



EDINBURGH TENANTS
FEDERATION

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***Edinburgh's Federation of Tenants' and
Residents' Associations***

**Tenant Led Inspection Report of City of
Edinburgh Council's Approach to Insulating
External Walls**

Final Report to the City of Edinburgh Council

November 2016



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Part 1 Background and Methodology

1.1 Introduction

This fifth Tenant Led Inspection (TLI) carried out by Edinburgh Tenants Federation (ETF) followed the successful inspections conducted in 2008, 2009, 2011 and 2015, which were recognised as a model of good practice by the Scottish Housing Regulator.¹

The purpose of this report is to provide feedback on the City of Edinburgh Council's approach to insulating external walls.

1.2 Background

TLIs are a form of tenant participation for those seeking greater involvement with the Council in improving housing services. Small groups of tenants (Inspection Teams) inspect that service to find out what works well and what could be improved. The Inspection Team feedback their findings to the Council with a view to achieving service improvements.

In collaboration with CEC, the following was agreed:

- The service area to be inspected would be the City of Edinburgh Council's approach to insulating external walls;
- The purpose and scope of the inspection would be to ensure that tenants have the best possible outcomes from this work and a service that provides value for money for their rent. Tenants should also find that their heating costs have decreased;
- The Inspection Team would produce in the first instance, a draft report outlining the methods used in the inspection; details of evidence collected; the strengths identified and the recommended areas for improvement.

In carrying out an inspection of the Council's approach to insulating external walls, the Inspectors were seeking answers to a number of questions:

- Does the Council communicate with tenants, before, during and after the process to a satisfactory standard?
- Do the Council and contractors meet the required service standards?
- Does the Council keep the site safe and clean during work?
- Are agreed policies and procedures followed?
- What are the outcomes of the work? What are the improvements for tenants?
- What do tenants think could be done to improve the process?
- Is it a value for money approach? Does the work help to save tenants' money?

¹ Scottish Housing Regulator *Report on City of Edinburgh Council (2010)*, page 43, 6.17.

1.3 Methods Used

Inspectors agreed the research methodologies with CEC in advance of the inspection.

The methods agreed were:

- A visit to insulation sites. This would help the Inspectors gain a better understanding of the insulation process and the impact on tenants;
- A face to face survey of a sample of tenants in properties where this work has been completed;
- A telephone survey of a sample of tenants in properties where this work has been completed;
- Interview a relevant staff member using a set questionnaire;
- Carry out a desk top audit of relevant Council policies and procedures including:
 - Communications Plan;
 - Communications issued to tenants;
 - Health & Safety and security procedures;
 - Service Standards;
 - Information on complaints and how they were resolved;
 - The approach to dealing with owners (to understand how that may impact on tenants).

Part 2 The Inspection

The Inspection fieldwork took place between Monday 16th May 2016 and Friday 10th June 2016.

2.1 Visit to properties and sites

Two Inspectors visited three properties in the Dumbiedykes area on 18th May 2016. The objectives of this exercise were to look at properties which had recently had the external walls insulated and assess on the following criteria:

- Overall health and safety of staff, tenants and the properties;
- The security of the properties and surrounding areas.

The assessment of the visit was conducted by the two Inspectors who completed a checklist and took notes. They scored each of the criteria on a scale of one to ten; with ten being the highest mark. The findings are reflected in the table on the next page.

Criteria	Highest score	Lowest score	Average score
Overall health and safety of:			
• Staff	8	7	7.5
• Tenants	8	5	6.5
• Sites	9	7	8
The security of the buildings/sites	8	8	8

Observations from the inspectors included:

- Overall the Inspectors were impressed with how clean the properties and surrounding areas were;
- The scaffoldings were neatly stacked and were not causing any health and safety problems for staff or tenants;
- The fencing round the properties were safe and secure;
- The Inspectors noted that a piece of rendering was hanging off one of the properties that had been completed. This was posing a health and safety risk to tenants. This has since been repaired.

2.2 Telephone/face to face survey of tenants living in properties where external walls had been insulated

The objectives of this exercise were to carry out either a telephone or face to face survey of tenants living in properties where the external walls had recently been insulated and find out if anything could be improved. Three Inspectors spoke to nine tenants in total. The observations from the Inspectors were as follows:

- The majority of tenants were satisfied with how their properties external walls were insulated;
- There was a mixed response from tenants regarding how well the Council communicated with them throughout the insulation process;
- Most of the properties were kept clean and safe during the work;
- Three tenants had noted that the insulation work had saved them money on heating costs, two tenants were unsure and four tenants hadn't noticed a difference²;

² This compares with 13 out of 20 respondents who thought their heating bills had 'gone down a bit or gone down a lot' and 5 out of 20 respondents had found there was no difference. 'Changeworks, Dumbiedykes External Wall Insulation: Householder Satisfaction Research, February 2016, 4.4, page 12

- Two tenants had to put in a complaint during the insulation process. The tenants were asked if they had any other comments on the insulation process. Their responses are noted in the table below.

