

Clackmannanshire Council  
inspection report

JUNE 2007



Ensuring decent housing  
and strong communities across Scotland



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# 1. Introduction

## About this inspection

1.1 This inspection was carried out by Communities Scotland under section 72 of the Housing (Scotland) Act 2001 on behalf of Scottish Ministers. Our purpose in inspection is to provide an independent external assessment of the effectiveness of housing service delivery and make recommendations to help improvement. Inspections are conducted within a published framework of *Performance Standards*.

## How we assessed performance

1.2 Our inspectors asked two key questions:

- How good are the services we have inspected?
- How well are these services being managed for improvement?

1.3 In order to answer these questions inspectors:

- spoke to tenants, service users, staff and elected members of the council;
- asked other partner organisations for their views;
- visited homes and local areas;
- saw and tested first hand how well services were being delivered;
- examined key policies, publications, information and the organisation's self-assessment submitted for this inspection; and
- analysed published performance and financial information.

1.4 We have awarded grades for the housing management, property maintenance and homelessness services. This is what our grades mean:

A	Excellent	Major strengths
B	Good	Many strengths and some areas where improvement is needed
C	Fair	Some strengths, but with many areas where improvement is required or with a small number of significant weaknesses
D	Poor	Major areas where improvement is needed or where a number of very significant weaknesses are found.

## The inspection team

- 1.5 The inspection team was led by John Jenkins (Inspection Manager) and included Jacqui Angus, Joyce Stewart, Tom Burns and Robbie Fraser (Inspectors) and Josephine McAloon and Carolynne Watson (Inspection Officers). In addition, one of our Tenant Assessors, Gordon Mason, assisted the team. We were on site between 6 November and 1 December 2006. Three of our Tenant Assessors, Jeanette Boyd, Lindsay Fyvie and Jessie Martin also carried out a desk top appraisal of documents recently made available to tenants by Clackmannanshire Council. We would like to thank everyone involved in the inspection, particularly the councillors, staff, service users and tenants for their time and co-operation.

## Responding to this inspection

- 1.6 We expect all inspected bodies to make the summary of this report available to all their tenants, report our findings to other stakeholders and respond to the issues raised in this report.

## 2. Context

### Geography

- 2.1 Clackmannanshire is the smallest county in Scotland, covering an area of approximately 100 square miles. It is adjacent to the local authority areas of Stirling, Falkirk and Fife. Because of their close proximity, most of their main settlements are easily accessible from the Clackmannanshire area. With the re-opening of the Stirling-Alloa-Kinross rail line planned for 2007, public transport links will be further enhanced.

### Population

- 2.2 Clackmannanshire Council is Scotland's fourth smallest local authority by population, with less than 1% of the country's population living in the area. The area is made up of several small towns and villages. 95% of the population live in its eight main settlements, some of which are former mining and textiles communities. The main centre of population in the county is Alloa.
- 2.3 The latest census figures indicate that the population of Clackmannanshire is 48,077. Mid-year estimates show that among Scottish local authorities, Clackmannanshire had the second highest rate of population growth between 2004 and 2005. It had 0.8% growth rate, compared with 0.3% growth nationally.
- 2.4 Clackmannanshire has a relatively small proportion of ethnic minority households. The area's population of White British inhabitants is slightly higher than the national figure at 97.5%. This can be compared with the Scottish average of 95.5%. The area has recently experienced an increase in the number of workers coming from Eastern European countries, in particular, from Poland. Recently a research project has been jointly commissioned by Communities Scotland and the local authorities in the Forth Valley region. This research project is attempting to identify the housing needs of ethnic minority communities in the area.

- 2.5 The age profile of the Clackmannanshire area is broadly similar to the Scottish average, with similar proportions of people of working age. There are slightly fewer pensioners in the area, with 17.1% of the population as compared to 18.6% nationally. However, the numbers of people aged over 45 in Clackmannanshire is projected to increase faster than the predicted national rate. These changes will ultimately have an impact on the future housing services which will be required in the area.

### Economic Factors

- 2.6 During the last 10 years, Clackmannanshire's economic profile has changed considerably. The area underwent a period of de-industrialisation, as its traditional industries of brewing, textiles and mining rapidly declined. Clackmannanshire has been further disadvantaged by poor transport links and infrastructure. At present, the area's main industries are manufacturing and wholesale and retail trade and repairs. Health and social work represents the area's third largest employer.
- 2.7 In terms of transport links and infrastructure, the regeneration of Clackmannanshire is being enhanced by the construction of the new Upper Forth Crossing. The re-opening of the Stirling-Alloa-Kinross rail line, planned for spring 2007, is also expected to bring significant economic benefits to the area.
- 2.8 At 3.4%, Clackmannanshire's unemployment rate is slightly above the national average of 3%. In some areas, for example, South and East Alloa and Tullibody, unemployment rates are up to twice as high, at 8.5% and 5% respectively.

### Social Housing Supply

- 2.9 The tenure profile in Clackmannanshire varies from the national picture. The 2001 census figures indicate that public renting accounts for around 37% of housing in the area, as compared to 29.5% nationally. Of this, local authority housing comprises 31%, as compared to 23.5% nationally. At 58%, owner occupation is the dominant tenure in the area, but the level is lower in

Clackmannanshire than the Scottish average of 62%. Private renting is also less prevalent in the area, at 3.2% as compared to 5.8% across Scotland.

- 2.10 In the last three years, the area has witnessed an upsurge in levels of new house building by private developers with an average figure of 300 houses being built each year. This appears to have contributed to rising average house prices in the area. In the year to September 2005, Clackmannanshire experienced a sharp rise in house price inflation at 10.4%. This compared to 6.8% nationally.

### Council Membership

- 2.11 Clackmannanshire Council has 18 members and its political make up at the time of inspection was as follows:

- 10 Labour
- 6 Scottish National Party
- 1 Conservative
- 1 Independent

- 2.12 In addition to full Council, two committees operated; the Regulatory Committee and a Performance and Audit Committee. A number of elected members are also appointed as Portfolio Holders. These councillors are politically accountable and responsible for policy and strategy development around each of the Council's strategic aims. A further group of elected members are identified as Service Representatives and they act as advocates for particular groups of services.

- 2.13 The Council is currently investigating the possibility of establishing joint management arrangements with Stirling Council with the ultimate aim of eliminating management duplication and improving efficiency by streamlining operations. Clackmannanshire Councillors agreed in principle to the proposal to increase integrated working in June 2006. In addition, the Council also continues to develop proposals and explore further opportunities for joint service provision with other Scottish local authority partners.

## Organisation of the Council

- 2.14 The Council delivers its services through four main service groupings, Chief Executive's, Corporate Development, Development and Environment and Services to People. Housing functions fall within the remit of the Director of Services to People.
- 2.15 Over 2003, there was a growing awareness among elected members that the Council's housing services were not appropriately structured. There was an increasing array of new strategic responsibilities being given to local government and its housing service users had increasing aspirations. In September 2003 consultants were appointed to carry out a comprehensive review of the existing structure, service delivery arrangements, working practices and organisational culture within the Council's Housing Services. The consultant's report was delivered in March 2004, and in June that year elected members agreed to a major restructure of its housing service. The intention of the restructure being to modernise and deliver a better organised, more customer-focused service. The restructuring has led to significant changes in working practices, personnel and the culture prevalent in the service. All of the 124 housing staff has been directly affected by this process with new revised job profiles being introduced. The implementation of the restructuring process has taken longer than originally anticipated. At the time of our inspection, a number of vacant and new posts remained to be filled and significant numbers of staff were still relatively new to their positions.
- 2.16 In housing management, there has been a shift away from generic management to a specialised team structure. It is anticipated that services and performance will be further enhanced by the Council's commitment to locate all housing staff together at Lime Tree House in Alloa, in the near future.
- 2.17 The Council has also recently put in place a new Performance Management framework, which places emphasis on Personal Review Development, personal and team workplans, and a new Career Development scheme for staff.

## Key facts

	2003-2004	2004-2005	2005-06
Houses owned	5,644	5,503	5,360
No. of applicants on housing list as at 31 March	N/A	2,118	2,485
Employees (Full time equivalents)	90	92	112
HRA* Gross Capital Expenditure (incl. Capital Funded from Revenue (CFCR))	£3m	£6m	£5.6m
Total possible rental income	£11,471,730	£11,563,643	£11,928,870
% of Rental income from Housing Benefit (HB)	42.03%	54.73%	53.45%
% of tenants in receipt of HB	55%	56%	57%
% of rent arrears	7.7%	8.1%	8.4%
Average weekly rent	£42.03	£43.75	£45.55
Average rent increase	2.71%	3.95%	3.93%
Houses relet	487	442	441
Responsive repairs carried out	24,337	24,500	24,728
Maintenance spend per house inc cost of service	£610	£705	£798
Supervision and management spend per house	£521	£633	£680
Right To Buy sales	169	124	117
Homeless presentations	1,003	1,122	1,158
Number of evictions*	14	5	6

Sources: Clackmannanshire Council's inspection submission and Scottish Executive Statistical Bulletins

\*including post decree abandonments

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\* See glossary

### 3. Housing management

3.1 The grade awarded for housing management is:

C	Fair	Some strengths, but with many areas where improvement is required or with a small number of significant weaknesses.
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We explain at the end of this section how the assessments we have made result in this grade.

#### How good is the service?

##### Access

*Social landlords should provide open, fair and equal access to their housing lists and should work with partners to simplify and maximise access to housing.*

3.2 Clackmannanshire Council is currently delivering its housing service through ten service points at various locations throughout its area of operation. At the time of our inspection the Council was in the process of relocating all housing staff to a central headquarters building, Lime Tree House (LTH) in Alloa. The Customer Service Centre, which deals with all telephone enquiries, is also based in LTH. Following staff relocation, the Council will continue to provide a limited housing service, through the Council's five new dispersed Community Access Points (CAPs)\*. This will include providing assistance with housing application forms. The Council also permits other local social landlords to use the CAPs to provide surgeries for their tenants. This is positive evidence of good partnership working.

3.3 The Council has carried out disability access audits on its five CAPs. It has also carried out a full access audit on two other housing offices, following which it closed one of these to the public. The Council carried out a partial access audit for LTH and is proposing to carry out a full access audit on this new headquarters building in 2007. We found the physical accessibility of the ten present service points variable. Where service points are located along with libraries,

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\* See Glossary

Clackmannanshire Council is providing free internet access. This allows the public to view the extensive information on the Council's website.

- 3.4 Clackmannanshire Council has access to an interpreting service, if this is required. In order to meet the needs of the increasing number of Polish people living in the area, the Council has employed a Polish speaker. This staff member can translate on request for those seeking advice or wishing to access the housing service. In addition, the Council's Tenant Participation Officer is regularly attending the newly formed local Polish Club. Council housing is promoted and general information and advice is provided at these sessions. These are positive initiatives by Clackmannanshire Council to improve access to housing.
- 3.5 The Council makes limited efforts to promote access to its housing list and relies upon:
- providing general housing advice on the Council's website, including accessing the accommodation of other housing providers;
  - a question and answer section around the Council's new housing allocations policy on its website; and
  - providing application forms and other information in different languages and formats on request.
- 3.6 Clackmannanshire Council recognised this weakness and following the on-site inspection, advised us that it has now introduced posters and is in the process of producing leaflets on how to access housing. These will be displayed at Council Service points. This information is now also provided to the public through its plasma screen located in the reception area of Lime Tree House.
- 3.7 We asked our tenant assessors to review the Council's waiting list information leaflet and the Tenants' Handbook. They found the documents easy to understand and written in plain English. However, they felt that their content could be improved by providing more information, or alternatively encouraging tenants to contact the Council to obtain this. Following our inspection the Council has revised its waiting list information leaflet to reflect these comments.

- 3.8 The Council is working with partner housing organisations, Paragon Housing Association and Ochil View Housing Association, to develop a Common Housing Register (CHR)<sup>\*</sup> in Clackmannanshire. An ambitious implementation plan has been developed with a scheduled completion date of September 2007. In the case of the Mar Policies regeneration area, the three landlords involved have developed and are using a common housing application form. This is a positive measure to improve access to their housing.
- 3.9 Clackmannanshire Council reviewed its allocations policy in 2005. This followed extensive consultation with tenants' groups, advocacy groups and other stakeholders. Elected members approved the new allocations policy in December 2005. At the time of our inspection visit, the Council was in the process of implementing the new policy. The introduction of the policy has been widely publicised in the local press and in the Council's regular tenants' magazine, "Homing In". Clackmannanshire Tenants' and Residents' Federation, together with the two local registered social landlords (RSLs)<sup>\*</sup> have been actively involved in the design of the new housing application forms.
- 3.10 As part of the introduction of the new allocations policy, Clackmannanshire Council is carrying out a review of its housing list<sup>\*</sup>. This was last reviewed in 2003/04. For the 2006 review the Council wrote to all applicants on its list. It asked for a new application form to be completed and submitted by the end of October 2006. Reminder letters were subsequently sent to those applicants who did not respond to the Council's first letter. Original applicants who do not respond to the second letter have a further six months from the end of October 2006 to complete and lodge their new application form. Failure to do so will result in them losing any accumulated "time in housing need" points. Those contacting the Council after the six month period has expired will be treated as new applicants. In future, Clackmannanshire Council is proposing to review its housing list annually.
- 3.11 We asked our tenant assessors to review the Council's new application form. While the Council had reflected feedback from its own service users, our

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<sup>\*</sup> See Glossary

assessors found the form to be lengthy and felt that not all the information requested was relevant.

- 3.12 The new allocations policy sets out the circumstances in which the Council will cancel an application. These are where someone has requested to be removed from its list, where they fail to reply to two letters from the Council, or on the death of an applicant.
- 3.13 Clackmannanshire Council received 1,851 new housing applications during 2005/06. At the end of March 2006, the Council had 2,485 applicants on its list. Following the recent review of its housing list, by November 2006, this had reduced to 1,404 applicants.
- 3.14 The Council aims to acknowledge applications for housing within one day of receipt and to process applications within five days. However, it is not recording or monitoring its performance against these targets. Where further information is required, Clackmannanshire Council temporarily places the applicant in allocation band four, until it receives the outstanding information. This is the band for applicants without housing need. This may result in some applicants waiting longer for an offer of a house. Following discussion, the Council took steps to amend its guidance for staff in order to appropriately reflect housing need.
- 3.15 Housing applications assessed by the Council's Lettings Team are all verified by a second member of staff. However, applications for housing processed by the Council's Homeless Section are not verified. The Council does not check decisions regarding offers of housing. Following discussion with inspection staff, the Council has now introduced verification of each offer of housing by a second member of staff.
- 3.16 Clackmannanshire Council writes to all applicants for its housing to confirm that they have been placed on the housing list. The letter advises them of their level of points and its breakdown. It also signposts applicants to other local housing providers both in its acknowledgement letter and in the points notification letter. The Council does not provide information on the applicants' right to appeal. It

acknowledged this while we were on site and has now re-drafted its standard letters to applicants to include this information.

- 3.17 Clackmannanshire Council offers every applicant for housing a prospects interview. At this meeting it will discuss applicants' preferred areas of choice and the potential availability of appropriate housing. The Council provides applicants with information on historical turnover in Clackmannanshire. This was last updated in 2003/04. It is now currently reviewing this information with a view to introducing it to coincide with the launch of Choice Based Lettings.
- 3.18 The Council's new allocations policy confirms that anyone aged 16 or over can apply and be admitted to the housing list. However, we found that the terminology used in the Council's application form, website and written procedures for staff did not accurately reflect this. The Council immediately corrected this inconsistency.
- 3.19 Clackmannanshire Council's allocations policy and procedures for staff have some weaknesses regarding access to the housing list for applicants whose status is governed by immigration control. Present legislation prescribes that social landlords should provide access to their housing list for all applicants aged 16 and over. Following discussion, the Council advised us that it would review this area.
- 3.20 The Council's policy states that it will suspend applications from its housing list for rent arrears, tenancy-related debt and antisocial behaviour in certain defined circumstances. Landlords should not suspend applications from the housing list, but may suspend applicants from receiving offers of housing for the aforementioned reasons. We found that in practice the Council was suspending applicants from receiving offers rather than suspending applications from the list. The Council advised us that it has amended the wording in the policy accordingly. At the time of the inspection there were no applicants suspended from receiving offers of housing from the Council.

