



THE SCOTTISH HOUSING REGULATOR

Dundee City Council Inspection Report
March 2009

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1. Introduction

About this inspection

- 1.1 This inspection was carried out by the Scottish Housing Regulator 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 well is Dundee City Council delivering its services?
 - Is Dundee City Council 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, asset management and delivery of repairs and homelessness services. The grades and judgements are based on evidence. The grades summarise performance in the following ways:
- Grade A = Excellent
 - Grade B = Good
 - Grade C = Fair
 - Grade D = Poor
- 1.5 When we provide a summarised assessment and award a grade, we take various factors into account. These factors are:
- outcomes for service users;

- how far the service or organisation meets Performance Standards;
- performance against key indicators in comparison with others;
- compliance with legislation;
- how good the leadership and accountability are;
- how far good practice is followed;
- the organisation's level of self-awareness;
- how well value for money is being achieved;
- local context and legitimate local priorities; and
- commitment to, and track record of, improvement.

The inspection team

1.6 The inspection team was led by Lynn Sweeney (Inspection Manager) and included Elaine Whyte, David Love, Lindsay Stother and Jean Harper (Inspectors), Adrian Waite (Associate Inspector), Diane McKiernan (Inspection Officer) and Martin Van der Lee (Tenant Assessor). Tina Beattie and Jessie Martin (Tenant Assessors) carried out a desktop review of some of the Council's publications. We were on site between 18 August and 5 September 2008. 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

1.7 We expect all inspected bodies to make the inspection grades and overview section of this report available to anyone that wants it, report our findings to tenants and other stakeholders and respond to the issues raised in this report.

2. Inspection grades and overview

In this section we set out our overall assessment of Dundee City Council's performance, including inspection grades and we summarise our inspection findings.

Grades

- 2.1 The inspection of Dundee City Council's housing service took place between 18 August and 5 September 2008. We awarded the following grades:

Dundee City Council has achieved a **D** grade for housing management. This is a **poor** performance.

Dundee City Council has achieved a **D** grade for asset management and repairs. This is a **poor** performance.

Dundee City Council has achieved a **C** grade for services to homeless people. This is a **fair** performance.

How well is Dundee City Council delivering its services?

- 2.2 Our assessment is that Dundee City Council's housing service has some strengths in the delivery of its services.

In housing management:

- it provides an useful range of written and web based information for its tenants and applicants;
- it has reduced its use of evictions; and
- it has a good approach to managing anti social behaviour.

In asset management and repairs:

- it is developing a strategic framework for the management of its housing assets;
- it gives good access to its repairs service;
- it is good at working with tenants when improving their homes; and
- it is good at managing asbestos in its houses.

In delivering services for homeless people:

- it gives good access to its homelessness services;

- it works well with partners to provide a good range of temporary accommodation;
- it generally makes good decisions on homeless applications;
- it has significantly reduced its use of bed and breakfast and worked to improve standards in bed and breakfast establishments;
- it now lets more of its houses to homeless people; and
- it has worked with partners to develop a good Homelessness Strategy.

2.3 The Council does, however, have many weaknesses in the delivery of its services and some are significant.

In housing management:

- it is poor at promoting access to its housing;
- it has weaknesses in how it manages applications for housing;
- it is poor at meeting housing need and it does not fully comply with legislation on allocations;
- it allocates a significant number of its houses outwith its policy and cannot demonstrate that it does this transparently and fairly;
- it does not use referrals and nomination agreements effectively to maximise access to housing;
- it takes a long time to let its houses and the standard of its relets is poor;
- it does not make good use of sign ups and new tenant visits;
- it does not always identify tenants who require support to establish and sustain their tenancy at an early stage; and
- its performance in collecting rent and letting empty houses is poor.

In asset management and repairs:

- we found major weaknesses in its management of its legal and regulatory duties on gas safety, although it has now started to address these;
- it is not fully meeting its statutory duties for the Right to Repair;
- its performance in completing repairs on time is deteriorating;
- it has not always clearly shown that its procurement decisions are taken transparently or in a way that demonstrates it is achieving best value; and

- it faces a number of significant risks to its plans to meet the Scottish Housing Quality Standard (SHQS).

In delivering services for homeless people:

- it does not monitor key service targets and standards, including how long it takes to provide a homeless interview;
- it loses contact with a large number of people who apply to it for assistance;
- it does not know if it always meets its duty to provide temporary accommodation;
- it can take a long time to arrive at an assessment decision; and
- it can take a long time to secure a permanent let for homeless people and these are not always of the same quality as it gives other applicants.

Is Dundee City Council managed for improvement?

2.4 We found that the Council has some awareness of the weaknesses in its services and has taken steps to identify these and to encourage improvements to be made. The Council was open about where it felt that its weaknesses lay, but we found that it is less aware of the extent and significance of these weaknesses or the impact they have on its tenants and service users. It has struggled to drive change needed to deliver improvements to its services. Its current performance is poor across a number of significant areas of service delivery. Although we saw some improvements where the Council had focused its resources, particularly in homelessness and in delivering response repairs, we saw that its leadership needs to significantly improve in key aspects of its services. This plays an important part in our assessments. It has recently changed the way it delivers its services and told us that difficulties resourcing this change process had impacted on its performance. We found that roles and responsibilities are often unclear, that it does not join up its service delivery and it gives its staff only limited training. The Council was slow to appreciate the seriousness of some of our concerns during the inspection, particularly in relation to gas safety. However, it accepted our findings in its approach to lettings and told us it is taking steps aimed at tackling this area of weakness, and it also took a number of early improvement actions in its homelessness service during the inspection.

