

CITIZEN LED INSPECTION

‘LOOK SEE’

FEEDBACK REPORT

HOMELESSNESS

MARCH 2025

INSPECTION TEAM:

Ann Pike

Citizen Inspector

REPORT SUBMITTED TO:

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Summary

In 2024/25, an inspection was undertaken in the Housing Need Service, this focused on customers' experience of the **homeless** process.

This 'Look See' inspection of homeless process was undertaken by our Inspector, Ann Pike, and had three key areas of focus:

1. The quality of the information provided on the website
2. The effectiveness of telephone and email communications
3. Face-to-face interaction with the service

Key Findings

A Citizen Led Inspection of the homeless process has rated the overall service provision as **Good**.

The Inspector considered the experience of customers using both telephone and in-person visits in order to gauge the overall quality of the experience and how easy it was to navigate the journey.

The Inspector carried out an online assessment looking at website content dedicated to homeless services and support and also assessed the overall experience in both a telephone enquiry and a face-to-face interaction with staff in the service.

Overall, it was felt that information provided on the council's website was of a good standard which provided the inspector with all the relevant information required.

The Inspector also observed that engagement with staff (via telephone and in-person) showed that there was a good level of knowledge demonstrated by the staff, and they provided clear responses to any questions that were asked by the Inspector.

The overall ratings from the inspection are as follows:

Table 1: CLI Look See Rating

Inspection Category	Homelessness
Website	Good
Email/Phone	Good
Face-to-Face	Good
Overall Findings	Good

The overall ratings for each category are an average of the scores recorded by the Inspector, where present, for each section.

Improvements were identified for each journey, with a particular focus on enhancing the quality and consistency of website content and encouraging the service to consider ways to improve the access to/availability of information for young people and other client groups.

An action plan will be developed by the service in response to the findings and suggested improvements contained within this report. Progress in the action plan will be reviewed with the inspector at an agreed date.

Introduction

The 'Look See' customer experience inspection is a "lighter" and more inclusive version of the council's Citizen Led Inspection process. It was designed to be a more rapid improvement process, yet still delivering detailed feedback on how our customer processes can be improved or made more accessible. Our inspectors will critically evaluate the quality of the services that we offer, giving us unique insight of the customers' experience across different channels.

Inspectors will also score the service based on the set criteria established prior to the inspection and will use a rating scale of Excellent, Good, Adequate, Poor and Very Poor.

The inspection process is intended to involve customers in reviewing and making changes to services. It is a particularly valuable during periods of change to ensure that service standards and performance is maintained.

In 2024/25, an inspection was undertaken in the Housing Need Service, this focused on customers' experience of the homeless process. It was undertaken by our Inspector, Ann Pike.

Background to the Inspection

The council has a legal duty to help people who are homeless or threatened with homelessness. The Housing Need Service has overall responsibility for this duty and their primary focus in delivering the service is to determine the best solution for customers. The service will assess customers' housing needs in order to identify all options that may prevent them from becoming homeless and they will also offer advice and a wide range of supports to help their customers throughout the process.

This is a highly responsive and needs-based council service and it has been greatly impacted by the increased demand for social housing occurring in many local authority areas in Scotland.

This is a critical service and, alongside the growing demand, it is for those reasons that the homelessness process was selected as an area for inspection. The council wants to make sure that this important service is delivered in a way that best meets the needs of our customers, whilst also recognising that this a complex area and the Inspector would need to be given information about the legal and policy frameworks that shape the service provision.

CLI Process and Scoping

The first stage of the Look See process was an initial scoping meeting between the Inspector and the leadership team responsible for managing the homeless process.

The Inspector met with the Housing Need Service Manager and the Housing Need Strategy Manager to gather preliminary and contextual information about the service. This was intended to deepen the Inspector's understanding of the service priorities and the regulations and policies that shape the way that the service is delivered and the standards that should be met. There was also discussion about the known needs and preferences of the customers of the service in order to give the Inspector some ideas about the things that may be important to service users.

This meeting was also used to jointly agree the key focus areas for the inspection, with the inspector agreeing to complete a review of information contained on the homelessness area of the council website and review the information that is provided as part of a customer journey through the homeless process. The Inspector was also asked to evaluate the service performance in telephone and face-to-face/in-person visits or interactions, as these are the typical routes that customers use to access homeless services.

A presentation from the service management team offered an understanding of the way the service operates, including; the service structure, key priorities and challenges, details of the areas of service provision, the Allocations Policy, as well as signposting the Inspector to applicant information and other useful information. The Inspector was also provided with information on a range of ongoing developments underway in the Housing Need Service and current improvement programmes.

The Inspector was asked to review the Homelessness process using set guidance and criteria provided but, they also had the opportunity to capture general comments around each component (website, email/telephone and face to face).

Inspection Activity

The 'Look See' inspection of Homelessness had three key areas of focus, as agreed between the service and the Inspectors:

1. The quality of the information provided on the website;
2. The effectiveness of telephone and email communications;
3. Face-to-face interaction with the service

It was agreed that the inspection process would start with a review of the available information, with face to face interaction taking place in January 2025.

Inspection Rating

The Inspector has scored the service based on set criteria established prior to the inspection using a 5-point rating scale of;

(1) Excellent, (2) Good, (3) Adequate, (4) Poor and (5) Very Poor

Table 1: CLI Look See Rating

Inspection Category	Homelessness
Website	Good
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Face-to-Face	Good
Overall Findings	Good

The overall ratings for each category are an average of the scores recorded by the Inspector, where present, for each section.