- 3.21 Clackmannanshire Council requests that applicants for housing provide an address history for the previous seven years. Thereafter it takes up references for this period. However, the Council told us that where it does not receive a response from an applicant's former landlord, it would not withhold an offer of housing. Good practice guidance recommends that landlords should not seek references for tenancies that ended more than three years previously. The Council has subsequently amended this practice and now only seeks references for tenancies that have ended in the last three years.
- 3.22 We asked our tenant assessors to review the Council's information leaflet "Introducing the New Allocations Policy". They found the leaflet easy to understand and written in plain English, but contained no specific references to other formats or translations to minority languages being available.
- 3.23 The Council collects information on the ethnicity of people who apply to it for housing and also those who are housed. However, it does not analyse or routinely report this information. As a result, the Council is not able to assess whether black and minority ethnic groups are under represented on its housing list or in its allocation of housing.
- 3.24 In summary, Clackmannanshire Council is fair at promoting access to its housing list and providing housing option advice. It was in the process of implementing its new allocations policy while the inspection team was on site. However, its written policy and some of its other documents do not meet the requirements of current legislation. Other areas for improvement were identified during the inspection. This included, for example, verification of offers of housing by a second member of staff and the reduction of the length of time for which tenancy references are sought. The Council responded positively and agreed to review all of these matters raised.

### Meeting need and maximising choice

*Social landlords should meet housing need through lettings and should maximise choice for applicants.*

- 3.25 Clackmannanshire Council's new allocations policy is primarily needs based, and also incorporates an element reflecting applicants' time in housing need. Applicants for housing are placed in bands according to their individual circumstances. Bands two and three reflect the statutory reasonable preference categories and are both based on a points system. Band four contains only applicants who have no housing need and is prioritised by date of application. Band one is for applicants whose house is due for demolition and for existing tenants who are presently under occupying their property. This band is also prioritised on date of application. However, from our case reviews we found that applicants in band one also included people who were in varying degrees of housing need. The Council advised us that it will review the prioritisation within band one, in order to adequately reflect applicants' housing needs.
- 3.26 In 2005/06 Clackmannanshire Council allocated 231 (52.4%) lets to homeless people and a further 133 (30.2%) lets to people who were roofless, threatened with homelessness or in insecure accommodation. 32 (7.2%) lets were allocated to transfer tenants and the final 45 (10.2%) lets to other categories. We reviewed 37 allocations based on the Council's previous policy and found that 86.5% of these were to people within the statutory reasonable preference categories. While the inspection team was on site, Clackmannanshire Council was in the process of implementing its new allocations policy. At the time of inspection the Council did not have a documented framework for monitoring the outcomes from the new allocations system. This is an important requirement to ensure that applicants within the statutory reasonable preference categories are not disadvantaged by the new allocations policy. The Council has subsequently introduced a monitoring framework. Initial results from the first two months of implementation of the new policy show positive outcomes for such applicants under the new allocations policy.
- 3.27 Under the new allocations policy, the Council proposes to use a quota system to allocate properties between the four bands of applicants. The quota set by the

Council in October 2006 is to allocate 56% of lets to bands one & two collectively. 23% of lets will be allocated to band three and 21% to band four.

- 3.28 The Council gives applicants in bands two and three time in housing need points. We reviewed 38 re-applications for housing. We looked at the points awarded to the applicants under both the old allocations policy and the new policy. Generally we found that no group of applicants were disadvantaged by the introduction of the new system.
- 3.29 Clackmannanshire Council asks tenants who accept the allocation of a house in which they will be overcrowded to sign a waiver. Under this agreement tenants accept that they will not be entitled to overcrowding points, if in the future they apply for a transfer. Following discussion, the Council has stopped this practice in order to address this weakness.
- 3.30 The Council does not advise those applicants who are bypassed during the selection process for housing. It does not give applicants the opportunity to appeal this decision. Nor does it always record the reasons why an applicant is bypassed. Following discussion during the inspection, the Council advised that it plans to review its procedures in this area.
- 3.31 The Council has nomination agreements in place with the two main registered social landlords (RSLs) who have property within its area. These agreements are however due to be reviewed. The number of successful lettings remained almost the same between 2004/05, when 31 (27.9%) nominations resulted in allocations, and 2005/06, when 25 (28.1%) were successful. In the seven months from April to October 2006, 27 (52.9%) nominations to RSLs were successful. The Council has recently started to meet monthly with the RSLs involved and monitor performance and the effectiveness of these nomination arrangements. These new measures are leading to more effective performance by the Council and increased choice for applicants.
- 3.32 The Council has plans to introduce a choice based lettings system early in 2007 and these are at an advanced stage.

3.33 In summary, Clackmannanshire Council has been good in the past at housing those applicants in greatest need. The Council's new allocations policy addresses its statutory duties to reasonable preference categories of applicant. The Council has recently put in place a documented framework for monitoring the outcomes from its new allocations system.

### **Sustaining tenancies and preventing homelessness**

*Social landlords should maximise security of tenure for all residents of their accommodation, and should work to sustain tenancies and prevent homelessness through their delivery of housing management services.*

3.34 Clackmannanshire Council had signed up 98.9% of its tenants to the Scottish secure tenancy agreement (SST)\* by the end of March 2006. It has plans in place to sign up its remaining tenants. The Council has a small number of short Scottish secure tenancies (SSSTs)\*. Of the five granted, two were for incoming workers, two were issued for homeless applicants, and one was granted on the basis that the tenant required housing support. At the time of the inspection all of the SSSTs had been in place for more than six months with four existing for over a year.

3.35 The Council does not manage its relatively small number of SSSTs well and this is a weakness:

- it does not have a policy or written procedures in place to guide staff;
- it is not clear and consistent about the grounds for providing this type of tenancy;
- it does not make tenants aware of their right to appeal the Council's decision to provide this form of tenancy;
- it does not record details of the support arrangements in place; and
- it does not regularly monitor or review the effectiveness of these tenancies.

The Council is aware of these issues and has firm plans in place to remedy these areas for improvement. This is also referred to in paras 3.46, 3.62 and 5.35.

3.36 The provision of good information and access to appropriate support are important ways for landlords can help individuals sustain their tenancies.

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\* See Glossary

- 3.37 Clackmannanshire Council gives all new tenants a detailed handbook. We asked our tenant assessors to review the Council's Tenancy Handbook. They found the handbook easy to understand and written in plain English. While the Council had reflected feedback from its own service users, our assessors felt that its presentation could be improved by making it more concise.
- 3.38 The Council also provides useful information at sign up interviews. It takes this opportunity to advise tenants of their rights and responsibilities. Staff have a checklist and we saw that they:
- explain how tenants can pay their rent;
  - help them to apply for housing benefit where necessary; and
  - indicate sources of financial advice.
- This is a good approach to offering new tenants support at the start of their tenancy.
- 3.39 The Council aims to visit all tenants within six weeks of taking up a tenancy and regularly monitors the number of completed visits. During 2005/06 42% of settling in visits took place within this target timescale. Between April and October 2006, from a total of 242 lets, 178 visits were carried out. However, of these settling in visits, only 29.8% took place within the target timescale. Following discussion, the Council took immediate steps to revise its procedures in order to improve its performance in this area. Subsequently, the Council's performance for settling in visits in the period April 2006 to January 2007 improved to 44%.
- 3.40 Where housing staff identify that a tenant requires support, they can make a referral to Social Services. The Council wishes to increase the support being provided to this group of tenants and now proposes to employ six Support Officers. These staff will be based within the Homeless section, to provide assistance and advice to vulnerable tenants. It is anticipated that these staff appointments will be in place by the end of March 2007.
- 3.41 Relatively few Clackmannanshire Council tenants give up their homes compared with the Scottish local authorities' average. The percentage of tenants doing so

- rose to 8.3% of the total in 2005/06, compared to 5.8% in 2004/05 and 7.1% in 2003/04. Tenancy terminations were lower than the Scottish local authorities' average in all three years.
- 3.42 Reducing numbers of Clackmannanshire Council tenants are abandoning their homes. 73 did so in 2003/04, 64 in 2004/05 and the numbers in 2005/06 were 50. The Council told us that it expected the reduction in abandonment levels to be slowed in 2006/07. Though it plans to do so, the Council has not yet analysed tenants' reasons for abandoning their homes.
- 3.43 We carried out a number of case reviews on how the Council deals with tenancies that may have been abandoned. We saw that there is a set of recently amended procedures that are closely followed by staff. There were a small number of cases where record keeping, particularly surrounding efforts made to locate absent tenants, was not comprehensive.
- 3.44 Clackmannanshire Council issued 745 Notices of Proceedings (NOPs)\* in 2005/06. The number NOPs issued, court actions raised and recovery decrees obtained all reduced very significantly between 2003/04 and 2005/06. The respective reductions were around 30% in NOPs, 42% in court actions and 52% in recovery decrees obtained. The great majority of these measures were due to tenant's rent arrears. These figures should be viewed in the context of the Council's deteriorating performance in collecting tenants' rents over the same period. This is further referred to in para 3.85.
- 3.45 The number of houses that the Council recovered broadly followed this pattern. There were 14 in 2003/04, 5 in 2004/05 and 6 in 2005/06. In each year, houses recovered as a proportion of the number of houses owned by the Council were well below the average for Scottish local authorities. Again, these figures can be contrasted with the increasing level of rent arrears over the same period.
- 3.46 The Council does not have appropriate arrangements for managing occupancy where it has decided not to recover a property following a court order for

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\* See Glossary

repossession. It does not offer new SSTs or SSSTs in such situations. This means that affected tenants do not have a signed tenancy agreement. The Council reviewed its approach following our inspection, taking account of published good practice. In future it will issue new tenancy agreements in these situations. It has decided to backdate this process to include any similar cases that have occurred since 2001. It expects to complete this review by the end of March 2007.

- 3.47 In summary, Clackmannanshire Council is fair at sustaining tenancies and supporting those at risk of losing their home. It provides good information to tenants at sign up and has plans in place to improve support to its vulnerable tenants. The Council's performance in carrying out settling in visits is an area for improvement. It does not manage its relatively small number of SSSTs well. Within a context of rising rent arrears, the already low number of its tenants who abandon their homes is reducing, as is the number of houses the Council repossesses. There are weaknesses in the way it manages post decree occupancy. Subsequent to our inspection, the Council have taken steps to address a number of the issues highlighted.

### Quality of neighbourhoods

*Social landlords should deliver services to ensure that neighbourhoods are attractive, well-maintained and safe places to live. They should deal appropriately with antisocial behaviour.*

- 3.48 Despite the county's relatively small geographical area, Clackmannanshire Council's housing estates may be located in urban, semi urban or rural areas. They vary greatly in terms of size, type of housing, tenure mix and environmental quality. Demand for locations varies and this has an effect on both turnover and levels of empty properties within different areas.
- 3.49 Clackmannanshire Council uses a wide range of measures to manage its estates. These include the use of :
- management initiatives tailored to individual areas, agreed in consultation with tenants. These may include stock refurbishment or demolition and renewal.

- Estate and Community Wardens services in certain specified areas;
- regular estate inspections;
- an Amenity Clear Up team;
- Community Tidy teams;
- targets of twenty four hours and seven days for removing graffiti;
- local best garden competitions;
- regular meetings with community groups; and
- a Junior Warden Scheme and youth diversionary projects.

3.50 However, the Council has no comprehensive set of standards to guide staff and inform tenants on how well it intends to maintain the environment within its estates.

3.51 The Council has plans to further strengthen the influence local communities have in how it manages its estates. It will shortly introduce formal, joint estate inspections. These will be carried out by its staff, community representatives and local elected members.

3.52 Generally, the estates that we visited during our inspection were reasonably well kept by the Council and the majority of its tenants. There was some evidence of vandalism and other forms of antisocial behaviour.

3.53 The Council's first comprehensive Tenant Survey was carried out in May 2006. It was completed by 1745 households, representing a 34% return. It showed that many of the Council's tenants felt their neighbourhoods were affected by a range of problems. These included vandalism, litter and rubbish, and other people's behaviour including drug dealing and other crime. 15% of respondents felt very unsafe and 33% a little unsafe, when walking in their area after dark. Respondents who live in areas where estate wardens operate had mixed views on the service. Around 43% were satisfied or very satisfied, 41% had a neutral view and 16% were less than satisfied.

3.54 Estate wardens and housing management officers/assistants regularly carry out inspections of gardens and common areas in flatted blocks. Where necessary,

they take steps to remind tenants of their tenancy responsibilities. However, the Council's lease agreement and tenants' handbook do not include enough information on what tenants need to do to maintain reasonable standards within common areas. On occasions, where standards are particularly low, clearing and cleaning of common areas is carried out by the Council without specific additional service charges being levied upon the tenants of the blocks concerned. The block's future condition is thereafter closely monitored by staff. We saw that in a number of flatted blocks, tenants were clearly not meeting their responsibilities to keep common areas clean. As a result, the common areas in some blocks were unattractive and this is likely to make letting properties in them more difficult.

3.55 In one block of flats that it has refurbished the Council has provided tenants with a regular common close cleaning service. An additional charge is levied upon tenants for this service. The Council intends to extend this service to a small number of similar blocks.

3.56 The Council deals with situations where tenants refuse to maintain their garden by carrying out the work on a rechargeable basis. It did this in a small number of cases in 2006 where the situation was particularly bad. However, the Council was unclear if these tenants had paid the accounts issued and was not aware if the action taken was having the desired effect.

3.57 The Council is improving the limited way it presently uses its ICT\* system to guide and monitor its estates management activities. It is further developing its written guidance for staff carrying out estate management duties.

3.58 The Council has excellent arrangements in place to deal with antisocial behaviour. It has met the requirement in The Antisocial Behaviour etc. (Scotland) Act 2004, to work with Central Scotland Police. Together, they have produced a joint antisocial behaviour strategy covering the period 2006/08. The Council and participating partners consulted community and voluntary organisations when developing the strategy. The strategy recognises the necessity for a range of agencies to work in partnership to combat antisocial behaviour and its causes.

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\* See Glossary

The strategy includes details of outcome targets. It also includes arrangements for monitoring progress and regular reporting to relevant parties.

3.59 The Council is receiving increasing numbers of requests for services relating to antisocial behaviour and neighbour nuisance. 494 in 2003/04, 538 in 2004/05 and 753 in 2005/06. This 52% increase may be due, in part, to increased publicity and improved recording arrangements. Such requests for service are categorised in terms of seriousness. The great majority, around 97% in 2005/06, are handled by area housing management staff. Reviews that we carried out on individual cases revealed staff closely followed a set of procedures that reflected good practice. The Council has a group of staff trained in mediation should it wish to use this resource to resolve neighbour disputes. It was not always clear that mediation had been actively considered in the cases that we looked at. The overall proportion of cases referred for mediation is low at around 2%.

3.60 In October 2002, the Council established the Clackmannanshire Antisocial Behaviour, Liaison and Mediation (CALM) team. This specialist team of officers deal with:

- more serious cases of antisocial behaviour;
- cases involving neighbours who were owners; and
- cases not resolved by area housing management staff.

The CALM team dealt with 136 cases during the period October 2002 to December 2005. A further 35 were dealt with by the time of our inspection in November 2006.

3.61 The Council's approach to dealing with these cases is comprehensive and well balanced. The CALM team and through it, area housing management staff, have a range of tools and partner organisations to assist them. Antisocial behaviour cases, particularly those dealt with by the CALM team, were well evidenced and fully recorded. We were able to see good examples where cooperative working contributed positively to the Council's excellent work in this area.