- 2.5 We found it difficult to obtain accurate and consistent information from the Council, particularly for its performance outcomes across a number of areas of service delivery. This impacts on our confidence that the Council has an accurate picture of how it is performing, particularly in relation to access and lettings, gas safety and across key parts of its homelessness functions.
- 2.6 We found that the Council generally has a good approach to equalities. It operates a number of equalities working groups and completes equalities impact assessments for its policies. It makes all its published information available in alternative languages and formats and states this clearly on all its publicity material.
- 2.7 The Council does not have a transparent approach to procurement and it cannot demonstrate that it always focuses on value for money in its procurement. It has recently introduced a corporate procurement strategy and has completed some benchmarking with other local authorities on costs, but it has extended major contracts without assessing whether these continue to provide value for money. Audit Scotland raised the demonstration of value for money in procurement as an issue for the Council in its 2005 Audit of Best Value and Community Planning.

Key recommendations

- 2.8 Our inspection report covers a wide range of issues. Dundee City Council must respond effectively to them. These are our most important recommendations.

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

- develop its leadership and management capacity to deliver change and improvement in its services;
- as a matter of urgency, put in place a robust performance management framework across its services;
- review its approach to procurement to ensure this is transparent and delivers value for money;
- improve customer focus and joined up working between all of its services;
- develop its approach to collecting and using tenant feedback to improve service delivery; and
- widen its approach to tenant participation.

In housing management the Council should:

- implement its new allocations policy quickly, and improve access to, and management of, its housing list;
- ensure all of its lettings decisions are transparent and in line with its new policy;
- improve its approach to sustaining tenancies and identifying vulnerable tenants;
- improve the standard at which it lets its empty houses; and
- deliver demonstrable improvements to its performance in collecting rent and letting its empty houses quickly.

In asset management and the repairs service the Council should:

- ensure it meets its legal and regulatory obligations in relation to gas safety;
- ensure it fully meets its statutory obligations on the Right to Repair;
- develop a robust and regularly updated information base on housing demand and need for its stock;
- closely monitor and manage the risks to its progress towards meeting the SHQS; and
- review its management of completing repairs on time to turnaround its deteriorating performance.

In delivering services for homeless people the Council should:

- review its homeless operations to ensure it is meeting all of its statutory duties, particularly in relation to temporary accommodation;
- improve its performance in maintaining contact with people who apply to it for assistance, and work to shorten the time it takes to make decisions; and
- make better use of referrals and nominations to RSLs to maximise lets to homeless people.

3. Context

In this section we look at Dundee City Council as an organisation and the context in which it operates.

About the organisation

- 3.1 Dundee City Council covers an area of 24 square miles, and geographically is the smallest local authority area in Scotland. Dundee is Scotland's fourth largest city and has a population of approximately 142,000 people. Its neighbouring local authorities are Perth & Kinross, Angus and Fife.
- 3.2 The Council is led by a minority Labour/Liberal Democrat coalition and has 29 elected members consisting of:
- 13 Scottish National Party;
 - 10 Scottish Labour Party;
 - 3 Scottish Conservative and Unionist Party;
 - 2 Scottish Liberal Democrats; and
 - 1 Independent
- 3.3 The Council has nine committees which sit beneath the full Council, including a committee focused on housing. All 29 elected members sit on all its committees apart from its licensing committee.
- 3.4 The Council delivers its housing services through its Housing Department which has two divisions: housing management; and housing strategy. The housing management division has four service delivery units:
- the East District Housing Office, incorporating the Lettings Centre;
 - the West District Housing Office incorporating the Rent Recovery Centre;
 - the Housing Services Unit incorporating the Antisocial Behaviour Unit, the Housing Support Team, the Sheltered Housing Warden Service and the Housing Repairs Centre; and
 - the Homeless Services Unit which is responsible for homeless assessments, temporary accommodation and homeless strategy.
- 3.5 The Council's housing strategy division comprises its:
- Private Sector Services Unit;

- Housing Investment Unit which manages all elements of its capital investment programme;
- Quality and Performance Unit which takes the lead on policy development and research, tenant participation strategy and performance management systems; and
- Finance and Corporate Services Unit which reports directly to the Director of Housing and manages financial accounting and human resources for the department.

3.6 The Council's average weekly rent level for 2007/08 was £50.34. In 2007/08 the Council increased its rent by 3.95%.

About its current and future tenants

3.7 The population of Dundee has declined over the last 20 years and was just over 145,000 at the time of the 2001 Census. The latest General Register Office mid year estimate for 2007 showed a further decline to 142,150 and this is expected to be an ongoing trend with continued out-migration from the city. Compared with the Scottish average, Dundee has a higher proportion of people in the 16-24 age group, mainly due to its status as a university town. The city also has a higher than average elderly population.

