Register
- Customer Led Inspection
- Project Award Panel
- Registered Tenants' & Residents' Organisation
- Editorial Panel
- Estate Walkabouts
- Tenant Magazine
- And Much, More...

For more information on how you can get involved, contact Inspector Tenant on 01324 590796, email or inspector.tenant@falkirk.gov.uk www.falkirk.gov.uk/inspectortenant

Charter Chat



Win £10 High Street Vouchers

Howgate Shopping Centre
Thursday
25 June
10.30am - 4.30pm

Find out about the Scottish Social Housing Charter, and how your Housing Service is performing.

Charter Chat will focus on:

- Our customers.
- How you can help improve the service.
- The quality of your home.
- Value for money in rents and services.
- How your estate is managed.

Free entry and refreshments provided.

For more information on the charter, visit www.falkirk.gov.uk/charterchat



Family Mediation

Are you having problems at home? Family mediation may be the answer.

Our family mediation service aims to prevent young people aged 15 to 25 years from becoming homeless.

Family Mediation gives parents and young people the opportunity to discuss any issues they may have in a safe and confidential environment.

Our specially trained mediators can help your family communicate better, understand each other and resolve differences in a calm, constructive and positive manner. We aim to provide help to try and resolve your issues in order for your child to return home, or make it possible for you to support your child living independently.

Mediation is a completely voluntary process, with meetings taking place in the family home or at an agreed neutral venue. Our mediators are there to give impartial advice and encouragement, and to make sure that everyone involved is given equal opportunity to have their say.

Even if you think you will never agree, the attendance of a trained mediator can make a big difference to the kind of conversation you can have. There is nothing to lose by trying a different approach.

If you are interested in Family Mediation, you can call us on 01324 503700, or email us at mediation@falkirk.gov.uk.

Your Point of View

Do you want to get your opinions across to your landlord, and receive information on ways you can get more involved?

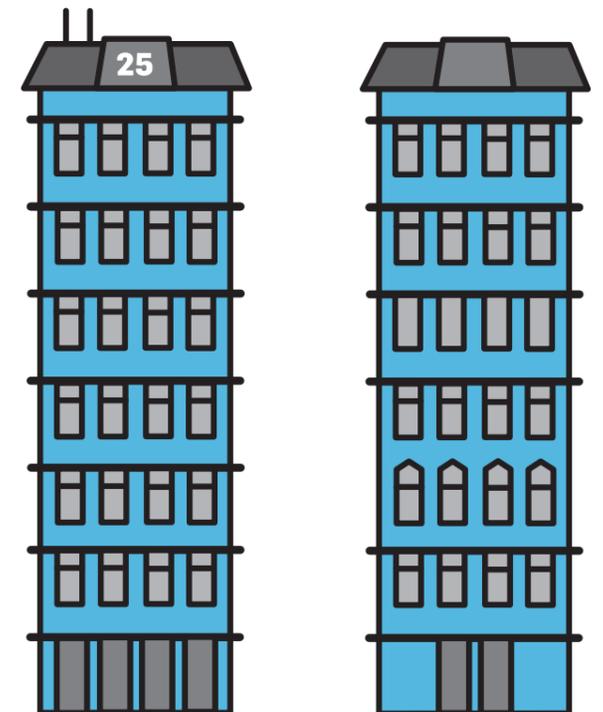
If this sounds like something you could be interested in, you can join Point Of View, our register of tenants and

other customers who are interested to hear more about services and events, and feedback to us what they think about our services. To join, and give us your Point of View, you can contact us by email at inspector.tenant@falkirk.gov.uk or call us on 01324 590796.



Spot The Difference Smyths Toy Voucher

Kids, can you spot the differences between the pictures below? Circle all five, and you might win a prize! There is a £25 voucher for Smyths to be won in each category: 6 and under, 7 - 10, and 11 to 16. Get looking and the prize could be yours!