3.62 Clackmannanshire Council generally uses antisocial behaviour legislation rather than its tenancy conditions to deal with antisocial behaviour. The Council is

making increasing use of Antisocial Behaviour Orders (ASBOs)\*. It obtained six in 2005/06 compared with two and one respectively during the two previous years. The Council may seek to recover possession following a breach of an ASBO\*. This process could be accelerated if SSSTs\* were used in appropriate cases at part of its antisocial behaviour procedures. The Council is in the final stages of developing a policy on when it will convert SSTs to SSSTs\* on the grounds of proven antisocial behaviour. This will guide and increase options available to staff dealing with serious antisocial behaviour.

- 3.63 The Council does not record or collate tenant's views on how satisfied they are with the neighbour nuisance and antisocial behaviour service. Performance monitoring of the service is poor. Monthly reports to senior management do not include information on the many cases that are dealt with by area housing management staff. Performance information relating to service requests dealt with by the CALM team needs to be further developed. It does not provide sufficient detail to identify outcomes, actions taken, the geographical origin of service request and any emerging trends.
- 3.64 In summary, Clackmannanshire Council has an excellent approach to dealing with antisocial behaviour. There are however some weaknesses in the way it monitors and reports on its performance. The Council's May 2006 Tenant Survey provides baseline tenant satisfaction levels that can help it monitor its progress and identify areas for improvement in its estate management service. The Council has good arrangements for monitoring conditions in its estates, though it has not developed an environmental standard to guide staff and to inform tenants on what it aims to achieve. The condition of the common close areas in some of its flatted blocks is poor.

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\* See Glossary

### Responsiveness to tenants

*Social landlords should place the people they serve at the heart of their work, treat them with respect and be responsive to their views and priorities. They should ensure that tenants are informed of and involved in decisions that affect the service they receive.*

- 3.65 Clackmannanshire Council is required by the Housing (Scotland) Act 2001 to publish a tenant consultation strategy. We found that Clackmannanshire Council has met its statutory obligation to publish a strategy. A Joint Tenant Participation Strategy and individual associated workplans were developed originally in 2003. This involved the three major Social Landlords operating in the local area; Clackmannanshire Council, Paragon Housing Association and Ochil View Housing Association. Following an invitation to all tenants to attend open day events, a focus group was formed to develop the detail of the strategy. This work was facilitated by Tenant Information Services (TIS), who supported the tenants involved throughout this process. The 2003 document was recently reviewed and a new Joint Strategy, and associated workplans, developed to cover the period 2006/2009. Council staff consulted with the Registered Tenant Organisations (RTOs)\* and used the Council's website and their tenants' magazine to publicise the proposed draft strategy, seeking comment from service users.
- 3.66 The Act also requires landlords to inform and consult tenants about changes to its services and to take tenants' views into account when making decisions that will affect them. We looked at the Council's approach to consulting tenants on proposed policy and service changes. We also reviewed the decision papers presented to the Council and found evidence that information on tenants views were made available and considered when decisions about changes to the service were made.
- 3.67 The Act also requires the Council to maintain a public register of tenants' organisations. Clackmannanshire Council has registered four tenants' organisations. We found that the register was up to date and available for the public on request at the reception of its headquarters building, Lime Tree House in Alloa.

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\* See Glossary

- 3.68 The Council's four Registered Tenant Organisations (RTOs) include the established and well resourced Tenants' and Residents' Federation. This is an umbrella organisation representing a wide range of local tenant organisations from across the Council's area. A formal service level agreement\* is in place between the Council and Federation. This contains the obligations and responsibilities of each party. The Federation has its own permanent office accommodation. It holds regular, well attended meetings and is supported by the Council's dedicated Tenant Participation staff team. A regular liaison meeting is held between the Federation, Council staff and key elected members.
- 3.69 The Federation has been closely involved in the development of the Council's new allocations policy. It contributed to the design of the new housing application form and has been involved in looking at the impact of proposed annual rent increases. It is presently also being consulted around the design and content of a new Handbook for the Council's Tenants. However, the Council yet to negotiate and agree future consultation arrangements with the Federation, laying out the areas of potential involvement, timescales and the resources needed.
- 3.70 The Council's three other RTOs focus on specific estates and areas and vary in terms of their experience. All RTOs have access to annual revenue grants and training resources through the Council. However, it is apparent that no formal training needs analysis has been carried out with each group. Also the Council have yet to agree any annual training plans with each of the groups.
- 3.71 The Council maintains regular contact with around ten unregistered tenant and resident organisations representing local neighbourhoods. In addition, the Council regularly consults with five local special interest groups covering various areas e.g. physical disabilities, learning difficulties.
- 3.72 At present, Clackmannanshire Council principally uses two methods to publicise its housing services. It has a well developed, comprehensive and easy to use corporate website. This contains extensive information on housing related matters. For a number of years, the Council has also produced and circulated a

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\* See Glossary

- quarterly magazine for its tenants, "Homing In". Recent issues of the magazine were reviewed by our Tenant Assessors who found it to be well produced, informative and easy to read.
- 3.73 Following publicity in its regular tenants' magazine, the Council now has in place, a register of tenants who have expressed an interest in being consulted around particular areas of the housing service. The views of these tenants have been used in the review of the Council's Tenant Participation Strategy and newly developed allocations policy.
- 3.74 Tenants' groups readily acknowledged the effort of Council's housing staff and the improvements made in tenant involvement over the past two years. However, a number of the tenants' groups we spoke to want the Council to increase the influence and impact of tenants' views on decision making within the Council. Further evidence came from the May 2006 Tenant Survey. 25% of respondents felt that much improvement was needed where the Council was taking tenants views into account. A further 52% of respondents felt that some improvement was necessary.
- 3.75 The Council carried out its first comprehensive survey of its tenants' views on housing services in May 2006. Two tenants and TIS were part of the Working Group commissioning and taking forward the survey. The Federation were involved in designing the survey questions. Plans are in place to have survey results fed back to tenants in the Council's regular tenants' newsletter "Homing In". It has confirmed that a comprehensive Action Plan will be prepared for consideration by the Council. This is expected to take forward a number of the areas of concern highlighted by service users. However, beyond its positive work in promoting tenant participation, the Council does not have a thorough understanding of its tenants' views of the housing management service.
- 3.76 Core housing service standards have recently been developed by a working group of staff. These were tested at a one day session with Citizens' Advice Bureau, tenant representatives from the Federation and other service users. The service standards have now been introduced and publicised. Awareness has

been raised by leaflets available in all Community Access Points (CAPs), items in the “Homing In” tenant magazine and on the Council’s website. Our Tenant Assessors reviewed these leaflets and found the information provided to be adequate but capable of improvement. They also noted that no reference was included to arrangements for those groups whose first language may not be English. Guidance for staff has been issued and training provided at a one day Customer Care event. This session covered both Service Standards and Tenant Participation topics. The Council is now looking to introduce regular reality checking and quality assurance as part of a performance monitoring framework for housing service standards.

- 3.77 Clackmannanshire Council has an underdeveloped approach to equalities. It has no targets in place for diversity. The Council published its Race Equality Scheme in 2005, in response to the Race Relations Amendment Act 2000. At the time of the inspection it had prepared a draft Disability Equality Scheme, having involved service users in its development. It advised us that in preparation for this, consultants had provided a report on “Particular Needs Housing Assessment for Clackmannanshire” in 2005. Research has also recently been commissioned into the local housing needs of minority ethnic groups. However, the Council did not carry out an assessment or publish details of the potential impact of new policies, strategies and procedures on the various equalities groups. These include:
- allocations policy;
  - homelessness advice and information strategy;
  - tenant participation strategy; and
  - service standards.

This represents a failure on the part of the Council to meet its statutory duties. The Council has a well publicised corporate complaints procedure. The Tenants’ Handbook advises that the target for responding to complaints is ten days. However the Council is operating to a performance target of ten working days. Therefore its assessment of performance in meeting this target may be different to the expectations of service users.

- 3.78 The Chief Executive’s Department receives all formal complaints, sorts them by category and monitors response performance. Housing Services undertakes a similar function for formal complaints it receives through the Chief Executive’s

Department. We saw effective monitoring of responses, together with good and improving performance. This reflected a positive attitude to complaints.

3.79 Many complaints which might otherwise be submitted through the complaints procedures are instead raised with elected members and progressed as a formal Member's Enquiry. Complaints made through the Members Enquiry system, may be very similar to, or duplicate, formal complaints. However the required target timescales for these may differ and in some cases, are determined by the elected member. Staff appear responsive to these enquires. However, not all are categorised or methodically recorded, detailing the action taken or information provided to elected members. This makes analysis of its overall performance on complaints processing, and identification of gaps in service or problem areas, more difficult.

3.80 In summary, the Council has a good approach to engaging with tenants. It has a well developed tenant participation strategy, jointly developed with partners and residents and provides good support to its RTOs. It has a good partnership approach to tenant participation and we saw many instances of tenants influencing the development of new policies, procedures and publications. It has a positive approach to dealing with complaints about its services. The Council has a poor understanding of tenants' views of its housing management service. However, the May 2006 Tenant Survey provides the Council with the opportunity to respond to areas of concern highlighted by service users. Clackmannanshire Council has an underdeveloped approach to Equalities, having failed to meet its statutory responsibilities in relation to race equalities impact assessments.

## Is the service managed for improvement?

### Resource management and efficiency

*Social landlords should maximise their income, in a way that is fair to service users, and manage costs effectively.*

3.81 Clackmannanshire Council provides tenants with a good range of ways to pay their rent. Around half prefer to pay in cash at one of the Council's offices. Other options available to tenants include:

- bank direct debit or standing order;

- cheque, debit or credit card at its local CAPs, or by telephone;
- postal order or cheque by post;
- debit or credit card at its website;
- wage deduction; and
- in two outlying areas, payment at post offices.

3.82 The standard rent period is weekly, but with the agreement of the Council tenants may decide to pay fortnightly, four weekly, or monthly.

3.83 The table below summarises Clackmannanshire Council's performance in collecting rent from its tenants.

	At March 2004		At March 2005		At March 2006	
	Clacks	National	Clacks	National	Clacks	National
Current tenant arrears as % of net rent due	7.7%	7.9%	8.1%	7.4%	9.0%	7.0%
% of current tenant in serious arrears	4.2%	4.9%	5.8%	4.5%	6.8%	4.5%
Total former tenant arrears	£427,905	n/a	£311,057	n/a	£323,865	n/a
Rent arrears written off	£172,400	n/a	£224,194	n/a	£107,683	n/a

Source: Audit Scotland's published performance indicators & Clackmannanshire Council's inspection submission

3.84 Clackmannanshire Council has been a consistently poor performer in collecting rent in recent years. Around 30% of its tenants owe the Council some amount of rent arrears. In 2004/05, the Council was performing at a level around the national average for Scottish local authorities. More lately its performance has deteriorated while the national average for Scottish local authorities has shown an improvement. In 2005/06, the Council was ranked 23rd of all Scottish local authorities in this measure of rent arrears performance.

3.85 Again, contrary to the national trend, the proportion of the Council's tenants owing more than 13 weeks rent and over £250, rose during these three years. For year ending March 2006 it was 6.8%, compared to the national average of 4.5%. The Council's ranking was 24th in this measure of relative performance.

3.86 The Council have identified a number of factors that may have contributed to its poor performance in rent arrears. These include:

- failure to introduce a clear strategy for turning round its declining arrears performance at an early enough stage;
- limited numbers of Notice of Proceedings (NoPs)<sup>\*</sup>;
- the Council's limited ability to advise tenants beginning their tenancy on what rent, net of housing benefit, they are likely to have to pay;
- failure to ensure tenants meet the tenancy conditions to pay rent in advance;
- failure to deal effectively with a relatively small number of tenants who have rent arrears balances in excess of £1000. In total, these account for around half of the total arrears owed by current tenants;
- procedural arrangements delay progress through the rent arrears recovery process;
- delays in the identification of tenants' support needs and the provision of appropriate advice may hinder tenants' ability to make payment; and
- communication issues between various Council departments delaying effective action.

3.87 The Council has, or is in the process of dealing with the above matters. It has;

- comprehensively revised its procedures that guide staff;
- reviewed aspects of its procedures that delayed recovery action;
- committed to increasing the number of staff available to assess vulnerability and arrange appropriate support;
- arranged to provide more detailed information at tenancy sign up on likely rent net of housing benefit;
- improved its performance monitoring arrangements making better use of its ICT system;
- included in its revised procedures improved arrangements for dealing with tenants who have high rent arrears;
- reintroduced issuing quarterly rent balance statements to tenants; and
- made progress in developing a proposed rewards scheme for tenants with a good payment record.

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<sup>\*</sup> See Glossary

- Following the introduction of these new measures over 2006/07, there has been evidence of rent arrears stabilising and over the final quarter of the financial year, starting to fall.
- 3.88 The Council has a good range of referral arrangements with partner services and outside agencies. However, it does not monitor the effectiveness of these arrangements.
- 3.89 A service level agreement\* with the Council's Revenue Services Department has been in place since April 2006. This covers the expected levels of performance in relation to processing of Housing Benefit applications and changes to circumstances. The agreement also lays out monitoring and liaison arrangements. Communication between housing and benefits staff is good with regular meetings. Currently, delays in processing benefit applications or changes in applicants' circumstances are having a negative impact on the Council's performance in collecting rent. The provisions of the service level agreement were reviewed in September 2006.
- 3.90 The May 2006 Tenant Survey highlights the good service provided by the Council. Only 11% of respondents in rent arrears were dissatisfied with the helpfulness of the staff involved. This was confirmed in our discussions with RTOs, who thought the Council provided a good, quick response to tenants in rent arrears.
- 3.91 The Council's revised rent recovery procedures include examples of good practice. These include early, sustained attempts to establish personal contact with tenants in rent arrears. It has good written communications which, where necessary, emphasise the increasing seriousness of cases where progress is not being made. In our case reviews we found these procedures were generally closely followed by staff. However we did see instances where payment agreements made with tenants did not follow guidance. There was evidence of some delays in the Council progressing actions against tenants. We also noted

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\* See glossary

- that details on the steps taken, or communications with tenants, were not always adequately recorded on the ICT<sup>\*</sup> system.
- 3.92 In the majority of cases the Council initially obtains a decree for recovery of any rent arrears due. This is subsequently followed by a conjoined action\* for both recovery of the debt and repossession of the property. It advised us that it did this in order to demonstrate that it had a phased approach to recovering arrears and therefore the Council used eviction as a last resort, only after all other options had been exhausted. However, in case reviews we carried out, we found little evidence that the process of obtaining a separate recovery decree was effective in reducing the amount of arrears owed.
- 3.93 The time taken to reach the point where a recovery of possession decree is considered by the court is extended using this two stage approach. From the evidence that we saw, the level of rent arrears and amount of court expenses that the tenant is required to repay if their house is not to be recovered by the Council, is likely to have increased during this extended period. This is likely to make it more difficult for the tenant to take steps to avoid eviction. A recent assessment carried out by the Council has come to a similar conclusion. Clackmannanshire Council has reviewed its procedures and in future where legal action is necessary it will move directly to seek either repossession or conjoined court orders.
- 3.94 The level of former tenant arrears is significant. The proportion written off as irrecoverable is also high relative to the position in most other Scottish local authorities. Arrears amounted to over £461,000 during the three years to March 2006. Recoveries during this period were £87,470 or around 19% of the former tenant rent arrears that became due. £505,670 was written off as irrecoverable over a similar timescale.
- 3.95 The Council manages former tenancy arrears using a comprehensive set of procedures. However, it rarely pursues the debt owed by former tenants with vigour. The Council's procedures do not include arrangements for tracing debtors

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\* See Glossary

whose address is unknown or uncertain. This is a common reason for debt being irrecoverable. It does not have performance targets in this area of its work.