3.8 Based on Scottish Government labour market statistics, unemployment in Dundee is 4.9%, which is higher than the national figure of 3%. Seventy three percent of the population are in employment, either full or part-time, or are self-employed. This is slightly lower than the national figure of 76%. Gross average weekly earnings in Dundee are 6% below the Scottish average. Around 67% of Council tenants are on full or partial housing benefit.

3.9 Dundee has a higher percentage of ethnic minority households than Scotland as a whole. In the 2001 census, the area's black and minority ethnic (BME) population was 3.7% compared with a national figure of 2%.

3.10 The Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation shows that Dundee has high levels of deprivation. Almost 30% of Dundee's data zones are within the 15% most deprived data zones in Scotland.

About its housing stock

- 3.11 A lower percentage of Dundee residents (54%) are owner occupiers than the Scottish average of 63%, while 31% of residents rent their home from the Council or another social landlord. The city has a larger than average private rented sector at 11% compared to a Scottish average of 7%, again mainly due to the number of students living in the Dundee.
- 3.12 Right to Buy sales within Dundee as a percentage of the total Council stock have remained constant at around 2% over the last three years.
- 3.13 Dundee has high levels of deprivation with some areas of low demand stock. The Council is currently undertaking a local housing needs and affordability study and is due to report its findings this year. The Council has carried out a large scale programme of demolitions over a number of years and the findings of its most recent study will influence its future approach on stock disposal.
- 3.14 The table below presents a summary of key information for Dundee City Council showing trends over the last three financial years.

Key facts	2005/06	2006/07	2007/08
Houses owned	15,650	15,209	14,711
No. of people on its housing list at 31 March	8,321	8,565	9,744
Employees	392.4	433*	417
HRA Gross Capital Expenditure (incl. Capital Funded from Revenue (CFGR)) (£m)	£14.9	£21.0	£14.0
Total possible rental income (£m)	£37.9	£37.2	£37.3
% of Rental income from Housing Benefit (HB)	64%	65%	67%
% of tenants in receipt of HB	67%	67%	67%
% of rent arrears	9.9%	10.6%	9.1%
Average weekly rent	£46.55	£48.41	£50.34
Average rent increase	3.5%	3.5%	3.95%
Houses re-let	1,898	1,989	1,374
Response repairs carried out	71,588	80,447	78,127
Maintenance spend per house incl. cost of service	£1,145	£1,125	£1,110
No. of homeless applications	1,938	2,098	2,358

Sources: Dundee City Council's inspection submission and Scottish Government Statistical Bulletins

* Numbers of housing staff increased as a result of the sheltered warden staff being transferred from Social Work

4. How well is Dundee City Council delivering housing management?

In this section we set out our assessment of the Council's performance in delivering its housing management service for tenants.

Grade

Dundee City Council has achieved a **D** grade for housing management. This is a **poor** performance.

- 4.1 Our assessment is that Dundee City Council's housing management service has some strengths, but set against these are many weaknesses, some significant. The Council has demonstrated that it was aware of most of its weaknesses before the inspection but had been slow to understand the significance of these and to introduce any effective improvements to its services. The Council accepted our findings and responded by setting up working groups to address the issues we raised, particularly around its approach to access and lettings.
- 4.2 The Council has a good approach to managing anti social behaviour and has made some recent improvements in how it manages rent arrears, although these are still high. It is carrying out less evictions. However, the Council does not provide good access to its housing or manage its housing list well and there are significant weaknesses in its approach to meeting housing need. It does not ensure that tenants who are at risk of losing their tenancy have access to advice and support. Although there has been some recent improvement in performance it still takes a long time to let its empty houses and the standard of these is poor.

Tenant satisfaction

- 4.3 Dundee City Council has not carried out a comprehensive satisfaction survey of its tenants in recent years. It does regularly capture the views of service users across a number of areas of service delivery, including arrears, allocations and antisocial behaviour. Its most recent year end performance figures for 2007/08 indicate that:
- 87% are satisfied with advice with rent payment difficulties;
 - 74% are satisfied with the housing list process and 82% with the rehousing process;
 - 73% are satisfied with how their neighbour problems were dealt with; and

- 97% are satisfied with the support service given to them.

Access to housing

- 4.4 The Council promotes access to its housing list through posters and leaflets displayed in its offices, as well as through its website. It makes information accessible to those whose first language is not English or who are visually impaired. It has recently developed a Housing Options Guide which contains useful information on applying for housing in Dundee and making a homeless application, as well as providing details of other housing providers in the area. This is currently web based, but the Council is considering making the information available in other formats.
- 4.5 In February 2007 the Council established a centralised lettings team, based in its East District office as the main delivery point for its allocation service. It operates this primarily as a contact centre and encourages applicants to make telephone enquiries rather in person, although it does not provide a freephone number for this. Applicants can also make enquiries at the Council's two district offices and at its advice and information centre in the city centre although not all of the Council's front line staff have received housing advice and options training.
- 4.6 The Council carried out an internal review of its lettings centre in August 2007, in response to concerns about performance. Although it developed an action plan to address the weaknesses which the review highlighted, it has been slow to fully implement the proposed improvements.
- 4.7 The Council is working with registered social landlords (RSLs) operating within Dundee to develop a Common Housing Register (CHR), to provide greater choice and improve access for applicants. It has had a CHR working group since September 2004 and has made progress in developing a common application form and agreed in principle that the Council's lettings centre will act as a central administration unit. The Council told us that the CHR will become operational in 2009/10.
- 4.8 The Council's housing list is open to anyone aged 16 or over. At the time of the inspection it had 8,789 applicants on its list.