Do you have any other comments on the insulation process?	Number of comments
As I live on the ground floor, it is still very cold. It would be better if the floor was insulated.	1
During the process, the ceiling installed in my property was not insulated properly. As a result there is now a hole in the bathroom and there is mould too. I'm still waiting for a response from the Council.	1
The insulation process affected my television aerial and I'm unable to watch television. Still waiting on the problem to be fixed.	3
Only problem was with workforce parking their vehicles in areas designated for tenants.	1
The workforce left windows and doors in tenants' properties open when they finished their shifts.	1
The communication between the Council and tenants could be better.	2

Recommendations

1. The Council should follow up on any outstanding repairs caused by properties being insulated.
2. The insulation work has resulted in a number of tenants' television aerials not being able to receive a signal, which is still an ongoing problem. This should be addressed.
3. The workforce should leave the properties safe and secure when they have finished their shifts.
4. There should be more consultation and information provided at all stages of the insulation process between the Council and tenants, including involving local Registered Tenant Organisations (RTOs) where possible.

2.3 Interview with member of staff involved in the insulation process using a set questionnaire

The purpose of this exercise was to interview a member of staff to learn about their experience of being involved in the insulation process. Two Inspectors interviewed the member of staff on 18th May 2016. Inspectors were interested in finding out the following:

- How often does the Council communicate with tenants during the different stages of the insulation process, i.e. before, during and after?
- How does the Council check that communications issued by them have been understood by tenants including those whose first language is not English?
- How does the Council ensure the health and safety of staff and tenants during the process?
- How does the Council ensure the agreed policies and procedures in relation to the insulation process are followed by installers, Council staff and external contractors?
- What is the Council's approach to dealing with owners in relation to the insulation process?
- What are the most common complaints from tenants in relation to the insulation process?
- What works well in the overall insulation process and what if anything can be improved?

The observations from Inspectors were as follows:

- Before the insulation process, a letter is sent to every Council tenant advising them of the work which will be taking place. The local office also uses social media to communicate with tenants, i.e. Facebook and Twitter. The Council will enter into discussions with the owners living in the blocks, where letters are sent to owners advising them of the appropriate costs of

the works due to take place. Owners are invited to discuss this or any other aspects with Council staff.

- During the insulation process, the Council sends newsletters to every tenant giving an update on the work which has already been carried out and what will be happening in the future. The newsletters also include contact details for members of staff if tenants have any queries. A letter is sent from Scottish Gas Network (SGN) to advise tenants of the gas works which will need to be carried out in tenant's properties during the insulation process.
- After the insulation process and before the scaffolding is taken down, the Council issues a letter to tenants asking if they have any issues. Tenants complete a Satisfaction Survey which is issued by Changeworks. The Council completes any snagging work before the scaffolding is dismantled.

The Inspectors wanted to know how the Council checks that the communications in relation to the insulation process have been understood by tenants, including those whose first language is not English. Letters sent out by the Council contain contact details of interpreters if they are needed. The Contractor's Resident Liaison Officer can speak languages other than English.

With regards to health and safety during the insulation process, Construction Design and Management (CDM) Regulators cover all aspects of health and safety. The Contractor is responsible for health and safety during working hours and the Council holds regular meetings with the Contractor to ensure health and safety is being upheld. Security patrols take place out with working hours.

The Council ensures the agreed policies and procedures in relation to the insulation process by using the following approaches:

- Installers - Every two weeks, the manufacturer checks properties have been installed correctly and after completion;
- Council staff - Checks take place to ensure the job is completed correctly before the scaffolding is removed;
- External Contractors - Have responsibility for the overall health and safety on site.

The Inspectors wanted to know if the Council has an approach to deal with owners in relation to the insulation process. The Council has a Service Level Agreement (SLA) that creates a contract between the Council and owners to safeguard the Council in the event of non-payment of owners. The SLA sets out a contract with the owner informing them of duties the Council will undertake on their behalf. Owners were informed of the work that would be taking place in Dumbiedykes in 2010. The Council then applied for planning permission for the whole estate.

The most common complaints from tenants in relation to the insulation process included:

- Noise;
- Dust;
- Lights not working;

- Television signals being cut off.

The member of staff was asked if anything could be improved in the overall insulation process. They suggested the discussion time between the Council and owners could be more streamlined, so there are fewer delays as the time taken to sign up owners can delay the insulation process. Discussions between the Council and owners started in June 2013 and issues weren't resolved until October 2014. The Council must continue to ensure the processes and information issued is as comprehensive and as practical as possible to avoid any delays. Furthermore there should be better communication between the Council and tenants. For example the Council should inform tenants that work is being done between the date tenants were informed the work would soon be starting and the actual start date of insulating properties.