3.96 Clackmannanshire Council's costs for the supervision and management of its houses, including central support charges, are significantly above the national average.

3.97 The table below summarises Clackmannanshire's reported performance in letting houses that have become empty.

	2003/04		2004/05		2005/06		1 Apr-31 Oct 2006
	CC	National	CC	National	CC	National	CC
Turnover (no. of new vacancies as % of total dwellings)	7.1%	11.6%	5.8%	10.6%	8.3%		
Total no. of relets	487	n/a	442	n/a	441	n/a	247
% relet in <2 weeks	5.5%	16.4%	3%	14.7%	2.3%		
% relet in 2-4 weeks	20.5%	24.9%	19%	23.8%	10.2%		
% relet in >4 weeks	74%	58.7%	78%	61.5%	87.5%	55.1%	86.9%
Average time to relet (days)	83	73	114	79	159	51	98
% of total annual rental due lost due to voids	4.1%	2.7%	4.1%	2.5%	3.7%	2.3%	

Source: Audit Scotland's published performance indicators and Clackmannanshire Council's inspection submission

3.98 In each of 2003/04 and 2004/05 the Council lost 4.1% of its total annual rental income from houses lying empty. At the end of March 2006 the rent loss had reduced to 3.7%, but this still placed the Council 25<sup>th</sup> of 29 local authorities in Scotland in 2005/06.

3.99 The average time for Clackmannanshire Council to re-let its houses increased from 83 days in 2003/04 to 114 days in 2004/05 and to 159 days in 2005/06. This compares with the national average of 51 days for local authorities in 2005/06. In the 7 months from April to October 2006 the average re-let time for Clackmannanshire reduced to 98 days.

- 3.100 In 2005 Clackmannanshire Council recognised its poor performance in this area. It set up a Voids Action Group in June 2005, to identify where problems lay and to explore how to improve performance. The Council has improved its management of voids<sup>\*</sup>, introducing a range of measures including:
- targeting resources at reducing long-term voids (10% of voids let in 2005/06 had been void for over a year);
  - introducing a lettable standard in December 2005 following discussion and agreement with its tenants;
  - improving record-keeping of keys for void properties;
  - regular meetings between the housing section and its in house contractor, Property Contracts Unit (PCU)<sup>\*</sup> to try to resolve issues regarding repairs to void properties; and
  - joint inspections by the housing section and PCU once the repairs to void properties have been completed.
- 3.101 The Council's May 2006 Tenant Survey stated that approximately 25% of respondents found the general state of repair and the cleanliness of their new home to be poor when they moved in. Following the survey, the Council has introduced its "Lettable Standard", aimed at improving performance in this area. New tenants we spoke to during our inspection stated that they were happy with the condition of their properties.
- 3.102 A key weakness in the Council's management of void properties is that its ICT<sup>\*</sup> system has not allowed it to collect accurate data and analyse it for use it as a management tool. Instead, staff presently rely on recording information for monitoring performance by more resource-intensive methods. This means that Clackmannanshire Council's ability to achieve more efficiency in the management of voids is being limited. The Council is aware of this issue, and is investigating potential solutions.
- 3.103 Clackmannanshire Council's performance in collecting rent and in the time it takes to re-let houses has, in the past, been poor. The Council has identified

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<sup>\*</sup> See Glossary

reasons for this, and has taken steps to address these. The measures the Council has introduced have recently had a positive effect upon its performance in managing voids. In the last quarter of 2006/07 its performance in dealing with rent arrears also showed early signs of improvement.

### Performance management

*Social landlords should have clear objectives, standards and targets for housing management services, should monitor achievement of these, and should work to continuously improve services.*

- 3.104 The Council's "Future Directions" document offers a vision as to how Clackmannanshire and the Council might develop over the next decade. It aims to provide a sense of direction, guiding the work of managers and staff.
- 3.105 Clackmannanshire's Corporate Priorities, 2004/2007, document aims to guide investment and the activities of the Council. In this, the Council has refined its strategic aims into five key themes and some forty one key priorities. Under the theme, "maximising quality of life", the Council's housing services directly impacts upon four of the ten key priorities outlined.
- 3.106 Housing, Property and Benefits Advice are one of the five divisions which comprise the Council's Services to People. In addition to stating the general objective for the division, the Services to People, Service Plan, 2006/2009, also contains details of the "balanced scorecard" used for housing services. The range of criteria monitored is basic and limited to only a selected number of Statutory Performance Indicators (SPI)\*. However, details are provided for previous performance and present year's targets. No effort has been made to reflect measures of service users' satisfaction in the performance management system. Progress reports are made quarterly to the Council's Performance and Audit Committee and Corporate Executive Team on the basis of the "balanced scorecard". Elected Members' Information Forums are held where performance in a particular area is causing concern or where new measures are being proposed to improve performance. In addition, the Service Plan also provides more detailed information on agreed Target Outcomes and individual three year

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\* See Glossary

actions with annual milestones. Progress is monitored twice a year with reports and explanatory notes provided to elected members.

- 3.107 The Council's Local Housing Strategy (LHS) 2004-09 forms the basis of the Council's housing strategy and proposed actions in relation to the service. The most recent annual update, 2006, contains details of the ten priority objectives and the proposed specific actions necessary. The Council adopts a good partnership approach by ensuring key local partner's engagement in the development and formal endorsement of the strategy. This approach is extended into monitoring arrangements for the LHS, with the Council's partners being part of the Core Group.
- 3.108 Flowing from the 2006 LHS update, individual Workplans for 2006/07 have been put in place for each of the three sections in the Housing, Property and Benefits Advice division. These are Strategic Housing Services, Policy, Planning and Performance, and Housing Management Operations. These workplans thereafter cascade to the annual performance frameworks for managers and co-coordinators. Individual officers meet regularly with their line managers to discuss their specific job performance, training and development needs. This system has only been recently introduced and therefore it is too early to comment upon its outcomes.
- 3.109 Most monthly reports to senior management provide reasonably detailed performance information on a range of services. Some reports could be usefully expanded and some services that are not reported on at this level would benefit from being included in this process.
- 3.110 In summary, Clackmannanshire Council has a fair approach to performance management. Links are evident between the corporate, service and divisional plans. The recent introduction of service workplans and staff performance systems has provided a firm foundation for moving forward this underdeveloped area. We saw positive examples of managers and coordinators making

increasing use of the Council's ICT\* system to improve information gathering on performance in their service area. However, the balanced scorecard's focus on Statutory Performance Indicators limits its effectiveness as a tool for managers and elected members. There is also little evidence of service users' views featuring in the present performance management system.

### Public reporting

*Social landlords should give stakeholders the information they need about the organisation and its plans, services and performance.*

- 3.111 The Council uses a number of methods to make limited information on its performance, service standards and its plans available. These include:
- regular tenant newsletters;
  - annual performance report;
  - annual presentation to tenants organisations;
  - its website;
  - annual benchmarking report; and
  - tenants handbook and advice leaflets.
- 3.112 Clackmannanshire Council is required by the Local Government Act 2003 to make service performance information on its housing and other services available to the public. Statutorily required performance information can be accessed on its website, however the Council does not give its tenants a single report that provides information on its performance across the full range of its housing services. While some of its publications contain information on aspects of its performance, reporting is not comprehensive or in a form that gives readers a overview of how well it is performing against its own targets or other similar landlords.
- 3.113 In summary, Clackmannanshire's approach to public reporting is fair. Overall the Council has some arrangements for reporting its service standards and plans, however reporting on a wider range of services and including more details of its

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\* See Glossary

performance, particularly service user satisfaction, would improve the overall position.

## Grade and overall assessment of housing management

3.114 Our overall assessment of Clackmannanshire Council's housing management service is fair. We found strengths in the service, along with some weaknesses, a number of which are significant. The Council has a good awareness of its strengths and weaknesses in housing management. Prior to our inspection, it took positive steps to address many of the weaknesses identified in the housing management service. We set out below the key factors we have taken account of in coming to our overall assessment.

3.115 Clackmannanshire Council has a number of strengths in its housing management service. Many of these are in areas that directly impact upon service users. The Council's strengths include housing those applicants in the greatest housing need, its good arrangements to deal with antisocial behaviour and a well developed, joint tenant participation strategy and framework.

3.116 The Council has a number of weaknesses that directly impact upon service users and which, at least in part, undermine the stronger areas of the service. The Council:

- had no framework for monitoring the outcomes from its new allocations policy, though this is now in place;
- had a declining performance in collecting rents from tenants and former tenants, though measures introduced by the Council are resulting in early signs of improvement ;
- took a long time to re-let houses that became empty, but again, measures introduced over 2006/07 are resulting in improving performance;
- has failed to carry out or publish impact assessments on its new policies, strategies and procedures; and
- is poor at managing its relatively small number of SSSTs.

- 3.117 While customer feedback is now gathered in relation to aspects of the lettings and voids processes, there remain gaps in the performance management system of the Council. It does not have a comprehensive picture of service users' views on the various areas of the housing management service. This has a direct impact upon the Council's view of its own performance and its ability to improve the service quality provided to tenants.
- 3.118 The Council has recognised a number of the weaknesses that we identified in our inspection and is in the process of addressing them. The award of a C grade takes into account the Council's self awareness of its performance, the recent measures undertaken and its commitment to improving its performance in this area. This was confirmed by responses to the May 2006 Tenant Survey where 36% of respondents considered landlord services to be improving, with only 7% describing them to be deteriorating.

## 4 Property maintenance

4.1 The grade awarded for property maintenance is:

C	Fair	Some strengths, but with many areas where improvement is required or with a small number of significant weaknesses.
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We explain at the end of this section how the assessments we have made result in this grade.

### How good is the service?

#### Access to the repairs service

*Social landlords should have arrangements in place that make it easy for tenants to report repairs and have them carried out.*

- 4.2 Clackmannanshire Council's responsive repairs service is accessible. Tenants can report repairs by telephone, in writing, by email or by calling in person at a local housing office or Community Access Point (CAP)\*. Tenants can also report repairs via the Council's website and by phoning the Council's recently introduced Housing Repairs Helpline. The Council does not record or monitor the methods used by tenants to access the repair service. It is therefore not able to identify the level of contact across the range of access methods available.
- 4.3 The Council gives tenants advice on how to report repairs in its tenants' Repairs Manual, at their settling in visit and on the Council's website. The service is also promoted in its tenants' "Homing In" magazine and through leaflets and business cards available at its offices. Our Tenant Assessors reviewed the Council's Repairs Handbook. In their opinion, they found the booklet contained too much information and a number of the diagrams were complex and difficult to understand.

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\* See Glossary

- 4.4 In the past, the Council routinely provided tenants with a written receipt for all reported repairs. This confirmed the work to be undertaken, the Repairs Priority Category allocated and target timescale for completion of the repair. However we found that no repair receipts had been issued to tenants throughout 2006, due to a printer failure. We did see evidence that staff were providing this information verbally to tenants contacting the Housing Repairs Helpline. Following our inspection the Council has re-introduced the issuing of receipts to tenants reporting repairs.
- 4.5 The Council operates an accessible out of hours emergency repairs service. A local rate telephone number is supplied which tenants use to contact the Council outwith office hours and at weekends.
- 4.6 In the Council's May 2006 Tenant Survey, 96% of respondents considered the handling of repairs requests to be good or fair.
- 4.7 The Council does not operate a formal repairs appointment system. However, the May 2006 Tenant Survey confirms that 91% of respondents found making arrangements for the contractors to call, to be good or fair.
- 4.8 Following tenant feedback, the Council is to consider the introduction of an appointment system for its responsive repairs service\*.
- 4.9 In summary, access to Clackmannanshire Council's repairs service is good and tenants are satisfied with the arrangements. However, the Council has recognised that further improvements can still be made to improve access to the service and it is currently considering a number of recommendations.

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\* See Glossary

### Speed and quality of response repairs service

*Social landlords should set challenging targets for completing repairs, strive to achieve them and ensure repairs are completed to a high quality.*

4.10 Clackmannanshire Council sets a target for emergency repairs to be dealt with within four hours. Its lesser emergency repairs target is 24 hours, its rapid repairs target is within seven days and its routine repairs target is within 28 days. The table below summarises the Council's reported performance against its targets over the last three years.

		Performance			National performance 2004/05
		2003/04	2004/05	2005/06*	
<b>Emergency repairs</b>	4 hours	97.9	95.2	94.3	93.6%
<b>Lesser Emergency repairs</b>	24 hours	93.1	93.0	86.7	85.9%
<b>Urgent repairs</b>	7 days	85.4	82.3	82.1	85.1%
<b>Routine repairs</b>	28 days	74.0	63.8	67.3	89.6%

Source: CC's Inspection Submission

\*As of 28 September 2006

4.11 We found weaknesses in the way the Council manages and records information about its responsive repairs service in that:

- recording responsive repairs which involve more than one trade, results in a number of separate repairs orders being generated and individually reported;
- there are inconsistencies in the allocation of repairs to the various priority categories operated by the Council. We found that procedures were not being strictly followed, resulting in higher numbers of reported repairs being categorised as emergency. This is covered in para 4.46.
- cancelled repairs such as "no access calls" are being reported as repairs completed within target. While on site, the Council acknowledged this weakness and amended its practice accordingly;
- it is not routinely verifying the accuracy of reported completion times for repairs; and
- the Council is raising a second repair order to remedy defects where a repair has not been completed satisfactorily.

- 4.12 The Council's reported figures therefore inflate the number of repairs carried out and overstate its performance against targets. This represents a significant weakness.
- 4.13 Pre and post inspections\* are important tools for making sure that repairs are targeted accurately and carried out to a high standard. The Council does not set out criteria to help staff select which repairs to pre-inspect. There is no target for the proportion of repairs to be pre-inspected. The Council does not record the number of pre-inspections that are carried out. As a result, it cannot be sure that its approach is proportionate and targeted. This was accepted by the Council and it has confirmed that it is reviewing this area.
- 4.14 At present, the Council does not routinely carry out any post inspections of responsive repairs. There is no guidance to staff when, or if, post inspections should be carried out. This is a weakness as the Council does not have the information required to assess contractor's performance.
- 4.15 The Council does not operate an effective Right to Repair\* scheme and this is a failure in statutory compliance. The maintenance procedures operated by staff has been in place since 1999. These refer to previous legislation which has subsequently been updated by the Housing (Scotland) Act 2001. However, leaflets giving details of the 2001 Act scheme are available at the Council's housing offices. When tenants report a repair, they are advised verbally when it is a qualifying repair\*, but they do not receive the necessary written confirmation. The Council does not maintain a list of alternative contractors nor is detail of the scheme advertised and promoted annually to tenants. Indeed, the tenancy agreement\* used by the Council appears to explicitly discourage tenants from exercising their rights under the legislation. This failure to comply with a landlord's statutory duties represents a significant weakness.
- 4.16 In summary, the Council provides a fair responsive repairs service. The Council's May 2006 Tenant Survey indicated that only 6% of tenants responding were dissatisfied and 3% were very dissatisfied with the way the Council handles

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\* See glossary

responsive repairs. A small minority of respondents also indicated that the repairs service was deteriorating, only 6%. This can be contrasted with the 36% of respondents who considered the service to be improving. This view was confirmed by RTOs. There is however significant weaknesses in the way the Council monitor its performance. The Council does not comply with the statutory requirements of the Right to Repair scheme. There is also weaknesses in its approach to ensuring quality through post inspections of repairs carried out.