- 4.9 The Council has a published target of 15 working days to process an application and inform the applicant of the outcome. Its lettings review found that it took an average of 53 days to process applications. In response, the Council introduced improved procedures to streamline the process and we saw that for applications received within the last six months it had taken an average of nine days to process. This is a significant improvement in performance although we found that the Council did not monitor or report on its performance against its target. However, in response to our feedback the Council introduced a monitoring and reporting mechanism.
- 4.10 We found weaknesses in how the Council assesses applications which could directly affect an applicant's chances of being successfully housed:
- it does not have quality assurance systems to ensure that it has accurately assessed applications in line with its policy; and
 - it does not proactively identify and advise applicants who may be homeless or threatened with homelessness, who come through the general application process.
- 4.11 Following its lettings review, the Council made some amendments to the letter it sends to applicants when it has assessed their application. As well as confirming the areas and house types/sizes the applicant has chosen, it now tells them how their application has been assessed and type and level of points the Council has awarded them. Beyond this, its letter gives applicants no prospects information. We saw that when applicants enquired about their prospects of being housed they were offered an inconsistent level and quality of information and advice.
- 4.12 Under its current allocation policy the Council reviews applications annually where the applicant has not contacted it during the previous 12 months. The Council suspended the review of applications for a period of 18 months while it set up the lettings centre. It reintroduced the review of applications in January 2008, in response to its internal review and now sends applicants a letter asking them if they want to remain on the list. However it does not ask applicants to provide up to date information about their circumstances or preferences. As a result, the Council still does not know if it has an accurate picture of its

- 4.13 In 2006/07 the Council cancelled 3,500 applications, or 41% of all applications on its list. This dropped to 1,542 in the following year, mainly because it had stopped its regular review. The Council has cancelled 3,142 applications from April to August 2008. Over 70% were cancelled because the applicant did not respond to the review. However, the Council also cancelled a significant number where the applicant failed to provide requested information. We found that its approach is not consistent across applications and fails to take account of individual's circumstances. The Council accepted that its use of cancellations is a significant weakness and agreed to take steps to amend its approach.
- 4.14 At the time of the inspection it had suspended 921 applicants from receiving offers, 87% of which were suspended at their own request. The Council suspends applicants who have refused three offers of housing for one year. Under its new policy it will reduce the length of suspension to six months, however this is still restrictive.
- 4.15 The Council's internal review highlighted that it suspended some applications inappropriately and that it did not effectively monitor suspended applications. As a result, it introduced new procedures to provide clarity to staff and to minimise the use of suspensions. Despite the recommendations of the review, we found that the Council is still suspending applications for reasons not included in its policy and procedures and poorly manages suspended applications. The Council accepted that it was managing suspensions poorly and agreed to take steps to ensure that its procedures are adhered to.
- 4.16 The Council collects information on the ethnicity of people who apply to it for housing, but does not know the ethnic origin of 24% of the people it lets its houses to. It does not include Gypsies / Travellers or disability information in its equalities monitoring information for either applications or lets. These factors limit the Council's ability to understand who is applying to it for housing and to assess whether it is adequately meeting the needs of all equalities groups.

- 4.17 In summary, Dundee City Council is poor at promoting access to its housing. After a slow start, it is working with partners to establish a CHR in Dundee. It has reduced the time it takes to process applications and has a good range of written and web based information for applicants. However, it provides a poor standard of advice and assistance to applicants and there are weaknesses in its approach to assessing and reviewing applications. Its approach to cancelling and suspending applications is poor.

Lettings

- 4.18 The Council currently uses a group points and waiting time policy to allocate its houses. It is aware that this policy does not give sufficient priority to applicants in the statutorily defined needs categories. Its waiting points have a disproportionate impact on lettings outcomes and result in it placing a large number of applicants with a low level or indeed no housing need at the top of its housing lists. This is a significant weakness. The Council agreed a new allocation policy in 2006 and this does not include waiting time points and gives greater priority to housing need. At the time of inspection the Council had not implemented its new policy and did not have a firm date to do so, because of delays in the development of IT systems. In response to our feedback, the Council told us that it would prioritise the development of the IT systems and hopes to implement the new policy in 2009.
- 4.19 Currently the Council deals with certain groups of applicants who have urgent need for housing or specific needs outwith the points element of its allocation policy and system. These groups include homeless applicants, applicants requiring sheltered or supported housing and transfer applicants who require to move because their home is affected by redevelopment proposals. At August 2008, the Council made 76% of its lets to people in these groups. The Council is aware that this is not a transparent approach, and its new policy will mean that points are awarded to all categories of applicants.
- 4.20 In 2007/08, the Council made 23 management transfers, which accounted for 1.8% of its lets. We found that the Council does not have good audit trails for its decisions in making these lets, despite its internal lettings review highlighting the absence of written procedures and control and monitoring for such transfers. It