Findings: Website

As part of the inspection of the homelessness customer journey, the inspector reviewed content and information within pages of the council website. This journey was selected as it is one of the main routes through which customers will access or review information about the homeless services.

The Inspector has scored the service based on set criteria established prior to the inspection using a 5-point rating scale of; (1) *Excellent*, (2) *Good*, (3) *Adequate*, (4) *Poor* and (5) *Very Poor*.

Areas of Good Practice	Areas for Improvement	Overall Rating
<ul style="list-style-type: none">In terms of access, the Homelessness information on the council website was “easy to find”.The homelessness pages on the council website “followed a sound logic in how you progressed through the information”.	<ol style="list-style-type: none">It was noted that the youth homelessness and adult homelessness web pages had inconsistencies in terms of tone and style of content. The service should complete a review of Adult and Youth Homelessness pages to identify and address discrepancies between the two.Terminologies such as “roofless” and “homelessness” are used in the web content before they are explained or defined. Clear definitions should be provided to ensure service users understand without possible confusion.The right to have someone with you in a meeting could be stated more prominently. When reference is made regarding interviews, it should be clearly stated that the service user can have someone attend along with them.	Good

Areas of Good Practice	Areas for Improvement	Overall Rating
	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 4. Inspector felt Adult and Youth Homelessness needed to be better linked. A clear initial link on website for options relating to “Adult” and “Youth Homelessness” would enable more straight forward navigation when seeking the appropriate information for the customer needs. 5. The inspector questioned how practical it is for some people who require the information to download it. The service could provide information to users via print out. 	

Findings: Email /Telephone

As part of the inspection of the homelessness customer journey, the inspector was to complete a phone or email interaction with members of the Housing Needs team, requesting information about homelessness services. This journey was selected as it is one of the main routes through which customers will access or review information about the homeless services.

The Inspector has scored the service based on set criteria established prior to the inspection using a 5-point rating scale of;
(1) *Excellent*, (2) *Good*, (3) *Adequate*, (4) *Poor* and (5) *Very Poor*.

Areas of Good Practice	Areas for Improvement	Overall Rating
<ul style="list-style-type: none">The inspector called the service and was given an explanation as to how someone can get in contact with the service in and out of work hours.The inspector felt they received clear answers to the questions from the member of staff dealing with their enquiry.	<ol style="list-style-type: none">When calling the contact centre, the option number you can select is linked to other services and is not exclusive to homelessness and you may leave your number but will get called back within 24 hours, if you are roofless this is a potential issue. Potentially look into having an exclusive number for homelessness and provide additional information on what further actions a service user could do during the 24-hour call back period if roofless and in urgent need.Callers who have to wait on call may have limited credit and unable to stay on the call. For service users who lack resources such as phone credit, clearer guidance on how they can access the service should be provided. This would make it easier for service users in this position to access the help of the service.	Good

Feedback on comments

Question – Unclear of how cases of roofless individuals who can't reach the civic centre are handled.

Response – Service users who cannot attend the Civic Centre can have the presentation undertaken over the telephone.

Question – The process of a homeless individual leaving prison is not clarified.

Response - Prisoner details due for liberation and who will be homeless are sent to the service weeks in advance to allow for planning of accommodation and appointments to commence in advance. The service does not, unfortunately, have the staffing resources to go into prisons and accommodation to offer this in advance therefore they are seen on the day of liberation with advance notice given to the teams prior to this.

Findings: Face-to-face

As part of the inspection of the homelessness customer journey, the inspector attended the West Lothian Civic Centre to speak face-to-face with members of the Housing Needs team. This journey was selected as it is one of the main routes through which customers will access or review information about the homeless services.

The Inspector has scored the service based on set criteria established prior to the inspection using a 5-point rating scale of; (1) *Excellent*, (2) *Good*, (3) *Adequate*, (4) *Poor* and (5) *Very Poor*.

Areas of Good Practice	Areas for Improvement	Overall Rating
<ul style="list-style-type: none">Inspector felt initial contact was well handled with no judgement or comments, the process and what would happen next was explained.Inspector waited approximately 20 minutes for a person to see them, assessor considered this wait time “acceptable”.Staff member (Housing Options Officer) was described as “very pleasant, calm and knowledgeable about the subject matter”.Inspector and Housing Options Officer walked through the process and assessors, “expectations were managed”.Housing Options Officer was prepared with hard copies of paperwork and forms and had a laptop to record information then and there.A colleague of the Housing Options Officer has done preventative work in the past and assessor hope it is brought back.	<ol style="list-style-type: none">The service could establish any specific needs/reasonable adjustments up front, this was inferred in Housing Options Officer’s approach and could be added as an approach on the website as well being a standard practice.Inspector observed both verbal and paperwork attempts to manage expectations but that the paperwork was not “systematically reviewed and updated therefore was out of date and nor relevant for some of the parts being talked about”. Ensure documentation is periodically reviewed to be current and accurate.Paperwork that was provided by the Housing Options Officer had coding that was unexplainable and could be clarified in future to provide clarification.	Good

Conclusions and Next Steps

Following a Citizen Led Inspection of the homeless process, an independent Citizen Inspector has rated the overall service provision as **Good**.

The Inspector considered the experience of customers using both telephone and in-person visits to gauge the overall quality of the experience and how easy it was to navigate the journey.

Improvements have been identified for each journey, with a particular focus on enhancing the quality and consistency of website content and considering how to improve the access to/availability of information for young people.

The service is encouraged to review the findings from the inspector and devise an action plan to address the identified areas for improvement. The action plan will be shared with the Inspector, with the opportunity for the inspector to review progress of the plan with the service after an appropriate period.

For further information about Citizen Led Inspection, please contact:
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