### Physical quality of houses

*Social landlords should have good information about the condition of their houses and should deliver effective maintenance programmes that take account of housing quality and home safety needs.*

- 4.17 Scottish Ministers have set a target that all social landlords' houses should meet the new Scottish Housing Quality Standard (SHQS)\* by 2015. Landlords were to complete a plan showing how they will achieve this by April 2005. The Scottish Executive and Communities Scotland assessed and approved the Council's Standard Delivery Plan (SDP). This demonstrated the Council's ability to meet the SHQS by 2015.
- 4.18 Before compiling its SDP, the Council completed a sample survey of the physical condition of less than 10% of its houses. This concluded that the stock was generally in good condition. This information was used as the basis for subsequent development of the SDP. However, the Council does not use routine maintenance information and inspections to further update its stock condition information. The Council is aware of this weakness and is currently working on a proposed new data base. This will use routine information and further inspections to update its bank of stock condition information.
- 4.19 The Council has worked with its tenants to develop a Clackmannanshire Standard. This clearly defines the minimum standard that all of the Council's houses should meet in future.

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\* See glossary

- 4.20 The Council has attempted to accelerate its investment in its houses in recent years. In the current financial year, 2006/07, the Council has increased its Capital Programme\* budget by 30%, to £9.37 million. This is in an effort to progress the works required to meet the SHQS. Current priorities include kitchen, bathroom and external door replacements. The programme also includes installing heating systems and improving energy efficiency. The Council fully involves its Tenants' and Residents' Federation in the development of its annual investment programme. The views of individual tenants are also canvassed through questionnaires circulated with the Council's 'Homing In' tenant magazine. In its May 2006 Tenant Survey, 97% of respondents agreed that the improvement works undertaken were necessary.
- 4.21 The Council manages the improvement works well and we saw evidence that it challenges poorer performing contractors. The Council insists that all contractor's operatives working on investment contracts must attend Council arranged training events. This is positive and ensures contractors are clear regarding its customer care expectations. The Council provides tenants with good information on proposed works and they are given the opportunity to speak directly to Council staff. Clackmannanshire Council arranges for its tenants to have a choice of design layout and colour for kitchen and bathroom replacements. In addition, the Council ensures that extra kitchen units and electrical appliances can be included at the tenant's own expense.
- 4.22 The Council has a five year rolling programme for cyclical maintenance, which is reviewed annually. Tenants are given appropriate notice of when works will be carried out. The Tenants' and Residents' Federation receive monthly updates on the programme's progress. The Council does not routinely carry out tenant satisfaction surveys on the completion of cyclical maintenance contracts. However the Council has plans in place to start collecting and monitoring this information.
- 4.23 The Council has taken positive steps to ensure the safety of its tenants. It has fitted mains or battery operated smoke alarms in most of its houses. Carbon

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\* See glossary

monoxide detectors are routinely fitted to properties with gas central heating. During our visit we identified four properties from our case reviews which did not have a smoke alarm fitted or the alarm was faulty. The Council immediately took appropriate steps to ensure the properties concerned had working smoke alarms. It also immediately reviewed its procedures. As a result, future annual gas safety checks will include confirmation that properties with gas have fully operational smoke alarms and carbon monoxide detectors. In discussion with local police and residents, the Council has installed door entry systems in the flatted buildings where it is the majority owner. The Council is planning to adopt a more formal strategy for the future installation and upgrading of door entry systems.

4.24 The Council's last survey in 2005 reported that 29 dwellings required internal lead pipe replacement. This work has now been completed. A replacement programme is now underway for the replacement of external lead service pipes.

4.25 Clackmannanshire Council is required to carry out safety checks every 12 months on all gas appliances and flues which it provides for its tenants' use. The Council is not meeting its statutory duty for a significant number of its houses. As at September 2006, the Council had completed safety checks within the required 12 months in only 89.5% of its houses with gas. 43% of checks were not done until more than one month after the date on which they should have been completed. At the time of our inspection, the Council's performance had improved. Following the appointment of two further firms of contractors, only 27 properties still were without a current gas safety certificate. The table below summarises the Council's performance in carrying out gas safety checks.

	At September 2006	
	Number of houses	% of houses
Houses with gas appliances and flues	4424	-
Houses with current gas safety certificates	3961	89.5%
Houses where safety check was carried out within 12 months of previous check	2058	46.5%
Houses where safety check was carried out up to one month after the due date	1123	25.4%
Houses where safety check was carried out one to three months after the due date	155	3.5%
Houses where safety check was carried out more than three months after the due date	625	14.1%

- 4.26 The Council reviewed its gas servicing procedures early in 2006. As a result of this review it introduced a number of improvements including:
- beginning a campaign to raise awareness of the issue among tenants;
  - appointing an independent contractor to check the quality of a 10% sample of all gas safety work;
  - initiating access for gas safety inspections 11 months after the date of the previous certificate; and
  - introducing clear procedures for staff where access is not being achieved.
- 4.27 These new practices are positive and there is evidence of these contributing to early improvements in the Council's performance in this area.
- 4.28 From 2004 social landlords have had a statutory duty to manage asbestos in the common areas of their properties. The Council inspected all its common areas for asbestos in 2000, but this information has not been updated or reviewed since. All information on asbestos from the surveys and other sources is currently being gathered. This will eventually be incorporated into the Council's repairs system. A link to the Council's website has been developed which will allow contractors to access information on all the buildings which are known to have asbestos. The Council has in place an implementation plan to cover all aspects of asbestos management. However, at present it is not in a position to demonstrate that it is fully complying with its statutory obligations.
- 4.29 The Tenant Survey carried out in June 2006 provides some evidence of tenant dissatisfaction with the condition of their new homes. From 122 respondents who had moved into their property in the previous twelve months, over half considered the decoration and garden condition to be poor. The Council subsequently introduced a 'Lettable Standard' for all void properties following consultation with tenants. The standard covers all areas of safety including gas, electrical and asbestos checks. Copies of the 'Lettable Standard' are issued to all tenants who have been made an offer of housing. The Standard provides details of the condition a property should be in when it becomes available for let. Tenants we spoke to during our inspection confirmed that they were generally satisfied with the internal condition of their house at the time of re-let.

- 4.30 The Council has a target of ten working days for completing any works necessary to bring its void properties up to its “Lettable Standard”. However repairs to the majority of empty properties are not carried out within the target of ten working days. The Council is putting in place measures to improve performance in achieving this target. This covered in para 3.101.
- 4.31 In summary, the Council’s performance in this area is fair. Its housing has generally been well maintained. It has agreed standards and is investing a significant amount of resources to maintain and improve its housing in order to meet the Scottish Housing Quality Standard (SHQS). The Council has incomplete information on the condition of its houses but it is has recognised this and has plans in place to improve the information it holds. Clackmannanshire Council does not meet its statutory obligations regarding gas safety and this is a weakness. The Council also cannot demonstrate that it is fully complying with its regulatory responsibilities relating to asbestos management.

#### **Responsiveness to tenants**

*Social landlords should place the people they serve at the heart of their work, treat them with respect and be responsive to their views and priorities. They should ensure that tenants are informed of and involved in decisions that affect the service they receive.*

- 4.32 Clackmannanshire Council’s general approach to responding to tenants’ has been previously described in para 3.65.
- 4.33 The Council does not have an effective system in place to routinely obtain tenant’s feedback on individual responsive repairs. It has not collected feedback on individual repairs for the last ten months. It therefore does not have comprehensive information on the quality of its repairs service. This lack of information makes it difficult for the Council to identify any improvements necessary to its present procedures. The Council has recognised this and is shortly to introduce a new pre-paid postcard repairs feedback. This postcard will be given to tenants by PCU operatives following completion of a responsive repair. The proposed postcard has been tested with a pilot group of tenants and arrangements are in hand for staff training.

- 4.34 The Council invests heavily in engaging with the Tenants' and Residents' Federation, particularly around its future investment decisions. The Council is working with the Federation to develop a detailed Business Plan which will address the funding of the investment priorities agreed. This includes future rent levels for tenants and their impact upon investment proposals. In order to allow tenants to be fully involved in this process, the Council has commissioned Tenant Information Service (TIS) to provide support and independent advice to the Federation.
- 4.35 The Council collects tenants' views on the kitchen and bathroom replacement contracts but has not done this consistently on the other contracts in the planned investment programme. The Council is currently updating its procedures for all capital investment contracts and this includes sending tenants questionnaires and entering the information onto a database in order to analyse responses. The results are regularly reported to tenants. In the recent Tenant Survey, around 900 respondents had major improvement works carried out in their home over the last twelve months. Among these tenants, only 6% were dissatisfied and 3% highly dissatisfied with the overall works undertaken. We saw evidence that the Council responded to tenants' views by including decoration, floor coverings and wall tiling in bathroom and kitchen replacement contracts. The Council also arranges, where necessary, alternative decant accommodation for vulnerable tenants affected by kitchen and bathroom replacement programmes.
- 4.36 The Council carried out a Tenant Survey in May 2006. Approximately one third of the Council's tenants responded. The survey results show that only 9% of the tenants who responded were dissatisfied or very dissatisfied with the repairs service provided. The Council's four Registered Tenants' Organisations all expressed the view that the repairs service was well regarded among their tenants.
- 4.37 The Council has a formal complaints procedure. As previously reported in para 3.79, we saw effective monitoring of formal complaints and the response of the Council to review the relevant policies and procedures. Complaints raised through the elected member's enquiries system are not always dealt with on the

same target timescales as those raised as formal complaints. The Council does not record or monitor informal complaints and therefore cannot use this information to make changes to its repair service.

- 4.38 In summary, Clackmannanshire Council is good at responding to service users' views, where these are available. However, this good work is compromised by weaknesses in its processes for gathering tenants' views on the quality of the responsive repairs service. However, the Council has firm plans in place to remedy this gap in its information.

## Is the service managed for improvement?

### Resource Management and Efficiency

*Social landlords should manage the costs of their services effectively and should procure repairs and maintenance services in a way that takes account of quality and cost.*

- 4.39 Clackmannanshire Council spent £798 per house on repairs and maintenance in 2005-06. This is an increase on the previous year and it makes Clackmannanshire one of the higher spending councils managing houses in Scotland.
- 4.40 The Council procures\* its investment programme contracts through traditional selective competitive tendering. This incorporates partnering\* agreements with suppliers, where appropriate. We saw evidence that the Council deals effectively with underperforming contractors.
- 4.41 The Council delivers its responsive repairs service through its in-house Property Contracts Unit (PCU). Responsive repairs, cyclical maintenance, voids and part of gas maintenance is covered by SimCo. This is a partnership agreement between Housing and PCU. A Core Group was initially established to monitor and manage the contract and members of this group include representatives from Housing, the contractor (PCU), Unions and the Tenants' and Residents' Federation. The SimCo arrangement was implemented in 2003 for an initial three

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\* See glossary

- year period. This arrangement was highly innovative at this time and involved formally setting objectives, performance targets, arrangements for monitoring and an equitable distribution of projected efficiency savings between the two sections of the Council. This arrangement was extended for a further year to April 2007, due to a Best Value Review of the Repairs Service. Subsequent to our inspection, this date was further extended to October 2007 due to delays in the review process.
- 4.42 For a number of reasons, the SimCo arrangement was not effectively monitored or managed at strategic level until 2006. The Council's Business Change analysts were asked to review the processes involved in SimCo and their recommendations have recently been reported to the Council. The SimCo Core Group has now been re-established and is meeting on a regular basis and will manage and monitor the remainder of the agreement and progress the recommendations for improvement.
- 4.43 The Council has recently instructed independent consultants to carry out a Best Value review. This will verify whether tenants' interests are being best served through the SimCo arrangement. It will also identify any potential implications for future arrangements between the parties. The results of this review are to be made available by March 2007.
- 4.44 The Council has procedures in place to monitor and control the cost of its repairs service. The SimCo arrangement is based upon a Schedule of Rates (SoR)<sup>\*</sup> which is inflated annually. However the schedule items are out of date and require to be reviewed. Variations<sup>\*</sup> in individual repairs are identified and staff members investigate significant additional costs before approving payment. Meetings are held on a regular basis in order to monitor overall expenditure.
- 4.45 The Council does not monitor the number of instances where contractors fail to gain access to carry out repairs. It also does not have information on how many of its repairs result in repeat visits by PCU. This has inhibited the Council's ability to reduce costs and improve its performance in this area.

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<sup>\*</sup> See glossary

- 4.46 The inconsistencies in the allocation of repairs to priority categories has been previously referred to in para 4.11. This weakness has had the effect of increasing costs of the responsive repairs service due to the higher number of emergency call outs resulting.
- 4.47 As highlighted in para 4.14, the Council does not carry out any post inspections of completed repairs and therefore cannot effectively assess or improve the service quality and value for money achieved from its responsive repairs service.
- 4.48 Clackmannanshire Council is poor at recharging repair costs effectively. Information is collected on the amounts to be recharged to tenants and owners by Housing staff. However, it can take several months for this information to be processed, causing delays in the issuing of invoices by Housing. The Council's Revenue Services team are responsible thereafter for management and collection of amounts due. At the time of our inspection, the Council was owed over £595,000 from tenants and owners, for rechargeable repairs in the period from 1<sup>st</sup> April 2003. Management systems are poor and figures are not readily available for invoices issued and the actual costs that have been recovered.
- 4.49 In summary, Clackmannanshire Council's approach to managing its resources to deliver its property maintenance service is poor. Its failure to effectively monitor the SimCo arrangement has severely limited its ability to manage the repairs service. The Council is starting to put in place the recommendations from the recent Business Change study and this should address some of the weaknesses identified. The Council has significant weaknesses in the way it manages rechargeable repairs.

#### **Performance management**

*Social landlords should have clear objectives, standards and targets for property maintenance services, should monitor achievement of these, and should work to continuously improve services.*

- 4.50 The Council does not have an effective strategic planning framework for its property maintenance service. The SimCo arrangement provided the basis for driving forward improvements in the responsive repairs service. As covered in

- para 4.42, the Council has failed to effectively monitor this arrangement for the first three years of its existence. Under these circumstances, it has been unable to effectively manage the responsive repairs service.
- 4.51 The Council does not have an effective framework for monitoring and reporting its performance in its property management services. A balanced score card is regularly completed and presented to managers and elected members. However, this information is basic and limited to Statutory Performance Indicators (SPIs)\*. The report does not routinely contain any information user feedback, benchmarking, trend analysis or improvement options.
- 4.52 The way the Council records and manages information about repairs has been highlighted earlier in para 4.11. The Council's reported figures overstate actual performance and do not reflect the service that tenants are receiving.
- 4.53 The Council does not have comprehensive up to date policies and procedures in place for its property maintenance services. These contribute to the weaknesses we found during our inspection. However the Council is currently developing a framework for managing the future review of its policies and procedures.
- 4.54 In summary, the Council has recognised its weak performance in this area. The recent re-establishment of the SimCo Core Group, the present Best Value Review and findings from their Business Change analysts report provide a solid basis for future improvement. However, at present, the Council's poor approach to performance management and planning remains a significant weakness.

### Public reporting

*Social landlords should give stakeholders the information they need about the organisation and its plans, services and performance.*

- 4.55 The Council's annual report provides no performance information on its property maintenance service to its tenants. The Service Plan contains a limited amount of information on the statutory performance indicators on the completion of

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\* See glossary

different categories of repairs. However this document is only available to the public on the Council's website.

- 4.56 The Council gives regular presentations to its Tenants' and Residents' Federation on its annual rent increase and proposed capital programme. It also provides some limited information on its annual repairs performance.
- 4.57 The Council provides tenants with a variety of information on issues affecting its property maintenance service through its quarterly "Homing In" magazine. However, the newsletters do not provide any information on repairs performance.
- 4.58 In summary, the Council is poor at reporting its performance of its repair service.

### Grade and overall assessment of property maintenance

- 4.59 Our overall assessment is that Clackmannanshire Council's property maintenance service is fair. We found strengths in the service, along with some weaknesses, a number of which are significant. The Council has a good awareness of its strengths and weaknesses in property maintenance. Prior to our inspection, it took positive steps to address many of the weaknesses identified in the repairs service. We set out below the key factors we have taken into account in coming to our overall assessment.
- 4.60 Clackmannanshire Council has a number of strengths in its property maintenance service. Many of these are in areas that directly impact upon service users. The Council's strengths include the good condition of its properties, rising levels of investment, good access arrangements, good engagement with its tenants and a highly responsive emergency repairs service. This view is confirmed by the low levels of dissatisfaction expressed by tenants and general high regard they attach to the repairs service.