- only introduced written procedures in February 2008. It did not introduce a monitoring system until we highlighted this as a weakness during our inspection.
- 4.21 The Council's lettings review highlighted that although staff were aware that homeless applicants should be prioritised, they were unaware of the relative priorities they should give to other groups of applicants. In response, the Council introduced letting targets for each group in March 2008: 40% for homeless applicants: 40% for housing list applicants: 15% for those affected by redevelopment; and 5% for applicants with waiting points only. The Council does not fully monitor its performance against these targets, although it does report that it has increased the percentage of lets to homeless applicants from 42% at March 2008 to 48% at August 2008.
- 4.22 The Council gives staff discretion to decide which group of applicants to go to when making a let, but does not have any management systems to monitor the quality of this decision making. This makes it difficult for the Council to demonstrate transparency and that all groups are treated fairly. We saw that although 42% of lets are made to homeless applicants, the Council allocated 71% of multi storeys but only 11% of cottages to this group. Also in the majority of the letting areas which the Council defines as high demand, it made no lets to homeless applicants. In the least desirable letting area it let 72% of empty houses to homeless applicants.
- 4.23 Despite a recommendation being made by its lettings review, we saw that the Council does not make sure that offers are checked or authorised by another member of staff and it does not keep records or audit trails of its allocation decisions. This is a significant weakness. The Council cannot demonstrate that it allocates its houses transparently and in accordance with its policy and procedures. Following our feedback, the Council took steps to have allocations checked and authorised. However, until it introduces its new allocation system the weaknesses in its approach to allocating houses will not be fully addressed.
- 4.24 The Council does not make offers to its current or former tenants who have arrears and are not maintaining a repayment agreement. This is an acceptable ground for the suspension of an application, but we found the Council does not

- recognise that its bypassing of these applicants is a suspension. As a result, the Council does not inform these applicants that it has suspended them. We also found that it suspends applicants with debts of less than 1/12th of their annual rent, despite this being prohibited by the Housing (Scotland) Act 1987, as amended. It treats tenants and former tenants of other landlords differently to its own tenants. The Council does not record or report on these suspensions. This is a significant weakness.
- 4.25 The Council gives applicants a good level of choice in terms of house type, form of heating and geographic locations. However the Council does not allow children of different sexes to share a bedroom whatever their age. This limits choice for applicants with children of different sexes; 25% of applicants on the waiting list require more than 2 bedrooms, but only 18% of council stock is this size. The Council told us that it will allow sharing when it is clear that housing need cannot be met from existing stock, and that its new policy will allow for children up to the age of 5 to share.
- 4.26 The Council recently revised its nomination agreements with RSLs and developed a Section 5 protocol as a way of increasing housing options for both mainstream and homeless applicants. Its nomination agreement allows the Council to nominate for 50% of RSL lets to be made up of referrals of homeless applicants and nominees from its housing lists. The Council does not have a target for what proportion of lets should go to each group and it does not effectively monitor the performance of RSLs against the agreements. RSLs let 905 properties in Dundee in 2007/08, and only 25.5% of these were let to applicants referred or nominated by the Council. This is a decrease from the previous year's figure of 29.5%. The Council accepted that this was a significant weakness and took steps to help it maximise its use of nominations and section 5 referrals.
- 4.27 In summary, the Council is poor at meeting housing need through its allocations. Its current policy and practice does not fully comply with current legislation. It cannot demonstrate that it lets its houses in a fair and transparent way and it is not using nomination agreements effectively to maximise access to housing for its applicants.

Tenancies and neighbourhood management

- 4.28 The provision of good information and access to support are important ways in which a landlord can help to manage and sustain tenancies. The Council provides an excellent range of written information to its tenants on tenancy and neighbourhood management through its tenant handbook, annual newsletter, its website and its wide range of leaflets.
- 4.29 The Council uses its tenancy sign up interviews with new tenants to give them all relevant leaflets and information, although we saw that it does not give them a full explanation of their rights and responsibilities. The Council aims to visit new tenants six weeks after their tenancy begins. Staff told us that the main focus of these visits is to check that new tenants have moved in and have spent their decoration allowances; and they do not consistently use these visits to reinforce tenancy conditions or to identify tenants who are having early difficulties sustaining their tenancies. The Council does not make appointments with tenants to carry out these visits, nor does it consistently monitor its performance in completing new tenant visits. On the basis of the partial information the Council does have it achieved only around 10% of its planned visits.
- 4.30 The Council writes to all new tenants to inform them about its Energy Advice Team who will visit to discuss energy efficiency and how to use their heating system to best advantage. The team can also provide general money advice and make referrals to other support agencies where necessary.
- 4.31 Through its Housing Support Service the Council can provide support to people who are moving into a new home, people who need help to sustain a tenancy or are vulnerable to homelessness, and people it has given a Short Scottish Secure Tenancy for previous anti-social behaviour. In 2007/08, the service received 485 referrals, 43% of these were from the Lily Walker Centre and 6% were from the Council's anti-social behaviour team. However, the Council's housing management and lettings teams make relatively few referrals to the Housing Support Service; we saw few referrals of tenants in the early stages of arrears. The Council also has a new housing support initiative for tenants living in the Douglas neighbourhood, that aims to promote social inclusion and prevent