Name: _____ Age: _____

Name of Parent/Guardian _____

Address: _____

Tel No: _____

You must be 16 years of age or under to enter, and have permission from a parent or guardian. Please leave your name and the contact details of who we should get in touch with if you win a prize. **All submissions must be entered by 19th June 2015.** You can submit your puzzle by posting it to the following address: Community Engagement, Suite 3.1, The Forum, Callendar Business Park, Falkirk. FK1 1XR. Winners will be drawn at the Charter Chat event on the 25th June, and will be contacted personally. Names of winners will be announced in the next edition of Tenant Talk.

If you would like more information, you can contact the Community Engagement Co-ordinator on 01324 590796, or email inspector.tenant@falkirk.gov.uk

Tenant Talk comes top



Tenants, residents, and staff involved with Tenant Talk magazine, including our volunteers on the Editorial Panel, were delighted to receive a top prize at a prestigious awards event.

The judges said, while the magazine was still in an early phase of its development, they were impressed with the approach used by the team to involve tenants and residents directly with the publication.

magazine beat off competition from finalists such as The Wheatley Group and Visit Scotland to make it to first place, and the Editorial Panel hope to build on this initial success to make the magazine even better in future.

Our revamped tenant magazine took gold at the Chartered Institute of Public Relations (CIPR) PRide Awards for Best External Publication.

Members of the Editorial Panel and staff attended the event at The Assembly Rooms, Edinburgh, in October 2014 to receive the award. The

Household Tips

If you've not quite finished your spring cleaning yet, here are some hints and tips to keep your home shining on a budget.

- White vinegar is a great tool for keeping your bathroom clean. It can be used to shine stainless steel or chrome, and also to clean your bath, shower and tiles. Filling a small plastic bag with white vinegar and securing this to your shower head should take the fuss out of this often tricky area.
- If you have small scratches or scuffs in your wooden furniture, rubbing a walnut over the area should hide these from sight.
- A touch of WD40 on a cloth can remove scuff marks from skirting boards. If you have a new tennis ball handy, rubbing this

over the area will also work!

- If you're sprucing up your home with a coat of paint, make sure to place a rubber band vertically around the paint pot. This way, you can wipe the paint on the rubber band as your brush leaves the pot, keeping the can clean and preventing drips on your floors.
- Have the kids been getting creative on your walls? A coat of hairspray and a quick wipe over the affected area should remove coloured pen marks from painted surfaces.
- You can also use white vinegar to clean your dishwasher. Half a cup added to an empty cycle should freshen up your machine with minimal effort and expense.



Falkirk Council

If you would like this information in another language, Braille, LARGE PRINT or audio tape, please contact one of our Neighbourhood Offices/ One Stop Shops.

Contact Directory

One Stop Shops

Bo'ness

24 East Pier Street,
Bo'ness EH51 9AB
T: 01506 778899

Callendar Square

Callendar Square,
Falkirk FK1 1ZF
T: 01324 506868

Camelon

256 Main Street,
Camelon FK1 4EQ

Dawson Centre

David's Loan,
Bainsford FK1 4EQ

Denny

Carronbank House,
Carronbank Crescent,
Denny FK6 6GA

Grangemouth

5 York Lane,
Grangemouth FK3 8BD

Stenhousemuir

398 Main Street,
Stenhousemuir FK5 3JR

Private Sector Team

Suite 5, The Forum,
Callendar Business Park,
Falkirk FK1 1XR
T: 01324 590797

Debt Advice

T: 01324 506735

Welfare Benefits Advice

T: 01324 501404

Maximising Your Income

T: 01324 501404

Community Engagement Co-ordinator

Suite 4, The Forum,
Callendar Business Park,
Falkirk FK1 1XR

Family Mediation Service

T: 01324 503700

Community Mediation Service

T: 01324 503700

Anti Social Behaviour
Helpline:

T: 0808 100 3161

Repairs (Contact Centre)

T: 01324 590590

External Funding Unit

T: 01324 506065

www.falkirk.gov.uk/housing