4.61 The Council has a number of weaknesses that directly impact upon service users and which, at least in part, undermine the stronger areas of the service. The Council:

- is poor at completing non emergency repairs within its published target timescales;
- does not carry out post inspections of reactive repairs;
- does not fully meet its statutory obligations in its management of gas safety, asbestos and on Right to Repair; and
- recently, has not routinely gathered tenants' views on the quality of its responsive repairs service.

4.62 There are also significant gaps in the performance management system of the Council. It does not have a good picture of performance across the service or the outcomes it is achieving. These weaknesses, some of which are significant, have had a direct impact upon the Council's view of its own performance and its ability to improve the service quality provided to tenants.

4.63 The Council has recognised a number of weaknesses that we identified in our inspection and is in the process of addressing them. The award of a C grade takes into account the Council's self awareness of its performance, the recent measures undertaken and its commitment to improving its performance in this area. Again this view is confirmed by responses to the May 2006 Tenant Survey where 36% of respondents considered the repairs service to be improving, with only 6% describing it as deteriorating.

## 5 Homelessness services

5.1 The grade awarded for homelessness services is

C	Fair	Some strengths, but many areas where improvement is required or with a small number of significant weaknesses.
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We explain at the end of this section how the assessments and judgements we have made result in this grade.

### How good is the service?

#### Access to homelessness services

*Local authorities should provide open, fair and equal access to their homelessness services and should provide a 24 hour crisis response service for roofless households*

- 5.2 Relative to its population, Clackmannanshire Council has received the highest number of homeless presentations in Scotland, in three of the last four years. During our inspection we found that the Council was recording presentation numbers accurately.
- 5.3 The main access point for homeless applicants in Clackmannanshire is the Council's main Housing office, Lime Tree House (LTH) in Alloa. This is also the contact point for the emergency standby service. Homeless people can contact the homeless section by phone or in person. Homeless people also present at the Council's Community Access Points (CAPs). CAPs' staff have had no specific training and are not equipped to answer general questions on the homeless service. This is contrary to recommendations in the Code of Guidance.
- 5.4 Two of the homeless section's staff are designated as visiting officers. From April 2006 this service has been available for applicants. However, at the time of our inspection, staff had not carried out any interviews.
- 5.5 The recent implementation of a duty system from September 2006 has significantly reduced the time homeless people wait for an appointment. In the period 1<sup>st</sup> September 2006 to 20<sup>th</sup> September 2006 applicants waited on average

- 2.79 days. For the corresponding period in 2005, applicants waited 36.4 days. This has significantly improved access to the homeless service.
- 5.6 Clackmannanshire Council received 1160 applications for assistance from homeless people in 2005/06. This represented an increase of 3% on the previous year. The number of homeless households presenting amounts to 4.99% of all households in the area. This is almost double the national figure of 2.51%. In 2004 the Council commissioned consultants to carry out a Homeless Needs Assessment. The consultants could find no specific reason for the high levels of homeless presentations in Clackmannanshire.
- 5.7 The Council routinely collects ethnicity information about homeless applicants, but does not extend this to include all other equalities groups. Although the Council has introduced a monthly Equalities report for their Senior Management Team, it does not always record, analyse or monitor ethnicity information. Monitoring would allow the Council to ensure that black and minority ethnic applicants are receiving fair access to and outcomes from the homelessness service. While we were on site, the Council decided to introduce a 100% check on closed cases in order to allow it to understand its responses to ethnic minority households.
- 5.8 The homeless section staff have access to and use translation services. The Council's Homeless Strategy is available in other formats and languages. The Council's website and Service Delivery Standards also ensure that all publications will be available in appropriate formats and languages. The Council have employed useful and effective measures, such as using a staff member fluent in Polish to help deliver a sensitive service to Polish speaking applicants. Homeless staff also advise applicants of translation services' availability during interviews. Posters advertising the translation service are prominently displayed in a range of community languages. One Polish speaking homeless applicant we spoke to, felt the homeless staff had been very helpful. The current arrangements for interviewing applicants at LTH allow privacy for interviewing and access for disabled people.

- 5.9 The Council recognises that it requires to do more to publicise the homeless service. While we were on site the Council introduced its first poster advertising the service, including a freephone contact number. It also introduced an audit system to ensure the posters were always available and prominently displayed in places where homeless people are likely to see them. The poster was also loaded onto the plasma information screen at the reception area in LTH. The Council is also presently planning a range of further measures to promote the service including:
- publishing information on its website on how to access the homeless service;
  - providing homeless applicants with leaflets on the service; and
  - publishing leaflets explaining the process of application.
- These various measures are under development and the Council has targeted their publication, following consultation with stakeholders, in 2007.
- 5.10 The homeless team are responsible for interviewing and advising applicants on housing options. The development of housing options is part of the Council's draft Housing Information and Advice Strategy. Housing options and follow on advice provided to applicants is currently not comprehensive. The Council plans to extend this information in its proposed Housing Options Guide.
- 5.11 When homeless people contact the service outwith normal working hours, an emergency controller, based at LTH, takes details. These are then passed to a duty standby officer, who then contacts the caller direct. Council staff on standby do not have detailed written procedures to guide them, however, these are currently in draft form. The cases we reviewed show the system generally works well, with temporary accommodation being offered. However the recording of homeless applications in some instances was incomplete. The Council's new approach to auditing casework is expected improve the recording of information. This new process is explained in para 5.22.
- 5.12 The Council has no formal referral arrangements in place with its partners and associated agencies. We did however see evidence of written contact in a small number of cases. Without formal referral protocols the Council cannot record

access information. This could help the Council monitor and improve the service experience of homeless people in Clackmannanshire.

- 5.13 In summary, the high number of homeless presentations to the Council show that applicants have good access to homeless service. However the Council could do more to publicise the service.

### Assessing homeless applications

*Local authorities should treat homeless people fairly and consistently and be responsive to their individual needs when assessing their application for help*

- 5.14 The Council must assess homeless people who apply for help and reach a decision on their application. The homeless legislation and the Code of Guidance define the decisions that the Council can reach and clarify the investigations that it should undertake. Some key statistical information on homeless presentations in Clackmannanshire is set out in the table below:

	2003-04		2004-05		2005/06	
	Council	National	Council	National	Council	National
No. of <b>applications</b> made under homeless legislation	1003	56,385	1122	57,020	1160	59,970
No. of households applying as a percentage of all households	4.49%	2.29%	4.79%	2.41%	4.99%	2.51%
No of <b>households</b> assessed as homeless as percentage of all households assessed	44%	78%	54%	73%	56%	73%
No of <b>households</b> assessed as priority homeless as percentage of all homeless households assessed	32%	56%	41%	55%	45.7%	54.9%

Source: Audit Scotland and Scottish Executive Statistical Bulletins and the Council's inspection submission

5.15 An overview of the outcomes for homeless applicants is set out in the table below.

	2003-04		2004-05		2005-06	
	Council	Scotland	Council	Scotland	Council	Scotland
Total number of applications assessed in period	1042	49,937	1181	54,302	1112	57,831
Priority unintentional	33%	54%	36%	52%	41%	52%
Priority Intentional	1%	2%	1%	2%	2%	2%
Non-priority	10%	21%	13%	19%	11%	17%
Not homeless	7%	8%	6%	9%	8%	9%
Lost contact/withdrew before assessment	17%	9%	18%	12%	30%	13%
Resolved prior to assessment	32%	6%	26%	6%	8%	7%
% of applications assessed in period	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%

Source: Scottish Executive Housing Bulletins and Clackmannanshire Council's inspection submission

5.16 The Council closed 30% or 334 of all assessed applications as "lost contact / withdrew before assessment" in 2005/06. This represents a 12% increase on the previous year. The Council considers this was caused by changes in the way lost contact decisions were recorded. Our analysis shows an improvement in "lost contacts" to 26.1% of decisions made between 01/04/06 and 20/9/06. This high level of lost contact distorts decision percentages in all other categories. Therefore, almost every decision category in Clackmannanshire falls below the national average percentage. However, the proportion of all applicants assessed as unintentionally homeless and in priority need has increased in the last 3 years from 33% to 41%; in the same time period applications increased by 15.4%.

5.17 The Council has not yet fully investigated the reasons for the high proportion of "lost contact" decisions. The homeless section has however, in response, recently introduced its new duty interview system which has resulted in significant reductions in the time applicants wait for appointments. For the period between 1<sup>st</sup> September 2005 and 20<sup>th</sup> September 2005, 35% of all appointments resulted in lost contact decisions. For the same period in 2006, following the

introduction of the new duty system, this figure had fallen to 7%. The Council has also begun to review its information requirements, following an examination of our case review analysis.

- 5.18 Scottish ministers have set a target to reduce by 50% the number of applicants who receive non priority decisions by 2009. This is leading to the complete removal of the non priority category by 2012. Clackmannanshire Council's response to this directive has been good. It now ensures that applicants presenting with overnight access to their children fall within priority categories. Clackmannanshire Council estimate this measure will reduce all non-priority decisions by 30% and significantly contribute to it meeting the target to halve non priority decisions by 2009.
- 5.19 A team of six caseworkers carry out homeless assessments. The Council conducts interviews on a duty system with applicants interviewed when they present. This system has been in place since 1<sup>st</sup> September 2006. If applicants are likely to receive a negative decision the Council call them for a second interview where the caseworker asks for further information before issuing their decision. Caseworkers interview, decide cases and arrange actions. To improve the quality of casework the Council has now introduced an audit system, which is explained in para 5.22.
- 5.20 We reviewed 70 homeless applications and found that the Council does not always follow the correct sequence of inquiries. In addition, it does not always record evidence in a clear way, particularly in checking accommodation histories. This can result in the Council issuing decisions without sufficient evidence in place to ensure the decisions are correct. Our sample case reviews also confirmed that the Council does not currently assess the support needs of applicants in all cases. It has however begun to plan a joint assessment framework for homeless and potentially homeless people, although implementation is not imminent. Once introduced, this will also positively affect the Council's performance in preventing homelessness.

- 5.21 In our case reviews, we found that the Council requires applicants presenting following marital dispute, to provide written evidence of the breakdown from estranged spouses. This is not good practice. In one case, the Council has given an owner occupier who presented as homeless following marital breakdown a “not homeless” decision. It has advised them to return to the family home, until their property’s sale. This is contrary to the way the Council treats people presenting from other tenures when in a similar situation. While we were on site, the Council responded positively to our comments. It has now issued improved guidance to caseworkers on the evidence requirements for cases involving marital breakdown.
- 5.22 The Council told us that it had begun a 15% random check of all closed applications. It anticipated that this measure would help manage the quality and consistency of investigation and decision making. However, the homeless section has not carried out these checks consistently and they have not been effective. The Council has no reliable audit system. It is therefore in a weak position to develop its understanding of key decision areas. Further, it cannot ensure its staff members receive the support they require to ensure high standards and consistency in decision making. While we were on site, the Council decided to introduce a 100% casework audit of closed cases. It resolved to re-contact applicants where the audit revealed its original decision to be wrong or questionable.
- 5.23 We shadowed\* a number of homeless interviews. We saw that officers are sensitive to the needs of people applying as homeless. The Council recently introduced a useful checklist to ensure homeless people receive appropriate information during their interview. Some further information could be added to this list to ensure that advice is comprehensive. This was acknowledged by the Council while we were on site and it agreed to amend the checklist.
- 5.24 The Homeless Code of Guidance suggests a target of 28 days for the Council to complete inquiries. Although it has not always recorded the date of application correctly in all cases, the Council has achieved the 28 day target in 49% of cases

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\* See Glossary

in 2005/06. We have calculated that performance has improved to 54.6% between 01/04/06 and 20/09/06. The Council's decision to change to a duty system in September 2006 should further improve its performance in this area. The Code of Guidance recommends that Councils notify people of the decision on their application as quickly as possible. In almost all of our case reviews, the Council sent letters immediately after it reached its decision.

- 5.25 In summary, while the Council accepts proportionately high numbers of homeless applicants, its current performance in the control and consistency of its assessment process is poor. Too many applications result in "lost contact" decisions. The Council has, however, recently begun to introduce consistency, quality and improvement in its assessment process. It has introduced casework audit, an improved interview system and improved the time taken for decisions. The homeless section has begun to work with other Council departments to develop an assessment system for those vulnerable applicants in need of support. This has yet to be implemented.

### Temporary accommodation

*Local authorities should make available an adequate supply of good quality temporary accommodation to meet the needs for homeless people.*

5.26 Key figures on the use of temporary accommodation by the Council are set out in the table below.

	<b>2003-04</b>	<b>2004-05</b>	<b>2005-06</b>
	<b>Clackmannanshire</b>	<b>Clackmannanshire</b>	<b>Clackmannanshire</b>
Number accommodated in bed and breakfast accommodation	269	310	288
Percentage accommodated in bed and breakfast accommodation	53.59	56.9	55.7
Average length of stay in bed and breakfast accommodation	34	35	37
Number accommodated in Council furnished accommodation	141	151	138
Percentage accommodated in Council furnished accommodation	28.1	27.7	26.7
Average length of stay in Council furnished accommodation	92	94	95

Source: Scottish Executive Housing Bulletins and Clackmannanshire Council's Inspection Submission

5.27 The numbers of homeless applicants accommodated in temporary accommodation in Clackmannanshire has remained largely constant for the last three years. The Council's records show 410 in 2003/04, 461 in 2004/05 and 426 in 2005/06. The average length of stay in bed and breakfast has increased in this period from 34 to 37 days. The average length of stay in dispersed units has also increased from 92 to 95 days.

5.28 The Council provides temporary accommodation for homeless applicants in a range of property including:

- dispersed, furnished Council lets;
- accommodation leased from RSL partners;

- a homeless accommodation block;
- security controlled furnished flats;
- bed and breakfast establishments with shared rooms;
- supported accommodation for young people, managed by partners; and
- a self contained “crash pad” in the supported accommodation building.

5.29 Certain forms of its temporary accommodation have been adapted for disabled applicants.

5.30 The Council always accommodates people who are homeless and who request housing. Homeless applicants using the Council’s 24 hour emergency service also have immediate access to accommodation. The Council view its “crash pad” as effective provision for even the most challenging client groups.

5.31 The Council has set itself a challenging target to decrease its use of bed and breakfast accommodation. It aims to ultimately discontinue its use by 2010. The Council proposes to achieve this by increasing the numbers of dispersed Council lets available. A homeless reception and assessment facility is also planned. However, the Council has not yet secured funding or identified a site for the proposed unit. It also intends to introduce enhancements to its current supported accommodation described in para 5.28. The Council has increased the provision of dispersed lets from 10 in 2002/03 to the current number, 28. It has plans to further increase this to around 50 within the next year. However, bed and breakfast usage has not decreased substantially. A reduction of 1.2% has been achieved between 2004/05 and 2005/06. In 2005/06, bed and breakfast use was 55.7% of all temporary accommodation and this is a weakness.

5.32 The Council continue to use bed and breakfast accommodation with homeless applicants sharing rooms with strangers. This is unacceptable. People will share accommodation with strangers for some time as most single people housed in bed and breakfast, are not moved on to dispersed units.

5.33 The Council has, at times, accommodated homeless people outwith the district in Stirling, Falkirk and Glasgow. 50 households were placed with establishments

outwith the district in the period 1st April 2006 to 1<sup>st</sup> December 2006. This is contrary to the advice given in the Code of Guidance. The Council told us that applicants would only be housed outwith the district when no other accommodation was available locally. It is noted that the supply of Bed and Breakfast accommodation is limited within Clackmannanshire. However, the extent to which the Council places applicants outwith the district is a weakness.