- homelessness. In 2007/08, 90% of tenants the Council supported through these initiatives had sustained their tenancies six months after the support had ended. The Council does not measure outcomes in terms of a reduction in arrears or anti-social behaviour. In 2006/07, 85% of new tenants remained in their homes one year after the Council gave them their tenancy.
- 4.32 The rate at which the Council's houses become empty was 12.1% in 2005/06, 13.1% in 2006/07 and 9.4% in 2007/08. The Council has carried out a number of demolitions and this partly accounts for the higher rate of terminations between April 2005 and March 2006. The Council does not analyse why tenants terminate their tenancies. The number of the Council's tenants who abandoned their homes reduced between 2005/06 and 2006/07, but more than doubled in 2007/08 when 2.1% of tenants abandoned their tenancies. The Council does not know why abandonments increased in 2007/08.
- 4.33 In 2007/08, the Council issued 1,199 Notice of Proceedings for Possession (NOPs), all but one for rent arrears. In the past, the Council has used a high level of legal action and evictions to manage its arrears. From November 2006 it has been rolling out a new approach which emphasises early intervention, personal contact and the making of repayment arrangements. Although the number of NOPs issued by the Council has reduced as a result, we found that it has issued these for arrears as low as £40 and where tenants were in receipt of Housing Benefit. The Council is steadily reducing the number of its tenants it evicts: from 51 in 2005/06: 32 in 2006/07; to 16 in 2007/08. In 2007/08, this equates to 0.1% of the Council's tenants and is a third of the national figure of 0.3%. Between April and August 2008 the Council evicted only 2 of its tenants, which is a positive trend, although it increased its use of NOPs and court action during the same period.
- 4.34 The Council's leaflet on rent arrears provides tenants with misleading information about their homelessness rights. When we raised this, the Council immediately undertook to review this leaflet.
- 4.35 The Council does not have procedures for managing occupancy where it does not recover vacant possession of a house after it has been granted a

- repossession order. When we raised this, the Council undertook to address this weakness.
- 4.36 The Antisocial Behaviour (Scotland) Act 2004 places a duty on Local Authorities and Chief Constables to prepare a joint antisocial behaviour strategy. Dundee City Council's strategy, published in 2005, sets out a partnership approach to tackling antisocial behaviour (ASB). The Council has developed a good working relationship with the police and its community planning partners in monitoring and evaluating the strategy. The Dundee Community Safety Partnership has a focus on antisocial behaviour issues and has both strategic and operational groups. The Council has succeeded in meeting the majority of outcomes within its ASB outcome agreement throughout the period 2005-2008.
- 4.37 The Council has a specialist antisocial behaviour team. In 2007/08, the team received 1,448 ASB complaints, an increase of 92 from 2006/07. The team provides a good range of information about its service through leaflets, posters and a dedicated section on the Council website. Our tenant assessors reviewed the range of ASB leaflets provided and found them to be well laid out, informative and helpful. The Council has good policies and procedures in place to guide staff dealing with ASB, including a separate racial incident investigation procedure. It has an effective ICT system for recording all ASB complaints.
- 4.38 The Council and its partners use a wide range of tools to tackle ASB, selecting the most appropriate for the circumstances. It uses a warning system which escalates if ASB continues. The Council obtained 20 Antisocial Behaviour Orders in 2007/08, up from 18 in the previous year. The Council aims to take early and effective action to prevent escalation, but will take legal action if it decides that this is the most appropriate way forward. The Council's team participates in a number of local forums aimed at tackling ASB.
- 4.39 The Council has a number of partnership initiatives that support its management of antisocial behaviour, including:
- Dundee Families Project;
 - Community Intelligence Unit;
 - Youth Justice Forum;

- Housing Education programme in secondary schools, with dedicated youth investigation officers; and
 - Victim Support and Community Mediation.
- 4.40 We found that the Council takes action quickly and maintains good audit trails of its decisions and actions. The Council monitors cases, keeps complainants informed as cases are progressing and issues closure letters to complainants.
- 4.41 The Council collects satisfaction information from people who report ASB. It reported satisfaction levels for 2007/08 of 73%. This was above its target of 70%, although it did drop significantly from 88% in the previous year. The Council could not identify a specific cause for this, but developed further training for staff in an attempt to improve satisfaction. The Council plans to look at the way it collects satisfaction information to help it better understand reasons for dissatisfaction and recognises the need to further develop its framework for monitoring ASB performance and the outcomes of its actions and initiatives.
- 4.42 We saw that the Council's neighbourhoods are generally well managed and in good condition, although some areas have problems with graffiti, vandalism and litter. The Council has a number of approaches to help manage its neighbourhoods including community safety wardens, open plan caretaking, concierge services and a communal cleaning scheme.
- 4.43 The Council introduced estate based housing officers in November 2006 with the intention that officers would have increased knowledge of their own patch to carry out estate supervision work. It has policies and procedures for this and sets targets for close and footpath inspections and reports its performance on a monthly basis. Its housing officers are also responsible for carrying out inspections of reported repairs, and we saw that in the past the Council prioritised this work resulting in estate supervision work being more reactive. Its performance reporting shows an increase in proactive work over recent months.
- 4.44 The Council aims to do regular estate walkabouts with tenant representatives but we saw that it only arranges these when tenants request them. The Council underwent an estate management peer review in October 2007 and received a good assessment with some recommendations. We found that the Council has