Recommendations

5. Discussions between the Council and owners should be more streamlined to ensure there are fewer delays in insulation work being carried out. There is a suggested three month negotiation period between the Council and owners.

2.4 Desk Top Audit

The purpose of the desk top audit was to:

- Look at the information provided by the Council to tenants to find out if the information is easy for tenants to understand;
- Look at the Council's Policies and Procedures to see if anything can be improved.

The Inspectors looked at copies of letters that the Council sent out to tenants in advance of the insulation work starting. The Inspectors felt that the letters were not in plain English. Furthermore the Inspectors felt that the Council could do more for tenants that have literacy problems and English is not their first language. The letters state that in order to maintain appropriate insurance cover, tenants must contact their contents insurance company to tell them about the proposed work. The Inspectors felt that the Council could help those who can't afford the necessary insurance even if it is only a temporary measure.

The Inspectors looked at copies of newsletters that the Council sent out to tenants. It was noted that there had been issues with Scottish Gas Network (SGN) not being given access to some properties due to the inadequate notice they were giving tenants. The Inspectors felt that the Council could give SGN more advance notice of work being carried out to avoid access problems in the future.

The Inspectors looked at copies of the correspondence that SGN send out to tenants in advance of work being carried out. The Inspectors felt that SGN were not giving tenants enough notice as the date between letters issued and work being carried out was not adequate. There is no indication in the letters if

alternative heating is available for tenants that need to stay in the property whilst the gas supply is unavailable. Furthermore the letters don't contain any information about whether a day centre is nearby with heating or cooking facilities they could use.

The Inspectors looked at the Changeworks 'Dumbiedykes External Wall Insulation: Householder Satisfaction Research'. It is important to note that this was not a comparison with the TLI Report, as the Inspectors wanted to see if there were any familiar trends in both the reports, as well as any similarities and differences in tenants' opinions.

Recommendations

6. Information sent to tenants should be in plain English, easy to understand and have no jargon.
7. The Council could be better at communicating with tenants that have literacy problems and whose first language is not English. The Council could liaise with local RTOs on this matter where possible.
8. The Council should do more to help tenants who can't afford the necessary insurance cover, even if it is only a temporary measure.
9. The Council should give SGN more advance notice of work being carried out to avoid access issues to properties.
10. The Council should notify tenants if alternative heating and cooking supplies are available whilst the gas supply in properties is turned off.

Part 3 Conclusion and Recommendations

3.1 Conclusion

In conclusion, the Tenant Led Inspectors found there were a number of strengths and weaknesses relating to Council's approach to insulating external walls.

The Inspectors spoke to tenants to find out how satisfied they were with the insulation work carried out in their properties and there was a mixed response. A number of the tenants reported that they have been unable to watch television due to the insulation work affecting their television aerials. Other issues tenants raised included following up on repairs as a result of the insulation work and a lack of communication between the Council and tenants.

The Inspectors would like the Council to look at streamlining the discussions between the Council and owners prior to the insulation work, so there are fewer delays in work being carried out.

The Inspectors were impressed with the overall paperwork that the Council issues to tenants. However some of the language used is not in plain English and includes jargon. Furthermore the Council could be doing more to communicate with tenants that have literacy issues and whose first language is not English. The Inspectors felt that both the Council and SGN could be giving more notice of the work being done in tenant's properties as the timescales are inadequate. The documentation does not give any indication if alternative heating and cooking supplies are available to tenants during the insulation work.

Overall the Inspectors found the inspection to be very enjoyable, invaluable and would like to thank all the City of Edinburgh Council staff who assisted during the inspection.

3.2 Recommendations

1. The Council should follow up on any outstanding repairs caused by properties being insulated.
2. The insulation work has resulted in a number of tenants' television aerials not being able to receive a signal, which is still an ongoing problem. This should be addressed.
3. The workforce should leave the properties safe and secure when they have finished their shifts.
4. There should be more consultation and information provided at all stages of the insulation process between the Council and tenants, including involving local Registered Tenant Organisations (RTOs) where possible.
5. Discussions between the Council and owners should be more streamlined to ensure there are fewer delays in insulation work being carried out. There is a suggested three month negotiation period between the Council and owners.
6. Information sent to tenants should be in plain English, easy to understand and have no jargon.
7. The Council could be better at communicating with tenants that have literacy problems and whose first language is not English. The Council could liaise with local RTOs on this matter where possible.
8. The Council should do more to help tenants who don't have the necessary insurance cover, even if it is only a temporary measure.
9. The Council should give SGN more advanced notice of work being carried out to avoid access issues to properties.
10. The Council should notify tenants if alternative heating and cooking supplies are available whilst the gas supply in properties is turned off.