- 5.34 The Homeless Persons (Unsuitable Accommodation) (Scotland) Order 2004 prohibits Councils from using unsuitable temporary accommodation for certain vulnerable groups. This covers households with children and pregnant women, if the stay is for longer than 14 days. Clackmannanshire Council has breached the unsuitable accommodation order in its temporary accommodation in that:
- it is placing pregnant women and families with dependent children in bed and breakfast accommodation. In the period 1<sup>st</sup> May 2006 to 1<sup>st</sup> December 2006, this breach occurred on four occasions: and
  - the Council also recognises it uses temporary accommodation of a size inadequate for some homeless families. This breaches the terms of the order, with reference to the Council's Houses in Multiple Occupation standards and its own allocations policy. In the same period, this occurred on two occasions.

The Council's failure to comply with the Unsuitable Accommodation Order is a weakness.

- 5.35 The Council has with NCH Path\* developed a good project providing temporary, supported accommodation for young people. Young homeless applicants can choose to take up accommodation from the project throughout the Council's area. This accommodation becomes permanent for applicants following a period of support. The Council can extend this period of support in line with the young persons support needs. The project has been successful with over 80% of young people retaining their tenancy. The Council is currently reviewing its present use of Occupancy Agreements for the project. It is aware that the use of SSSTs would increase the security of applicants in this form of temporary accommodation.

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\* See Glossary

Generally the Council does not assess homeless applicants for support, unless they fall within the remit of the NCH Path project. During our inspection, the Council advertised for six staff to undertake work as support officers. Subsequent to our inspection, four officers have been appointed and are now in post. They will be responsible for supporting homeless applicants in both temporary and permanent accommodation.

5.36 The Council recognised their limited approach to meeting an applicant's individual needs in temporary accommodation. It has no routine process to identify suitable properties close to schools or applicant's workplaces. However, the accommodation section will seek to place people sensitively. The Council is aware of this. It told us it hoped to improve the situation in future by giving wider consideration to the sites for future dispersed units.

5.37 The physical standard of temporary accommodation offered to homeless people in Clackmannanshire is good. It is well furnished and cleaned to a high standard. The Council's temporary tenancy team carry out regular weekly checks of most accommodation. The Council ensure that all bed and breakfast establishments that it regularly uses have current Houses in Multiple Occupancy (HMO) certificates. Homeless applicants we spoke to were very satisfied with the standard of their accommodation.

5.38 In summary, the Council offers a poor temporary accommodation service to many applicants. This significant weakness is characterised by:

- the Council's high level of shared bed and breakfast placements for homeless people, although this should be reduced in future by the Council's plans for greater numbers of dispersed lets;
- its continued use of out of area placements;
- breaches of the unsuitable accommodation order;
- the absence of a routine assessment to identify vulnerable applicants; and
- the lack of adequate support mechanisms.

### Permanent accommodation

*Councils should, so far as possible, make offers of permanent accommodation quickly and should offer the same level of choice and quality of houses as other applicants.*

- 5.39 In 2005/06 the Council secured permanent accommodation for 77% of the people it assessed as having priority need. This is significantly higher than the national average figure of 70%. The Council housed 5% of the people it assessed as non priority during the same period. The Council allocated over 52% of all its lets to applicants assessed as homeless in 2005/06. This was an increase from 35.52% in 2003/04. The Council allocates all types of houses to homeless people and records show an equitable distribution of properties. The Council's recent performance in allocating homes to homeless people is a key strength.
- 5.40 The Council's new allocation policy is to become a choice based system in early 2007. However, until then, the Council will make direct allocations to applicants on the basis of bandings and quotas. Early results from the monitoring of the Council's new allocations policy suggest that outcomes for homeless applicants have not been adversely affected.
- 5.41 The Council was unable to tell us how long it took on average to offer housing to homeless people following its "duty to house" decision. Our sample analysis of 107 cases from 2005/06 shows an average of around 88 days. However there were 3 cases waiting over 300 days and 20 cases taking over 150 days. Many of these cases had minimal contact with the Council during the period awaiting their offer of permanent housing. In accordance with guidance, the Council should seek to house homeless people as soon as possible, taking into account the suitability of accommodation for applicants. Our analysis suggests that in 2005/06 from 1108 cases, where the Council recorded the re-housing outcome, 531 or 47.9% were "not known". The Council needs to ensure that it records outcomes for as many cases as possible. This will allow better and more accurate analysis of its performance.

- 5.42 The Council currently fulfils around half of all possible nominations with its RSL partners. Although this level is an improvement on previous years, it represents a missed opportunity to house homeless people. It could also reduce the time some of them wait for suitable permanent housing. The Council has only recently put in place Section 5\* Agreements with its two main local RSL partners. To date it had referred three people, all of whom its partners housed.
- 5.43 In summary, the Council's performance in allocating permanent accommodation to homeless people in priority need is good. Outcomes for priority homeless applicants presently are amongst the best in Scotland. It houses around 80% of priority homeless applicants. However, the Council needs to do more to understand final outcomes for some homeless people. It could also reduce the time some homeless applicants wait to be permanently housed.

### Preventing homelessness

*Local Authorities should work to prevent people from becoming homeless and to reduce the incidence of repeat homelessness.*

- 5.44 Clackmannanshire Council sets out its approach to preventing homelessness and reducing repeat presentations in its Joint Homeless Strategy and local outcome agreement. This strategy was adopted by the partners in June 2006. It sets out a range of aims and objectives intended to prevent people from becoming homeless and reduce future repeat applications from homeless people. The homeless strategy is accompanied by a wide ranging action plan. This involves a number of the Council's Departments and key partners.
- 5.45 Many of the detailed measures to prevent homelessness contained in the action plan have been in progress since 2004. This followed the Council's first presentation of its strategy to the Scottish Executive. The Council is progressing prevention through the action plan in areas such as:
- the development of a shared method for identifying vulnerable applicants;
  - the establishment of a local private landlord forum;
  - a formal framework of multi agency referral protocols; and
  - the development of baseline information about tenancy breakdown.

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\* See glossary

- 5.46 The Council has not achieved some action plan tasks within the stipulated timescales. Examples include the proposed introduction of a rent guarantee scheme and drafting of revised policies and procedures. The Council told us it had chosen to implement the action plan under 17 broad headings. Responsibility for leading on specific headings is split between different Council Departments. The Council advises that this arrangement had proved to be difficult to monitor. The Council undertook to review the action plan attached to its strategy, as a matter of priority, early in 2007.
- 5.47 The Council has a high level of repeat homeless applications. 19.5% of applicants who presented as homeless in 2005/06, had presented in the previous 12 months. This represents an improvement on 2004/05, when the figure was 24.1%. Although this improvement is welcome, the Council's performance in this area remains poor. Its performance represents around double the national average for Scottish local authorities. The Council has not taken specific action to reduce repeat homeless presentations. However, recent measures to reduce lost contact decisions referred to in para 5.17, and the appointment of support officers, referred to in para 3.40, should help reduce future repeat applications. Our case reviews concluded that the Council's weakness around assessment is a key factor in the high level of repeat presentations.
- 5.48 The Council advises that in 2005/06, 91% of homeless applicants who secured permanent tenancies were still in tenancy after 12 months. This represents a good outcome, with performance better than most other Councils we have inspected.
- 5.49 The Council has introduced a number of initiatives to help sustain homeless and potentially homeless people in their tenancies. These measures should also prevent homelessness occurring and include:
- the notification of pending eviction from RSLs and the Council's own teams;
  - settling in visits to new tenants;
  - mediation for neighbour and family disputes;
  - the Council's new allocation policy framework provides a number of tools to potentially prevent further homelessness;

- schemes to help integrate homeless people including the “Soup pot” scheme which provides meals; and
- the Street Sport scheme for homeless men and women. This is an innovative initiative designed to address issues surrounding their health and fitness and through this, tackle underlying issues.

5.50 The Council’s action plan has further proposals to introduce a number of new measures. These will include:

- an outreach schools project;
- a new furnished tenancy initiative;
- a rent guarantee scheme; and,
- an offenders’ liaison officer.

All of which should all help to sustain homeless people in tenancies and prevent homelessness in other cases.

5.51 The Council is not always referring people to suitable agencies for further advice. For example, the Council told us that it offered every homeless applicant an appointment with a money adviser. However, we found no evidence of this in our case reviews or in interviews we shadowed. In some cases appropriate referrals would allow people to receive advice which could prevent their homelessness. The recording and monitoring of referral information is poor. The Council cannot use information on the referrals it does make to assess its own performance. It cannot therefore improve the effectiveness of this aspect of the prevention service to homeless people.

5.52 In summary, the Council’s work in preventing homelessness is fair. The introduction of support staff is an important step. The Council has a good track record in allocating homes to applicants in insecure accommodation or threatened with homelessness. Its high level of tenancy retention, measures from the strategy action plan and the decision to employ support staff are all positive. However, the Council could do more to help prevent homeless presentations and re-presentations. The Council is aware it must review the strategy action plan to ensure that recent progress is continued.

### Responsiveness to homeless people

*Local authorities should place homeless people and those threatened with homelessness at the heart of their work to prevent and alleviate homelessness. They should treat them with respect and be responsive to their views and priorities.*

- 5.53 The Council has involved homeless service users in the development of its homeless strategy. It held a homeless strategy consultative conference to help evaluate the strategy. Previous applicants who had used the service attended this event. The Council commissioned its first homeless service users survey in 2006. The results of the survey were returned to the Council during our inspection. The survey is a positive step and the Council confirmed that it was considering the introduction of an exit survey for homeless interviewees. This would add to its understanding of a service user's perspective. At this stage, we are unable to assess the impact of the survey and the Council's other plans for service user's engagement.
- 5.54 The Council has prepared service standards for the homeless service, but has not, as yet, published these.
- 5.55 The strategy includes measures to enable service users to shape the strategy's development and to influence service responses. Planned actions include an annual consultative conference and the development of a service user's forum. The strategy also states that the Council will consult homeless service users about all policy and service changes. However, it is evident that this has not always happened recently.
- 5.56 The Council has a duty to notify homeless people applying for assistance of a right to have decisions on their applications reviewed. The Council has plans to change its process to allow appeals on all aspects of its homeless duties, in line with recommendations in Code of Practice. However, while we were on site it had not yet introduced this change.
- 5.57 The Council's homelessness decision letters contain information on its appeals process. However, in the past, it did not always include accurate information on associated timescales. From our case reviews we could confirm that the Council

did accept appeals presented outwith the timescales it set. The Council has recently introduced an electronic template for the production of revised decision letters. It hopes this measure will improve the consistency of its appeals information to applicants.

- 5.58 Some decision letters we saw in our case reviews lacked clarity setting out the Council's decision and the matters taken into account. The letters also did not tell applicants where they could source further advice and information. While we were on site, the Council undertook to amend its decision letters. Future decision letters will signpost the local Citizens' Advice Bureau (CAB), who can act as advocate on behalf of homeless people. The Council's audit of casework referred to in para 5.22, will also verify details on appeals to improve their accuracy.
- 5.59 The Council's appeals process on homeless decision has two stages. The first appeal is heard by an officer senior to the caseworker. The second stage appeal is heard by a further, more senior officer. We reviewed a number of upheld appeals which themselves were contrary to advice in the Code of Guidance or where investigation was incomplete. In Clackmannanshire, during 2005/06, there were 23 first and 10 second stage appeals. The Council did not use appeals outcome information to help improve the quality of its homelessness casework.
- 5.60 There were 39 appeals against offers of accommodation in 2005/06. Again, the Council does not use this information to feed into future service development and possible service improvements.
- 5.61 The Council has an underdeveloped approach to equalities. The Council routinely collects ethnicity information about homeless applicants as part of their application, but does not extend this to include all equalities groups. However, this ethnicity information is not always recorded, analysed or monitored. Our analysis shows a lower homeless presentation rate among ethnic minorities households in Clackmannanshire than would be expected from the numbers of ethnic minority families recorded as living in Clackmannan in the 2001 census. While we were on site, the Council decided to introduce a 100% check on closed homeless cases. Part of the reason for this was to understand its responses to

ethnic minority households. The Council's general approach is covered in para 3.77.

- 5.62 In summary, the Council's responsiveness to its homeless service users is fair and a developing area. Clackmannanshire Council is aware that users' views should shape the future development of homeless services. The Council's commitment to consultation has been demonstrated by its first homeless users' survey. However, it needs to ensure that it implements further planned initiatives to engage with and respond to service users.

### **Working with partners**

*Local authorities should work corporately and co-operate with other organisations, to ensure that the needs of homeless people are met quickly and appropriately.*

- 5.63 Clackmannanshire Council homeless service works with a range of partners in planning and delivering services to homeless people. The multi-agency Strategy Management group receives regular reports on the implementation of the joint homelessness strategy. The group involves a range of statutory and voluntary sector organisations. These include NHS Forth Valley, CAB, Paragon and Ochilview Housing Associations and NCH Path.
- 5.64 The Homeless Service's Referral Purchase Group provides a useful mechanism for referring young, vulnerable, homeless people to appropriate supported accommodation. This group includes representation from various internal Council sections. These include through care / after care, criminal justice and external organisations such as NCH Path and at times SACRO. Homeless staff are also involved in the Sex Offenders Liaison Group working with representatives of the police and criminal justice
- 5.65 The partner organisations we spoke to were positive about the work carried out by the Council. It kept them up to date with progress on the implementation of the Strategy action plan. However, partners did not feel they were involved in helping to shape the strategy's implementation. Partners were of the opinion that they could offer more support if the Council was more inclusive in its approach.

5.66 In summary, overall, Clackmannanshire Council is good at working with its partners. In our case reviews we saw examples of joint working with all the agencies mentioned previously. We saw good examples where the Council and its partners pooled resources and coordinated work and support to the benefit of homeless people. There were, however, other examples where the ad hoc, local network failed to provide the correct support and help. The Council needs to monitor and assess the ways in which it and partners engage to help homeless people. This will ensure that the homeless service offered is as comprehensive and high quality as it can be.

### Is the service managed for improvement?

#### Performance management

*Local Authorities should have clear objectives, standards and targets for their homelessness service, should monitor achievement of these, and should work to continuously improve services.*

5.67 The joint homeless strategy action plan includes aims and objectives covering the period to 2009. It sets out the measures the Council will undertake to achieve the strategy's aims. The Council monitors progress against some of the action plan objectives in its Local Outcome Agreement, 2005/06. The Council is aware that some action plan objectives have not met the specified timescales. It has pointed to the effects of recent organisational restructuring as the main cause. The Council also acknowledged that it would have to review the strategy to make the action plan timescales more achievable.

5.68 The Council is aware that its performance management for the homeless service is poor. Its electronic information system is not producing the information required. The information available does not provide a clear picture of the overall operation of the service. The Council is not monitoring key parts of the process. These include:

- access to the service generally, for applicants from black and minority ethnic or other equalities groups;
- the quality and consistency of decision making;
- appeals on decisions and offers;

- repeat homeless applications;
- outcomes for a high number of homeless applicants; and
- support requirements in temporary and permanent accommodation.

5.69 The Council has begun to address some of the issues highlighted above and has plans to address others. However, currently the Council's weakness in performance management means it does not have the information it needs to identify potential areas for improvement. It cannot be certain that it is effectively meeting the needs of homeless applicants.

5.70 The Council is currently developing a comprehensive range of procedures and policies to guide staff in their work. However, the service currently has few written procedures and this has contributed to some inconsistencies around assessment, the provision of services in temporary accommodation and in advice and information.

5.71 The homeless section holds monthly team briefings. Managers relay information such as procedural updates, changes in policy and developments in services. Homeless staff have also attended development days including away days. During our period on site, one such day was organised. This was arranged to present initial feedback from the homeless users' survey.

5.72 In summary, the Council's approach to performance management is poor. Staff are committed to the improvement of the service and the process of improving performance management has begun. However, the Council does not have a firm basis for effectively monitoring progress in homelessness.