- 4.45 The Council does not collect information on tenant satisfaction with its estate management service, but told us that it plans to do this in the next year.
- 4.46 In summary, the Council does not make good use of new tenant visits and does not always identify those at risk at an early stage, although it does have access to good support initiatives for vulnerable tenants. It is reducing the number of its tenants it evicts. It is good at responding to antisocial behaviour. It is working to become more proactive at managing its neighbourhoods and has developed a number of approaches to help it achieve this.

Income maximisation

- 4.47 The Council provides its tenants with a wide range of options for paying their rent. It promotes the use of Direct Debit and 19% of its tenants pay by this means. The Council provides a rent collection service to tenants who cannot get out to pay their rent because they are elderly, disabled or housebound.
- 4.48 The table below summarises the Council’s reported performance in collecting rent.

	2005/06		2006/07		2007/08
	Council	National	Council	National	Council
Current tenant arrears as % of net rent due	9.9%	7%	10.6%	6.7%	9.1%
% of current tenants in serious arrears	5.7%	4.5%	6.4%	4.4%	6.1%
Total former tenant arrears (£)	£699,198	n/a	£754,883	n/a	£614,295
Rent arrears written off (£)	£555,106	n/a	£617,569	n/a	£525,454

Source: Audit Scotland’s published performance indicators and the Council’s inspection submission

- 4.49 The Council’s reported performance in collecting rent has fluctuated over the past three years, and the percentage of current tenants in arrears and the percentage of tenants in serious arrears continues to be well above the national figure. In 2006/07 the Council was ranked 23rd (for current arrears) and 22nd (for serious arrears) out of the 27 Scottish local authorities managing houses at that time.

Over the medium term there are signs of a trend towards improvement in current arrears; in 2004/05 the percentage of current tenants in arrears was 11.8% and this decreased to 8.6% in August 2008. However, the percentage of tenants in serious arrears increased over the same period from 5.7% 2004/05 to 6.12% in August 2008. The Council has set a target of 7% for current arrears but is still some way from achieving its target and its performance remains poor in comparison to national figures. The Council told us that high levels of deprivation within Dundee was a possible reason for this.

4.50 As we report above, the Council is rolling out a new approach to managing arrears which emphasises early intervention, personal contact and repayment arrangements. It has introduced a range of measures aimed at improving its arrears performance including:

- a dedicated rent recovery team and contact centre;
- new arrears management policy and procedures and a new ICT system;
- reducing its use of standard letters and making more attempts to communicate with tenants in person; and
- regular monitoring and reporting of performance.

4.51 However, we found a number of weaknesses in the Council's approach:

- it does not always identify people at risk of losing their home as a result of arrears from an early stage, and does not refer people to its homelessness service;
- it is poor at referring tenants to specialist advice and support services, such as welfare rights and money advice and Housing Support;
- it does not always check tenants' entitlement to housing benefit before pursuing legal action against them;
- it does not carry out financial assessments before agreeing repayment arrangement with tenants;
- it does not tailor its approach to individual tenants' needs; and
- it does not have management systems to control the quality of its arrears work and to ensure its policy and procedures are followed.

- 4.52 The Council plans to develop its ICT system to automatically refer tenants in arrears to its Welfare Rights and Housing Support teams. These plans will address some of the Council's weaknesses.
- 4.53 The Council has a relatively high level of former tenant arrears and has written off substantial amounts of these in each of the last three years. It has a process in place for recovering former tenant debt. It reserves the right to pursue former tenants' arrears for up to 20 years. The Council told us it would review this when responsibility for pursuing former tenants' arrears transfers to its contact centre in 2009.
- 4.54 The table below summarises Dundee City Council's reported performance in letting houses that have become empty.

	2005/06		2006/07		2007/08
	Council	National	Council	National	Council
Turnover (no. of new vacancies as % of total dwellings)	12.1%	9.3%	13.1%	9.5%	9.3%
Total no. of re-lets	1,685	n/a	1,497	n/a	1,306
% of dwellings that were not low demand re-let within 4 weeks	29.8%	44.2%	30.0%	47.7%	13.7%
Average time (days) to re-let houses that are not low demand	56	64	57	51	71
% of total annual rental due lost due to voids	2.4%	2.3%	2.2%	1.9%	2.1%

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

- 4.55 The Council lost 2.1% of its total rental income because of empty houses in 2007/08. Although this represents a reduction in lost rent since 2005/06, it does not represent improved performance in real terms since the number of houses the Council relet fell by 18% over the same period, as a result of its demolition programme. In 2007/08 it took the Council an average of 71 days to let its empty houses and it let only 13.7% within 4 weeks. This represents a significant deterioration in its performance since 2005/06. Over the same period the national figure for performance in this area has improved.