### Resource Management and Efficiency

*Local authorities should procure homelessness services in a way that takes account of quality and should manage the cost of their services effectively.*

5.73 Clackmannanshire Council's expenditure on the delivery of the homeless service increased from the previous year by almost 15% or £166,201 in 2005/06. Meantime, income has decreased from £1.25 m to £1.05 m over the same

- period. The Council's spending on bed and breakfast accommodation reached £543,196 in 2005/06. This was £100,000 in excess of income received.
- 5.74 The Council told us that it plans to review the present rents for temporary accommodation and meeting costs in bed and breakfast accommodation. This is in an effort to avoid the current heavy reliance on housing benefit. In our case reviews, we saw an example of an employed person refusing temporary accommodation because of the high rent involved. The Council has not yet begun this review.
- 5.75 At the time of our inspection, the Council had plans to have its Business Change analysts carry out a review of the homelessness service. This is scheduled to be carried out in 2007.
- 5.76 The Council has arrangements in place with voluntary organisations to provide services to homeless people on its behalf. It contracts with consultants and private companies for various services. The Council procures these services through competitive quality / cost led tendering.
- 5.77 In summary, Clackmannanshire Council has a fair approach to monitoring the costs of the homeless service. The Council has plans to review the costs attached to temporary and bed and breakfast accommodation. A programme for this review has yet to be established.

### Public reporting

*Local authorities should give stakeholders and service users the information they need about the homelessness service, its plans and performance.*

- 5.78 Clackmannanshire Council's approach to the public reporting of homelessness information is poor. The homeless strategy is available on the website. The Council previously published some statistical information in its regular "Homing In" tenants' newsletter. Some limited homeless statistics and information is contained in its annual Public Performance Report. However, the information does not allow the public to understand the progress the service has made or its targets for the future.

## Grade and overall assessment of homelessness services

- 5.79 Our overall assessment of Clackmannanshire Council's homelessness service is fair. We found a number of strengths and a range of weaknesses that impact to varying degrees on the quality of service that homeless people receive. The Council has a good awareness of its strengths and weaknesses in homeless service. Generally, we saw that the Council has a willingness and capacity to tackle the weaknesses identified in this report. This is evidenced by recent positive changes to the service, both strategic and operational. This is a significant factor in our grading of homelessness. We set out below the key factors we have taken account of in coming to our overall assessment.
- 5.80 Clackmannanshire Council has a number of strengths in its homelessness service. Many of these are in areas that directly impact upon service users. The Council consistently houses a high percentage of homeless people in priority need. It has steadily improved its level of allocations to homeless people. In 2005/06, these accounted for around half of all its allocations. The Council provides a good service to young people through a supported accommodation project. This is an example of a generally good relationship with its partners, both internal and external. The Council's services in access and responsiveness to homeless people, although currently underdeveloped, evidence the Council's commitment to improvement.
- 5.81 The Council has a number of weaknesses that impact on service users and which at least in part, undermine the stronger areas of the service. These include:
- significant weaknesses around the use of bed and breakfast accommodation; and
  - weaknesses in the assessment process leading to limited investigation and poor recording.
- 5.82 There are also significant gaps in the performance management system of the Council. It does not have a good picture of performance across the service or the outcomes it is achieving. These weaknesses, some of which are significant, have

had a direct impact upon the Council's view of its own performance and its ability to improve the service quality provided to homeless applicants.

5.83 The Council has recognised a number of weaknesses that we identified in our inspection and is in the process of addressing them. The award of a C grade takes into account the strengths identified in para 5.81 above, the Council's self awareness of its performance, the recent measures undertaken and its commitment to improving its performance in this area.

## 6. Areas for improvement action

These are the key areas that need to be targeted for improvement action. They are broadly in order of priority within each of the key service areas:

Across all of its landlord and homelessness activities Clackmannanshire Council should:

- introduce a robust system for routinely gathering service users' views and use this to inform service improvements;
- develop a more comprehensive performance management framework to assist it make improvements to the delivery of services and establish an effective performance management culture;
- ensure that it carries out and publishes equalities impact assessments on new policies and strategies;
- improve how it publicises its services, targets set and its performance; and
- ensure that a monitoring framework is developed for the recently introduced Service Standards.

In housing management, the Council should:

- introduce a framework to allow outcomes from its new allocation policy to be monitored and evaluated;
- continue recent improvements in its performance in collecting current and former tenants' rent arrears;
- review its management of void properties and re-letting processes in order to ensure that recent improvements in performance continue;
- develop standards to guide staff and inform tenants on the standards it is trying to achieve in its estates;
- improve its performance monitoring and reporting of neighbour disputes and antisocial behaviour; and
- introduce a policy and procedures for Short Scottish Secure Tenancies.

In property maintenance, the Council should:

- ensure that it accurately records performance information for responsive repairs;
- improve its performance in carrying out non-emergency repairs;

- ensure that it fully complies with its statutory duties regarding gas safety, asbestos and Right to Repair;
- ensure that the quality of responsive repairs are routinely verified; and
- improve its management of and performance in re-chargable repairs.

In homelessness, the Council should:

- increase the supply of temporary accommodation to remove its reliance on Bed and Breakfast accommodation;
- improve the management of homelessness assessments to improve the quality and consistency of decision making and to understand and improve the service provided to homeless people;
- introduce a robust assessment process to identify the support needs of homeless people;
- ensure it reports on and monitors outcomes for homeless applicants and uses this information to plan for service improvement; and
- ensure that service users are involved in service developments.

## 7. Next steps

7.1 If you would like to see Clackmannanshire Council's improvement plans you should contact:

John Gillespie  
Head of Housing Services  
Clackmannanshire Council  
Lime Tree House  
Castle Street  
Alloa  
FK10 1EX

Telephone: 01259 450000  
E mail: [housing@clacks.gov.uk](mailto:housing@clacks.gov.uk)  
Website: [www.clacksweb.org.uk](http://www.clacksweb.org.uk)

### Sources of evidence

#### Groups and third parties consulted

- Seven local tenants' and residents' groups, including Clackmannanshire Tenants' and Residents' Federation
- Six Community Councils
- The Council's External Auditor
- Audit Scotland
- Women's Aid
- Local Housing Associations
- Scottish Executive Homelessness Team
- HomePoint
- Communities Scotland Tenant Participation Team
- Central Scotland Police
- Citizens Advice Bureau
- Community Partnership Team
- NCH (Scotland)
- Voices Group
- Independent Living Services
- Clackmannanshire Disability Awareness Group
- Council for Voluntary Service Clackmannanshire
- Surrounding Local Authorities
- Scottish Public Services Ombudsman

#### Interviews/Meetings

- Councillor Paterson - Leader of the Council
- Councillor Matchett - Depute Portfolio Holder
- Councillor Earle - Service Representative
- Councillor Ovens - Portfolio Holder
- Councillor Holden - Opposition Portfolio Holder
- Director, Services to People
- Head of Housing Services
- Head of Property Services
- Senior and front-line staff in the Housing, Property and Benefit Advice Department
- Senior and front-line staff in the Property Services Department
- Community Police Officers

#### Reality checks

- Shadowing tenancy sign-up interviews
- Shadowing housing application visit
- Shadowing arrears visits
- Shadowing settling-in visit
- Shadowing repair pre-inspection

## Appendix 1

- Shadowing estate management visits
- Shadowing estate inspections
- Shadowing estate warden patrol
- Shadowing of assessment and follow up interviews with homeless people
- Shadowing of Temporary accommodation visits
- Empty property visit
- Estate visits
- Review of housing list applications and allocations
- Review of void management records
- Review of information for applicants and tenants
- Review of Recovery of Possession Actions (NOPs)
- Review of repossessions
- Review of neighbour nuisance and antisocial behaviour cases
- Review of abandonment cases
- Review of gas safety checks
- Review of complaints/comments
- Review of rechargeable repairs
- Review of capital investment files
- Review of former tenant arrears recoveries
- Review of Homeless assessments and appeals
- Observation of Council's call-centre
- Observation of team meetings in Homelessness
- Observation of Information feedback session on Homelessness strategy
- Observation of temporary accommodation visits
- Observation of Housing and PCU Voids Meeting

### Key documents reviewed

- Inspection Submission
- Joint Homelessness Strategy
- Housing Information and Advice Strategy
- Antisocial Behaviour Strategy
- Consultative Conference Report
- Service Improvement Contract (SimCo)
- Relevant policies and procedures
- Draft policies and procedures
- Minutes of meetings and associated reports
- Council's website
- Tenant newsletters
- Outcome reports for housing management, property maintenance and homelessness
- Performance reports
- Housing application form

### Examples of positive practice

These are areas we would highlight as working particularly well, taking account of the organisation's operating context:

#### **Customer Care**

Clackmannanshire Council is committed to customer care. Contractors are required to have all of their operatives who are to work on kitchen replacement contracts, attend the Council's Customer Care Course. This clearly sets down the standards which the Council expects in relation to service standards for tenants. The Council also includes details of customer care requirements in its kitchen and bathroom replacement contracts. The Council issues a satisfaction survey to all tenants on the completion of the works, which specifically asks for their opinion of the contractor and the behaviour of its workforce. The results are analysed and the information gathered is used in the selection of contractors for future phases of the programme.

## Glossary

<b>Anti Social Behaviour Order (ASBO)</b>	ASBOs are preventative orders designed to protect individuals from further anti-social behaviour that causes or is likely to cause alarm or distress. Breach of an order is a criminal offence, punishable by a fine or imprisonment.
<b>Benchmarking</b>	A process used by organisations to systematically compare service processes and performance to identify best practice.
<b>Capital Programme</b>	Major repair schemes funded mostly from borrowing.
<b>Common housing register (CHR)</b>	A register of all applicants for social housing used by two or more landlords within an area.
<b>Community Access Point (CAP)</b>	Local Council offices where callers can access and obtain advice on a range of Council services.
<b>Conjoined action</b>	Legal action by the landlord seeking both repayment and repossession of the property.
<b>Housing list</b>	A list of applicants for housing which is used by the local authority to allocate its housing stock.
<b>Housing Revenue Account (HRA)</b>	The budget a local authority has from rental income for managing and maintaining its houses and housing services.
<b>ICT system</b>	Information and communication system.
<b>NCH PATH</b>	A local project operated by National Children's Homes (NCH) aiming at providing a variety of support packages to young people, in a wide range of dispersed accommodation.
<b>Notice of Proceedings (NoP)</b>	The formal notice provided to tenants informing them that their landlord is taking legal proceedings to seek a court order for recovery of possession of a property.
<b>Partnering</b>	A structured contract management approach to improve efficiency and reduce confrontation between the RSL and its consultants and contractors. Partnering requires formalised objectives, agreed problem solving methods and an active search for continued measurable improvements.
<b>Planned maintenance</b>	The planned renewal or maintenance of key property components.
<b>Post inspections</b>	Inspections undertaken following work to check the suitability and quality of repairs.

<b>Pre inspections</b>	Inspections undertaken to ascertain the nature of the repair required.
<b>Procurement</b>	The way an organisation obtains services or materials from other organisations or agents.
<b>Property Contracts Unit (PCU)</b>	Internal organisation which carries out responsive repairs, gas servicing and work to void houses on behalf of housing department.
<b>Qualifying Repair</b>	Repairs which qualify for inclusion in the Right to Repair scheme.
<b>Quartile</b>	The range represented by one quarter of the ordered performance of all Scottish Local Authorities. So for example, the upper quartile is the top 25% of Local Authorities.
<b>Registered social landlord (RSL)</b>	A landlord providing social rented housing that is registered and regulated by Communities Scotland.
<b>Registered Tenant Organisation (RTO)</b>	A tenants' organisation formally registered with Communities Scotland.
<b>Responsive repairs</b>	Day to day repairs carried out on a reactive basis, distinguishable from planned, capital or cyclical maintenance.
<b>Right to buy</b>	Many Scottish secure tenants have the right to buy their property at a discounted price subject to length of tenancy.
<b>Right to Repair</b>	Statutory scheme which sets out timescales for some repairs and actions which can be taken if timescales exceeded.
<b>Schedule of Rates (SoR)</b>	List of costs for repair items, usually organised by trade.
<b>Scottish Housing Best Value Network (SHBVN)</b>	A formal group for local authority members to benchmark their performance and share good practice.
<b>Scottish Housing Quality Standard (SHQS)</b>	All property managed by registered social landlords must be brought up to a certain standard by 2015.
<b>Scottish secure tenancy (SST)</b>	The Housing (Scotland) Act 2001 establishes the Scottish Secure Tenancy as the tenancy for all tenants of social landlords in Scotland.

<b>Section 5 referral</b>	Under Section 5 of the Housing (Scotland) Act 2001 a local authority can request a registered social landlord which has accommodation in its area to provide accommodation to homeless people. This request is known as a Section 5 referral.
<b>Service level agreement (SLA)</b>	An agreement between departments within an organisation or between partner organisations that defines the type and level of service they will provide.
<b>Shadowing</b>	An inspection technique that involves accompanying and observing staff while they carried out their day-to-day tasks.
<b>Short Scottish secure tenancy (SSST)</b>	Section 34 and schedule 6 of the Housing (Scotland) Act 2001 establish the basic conditions when a Short Scottish Secure Tenancy can apply to some tenants of social landlords in Scotland in place of a full SST.
<b>SMART criteria</b>	Performance management acronym for: Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Relevant and Timebound.
<b>Statutory Performance Indicator (SPI)</b>	Indicators of local authorities' performance that are published by the Accounts Commission for Scotland.
<b>Statutory reasonable preference categories</b>	People who have one or more of these housing needs: homelessness, overcrowding, large families, living in below tolerable standard housing or unsatisfactory living conditions.
<b>Tenancy agreement</b>	Legal document or contract between landlord and tenant setting out the rights and responsibilities of each.
<b>Tenant assessor</b>	Tenant assessors are trained lay people (tenants) who are part of the inspection team. They may be involved in the preparation for the inspection, reading landlords document, on-site visits and talking to tenants.
<b>Tenure</b>	The method by which a person occupies a property i. e. tenant, lodger, owner-occupier.
<b>Variations</b>	A term used to refer to the practice of changing a repair works order on site where the contractor feels additional or alternative work to that specified is required.
<b>Void</b>	A property without a tenant. Voids occur in the period between one tenant leaving and another taking over the tenancy.

Regulation and Inspection is a separate division within Communities Scotland (the Scottish Executive's housing and regeneration agency) that regulates and inspects social housing and homelessness services. We operate independently and impartially, while remaining accountable to Scottish Ministers for the standard of our work and for inspecting and reporting within the overall context of Scottish Ministers' strategic objectives for the social housing sector and tackling homelessness. A code of practice sets out what Ministers expect from us in delegating their regulatory powers to us. Our independence is further safeguarded by a Regulation Board that oversees our work.

Our two core objectives are:

- to promote improvements in the quality of housing and homelessness services delivered by registered social landlords (RSLs) and local authorities and, by doing this, to help improve people's lives; and
- to make sure RSLs are well governed and financially viable, so that we can safeguard the interests of tenants and funders and maintain their confidence in the sector. RSLs are housing organisations registered with Communities Scotland. They include housing associations, housing co-operatives and companies limited by guarantee.

In order to meet these two core objectives we have five priority activities. We:

- undertake rigorous independent inspections and thematic studies of housing and homelessness services and promote public accountability by publishing our findings in clear, concise reports that provide practical recommendations for change and spread good practice;
- have a successful strategy in place (which may involve exercising our statutory powers of intervention) with regulated bodies that need our support to improve services or to deal with governance and financial viability problems;
- register new landlords and grant statutory consents in line with our regulatory criteria and standards;
- provide information and advice to Scottish Ministers, relevant departments of the Scottish Executive, landlords, key national bodies, funders and other regulators; and
- minimise the regulatory burden on regulated and inspected bodies by taking account of the principles of good regulation and working with other scrutiny bodies, while maximising the benefits of our work.

## Regulation & Inspection

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