- 4.56 The Council carried out a review of its management of empty houses in August 2007. One of the key recommendations for improvement was the establishment of the post of Void Manager to streamline processes and improve communication with the contractor. The Council recruited to this post in April 2008 and has made changes which may in time lead to some reduction in void time. The Council reported that in August 2008 it had reduced the average days to let to 59.
- 4.57 However, we found weaknesses that undermine the Council's attempts to reduce the length of time it takes to relet its properties. It does not preallocate empty houses and only starts the letting process once it has ordered repairs to the empty house. The Council does not visit tenants who are terminating their tenancy, and does not give tenants clear guidance about clearing out their house and making good minor damage; the Council told us that two thirds of its empty houses need to be cleared out before it can order void work. This routinely adds an additional three days to the time houses are empty. The Council accepted these weaknesses and told us it has now introduced pre-termination visits and the preallocation of empty houses.
- 4.58 We found further weaknesses which have an affect on the length of time houses are empty. The Council routinely exceeds the targets for various stages of the process and does not effectively monitor its performance and it has a rigid approach to when it will start tenancies, potentially adding up to another 12 days to the period a house is empty.
- 4.59 The Council does not have a formal standard on the condition it expects its houses to be in at the start of a new tenancy. The Council aims to relet its houses at minimal cost. In 2007/08 the Council spent an average of £1,089 on empty house repairs. This is significantly lower than the average of £1,621 spent by other Scottish councils in the same period. The Council encourages its relet officers to minimise repair orders and to concentrate on safety and security issues. The Council offers new tenants a decoration allowance in the form of vouchers. We found the standard of the Council's houses that were ready to let was poor. The Council seeks feedback from new tenants about the condition of their new home. Although it has had a limited response, nearly half of those replying said their new home had been dirty.

- 4.60 The Council told us that a key factor in its performance in letting houses is the lack of demand for many of its houses and that the condition of the house was not a significant factor in refusals. Indeed, it told us that many applicants refuse its offers before even viewing the house. However, the Council does not effectively monitor the reasons for refusals or use this information to identify potential improvement to its management of empty houses. It accepted that this is a weakness and told us that it has begun to monitor and analyse refusal reasons.
- 4.61 The Council currently lacks a cohesive strategy for dealing with its houses which are difficult to let. Its policy allows for properties to be designated as 'readily available' and advertised, although it is not currently using this option. Its current approach to letting these houses is the same as for its other empty houses and its performance in letting both categories is not significantly different: in 2007/08 it took the Council an average of 75 days to let its hard to let houses; and 71 days for houses it does not classify as hard to let. The Council told us that it intends to take a more strategic approach, including decommissioning low demand sheltered housing and reintroducing advertising for readily available properties.
- 4.62 In summary, the Council's performance in income maximisation is poor. It has improved its arrears management procedures, although it is too early to tell the effect of these and it still has some weaknesses in its approach. Its management of empty houses is poor, although we saw some signs that recent changes are beginning to make some impact on its performance. The Council views low demand as a major factor in its empty house management performance, but it has not yet developed a coherent strategy to deal with its hard to let houses.

5. How well is Dundee City Council managing its assets and delivering repairs?

In this section we set out our assessment the Council's performance in managing its housing assets and in delivering a repairs service for tenants.

Grade

Dundee City Council has achieved a **D** grade for asset management and repairs. This is a **poor** performance.

- 5.1 Our assessment is that Dundee City Council's performance in its asset management and repairs has some strengths, but set against these are many weaknesses, some of which are significant. We saw that its responsive repairs service is accessible, and it receives positive feedback on the repairs service from tenants. It is developing a strategic approach to managing its assets, and it is good at managing asbestos in its houses.
- 5.2 It has major weaknesses in complying with legal and regulatory duties in gas safety and does not fully comply with the Right to Repair. Its performance in completing responsive repairs on time is deteriorating. The Council faces a number of significant risks to its plans to achieve the Scottish Housing Quality Standard. Its current procurement practices do not demonstrate a focus on value for money, and it does not take its procurement decisions transparently or in a way that clearly demonstrates it is achieving best value.

Tenant satisfaction

- 5.3 The Council collects feedback on a small sample of the repairs it carries out through weekly telephone surveys. For the year 2007/08, the Council's surveys found that:
- 99.3% of tenants said their repairs were carried out within a reasonable time;
 - 100% found it easy to report their repair; and
 - 99.4% were satisfied with the standard of work, and 93.9% were satisfied with the quality of materials used to carry out repairs.

Asset management strategy and planning

- 5.4 The Council does not have a consolidated asset management strategy or plan for its housing, but is developing a strategic framework for managing its housing

assets. It has effectively connected its overall strategic aims, as it sets out in its Council Plan and Local Housing Strategy, to specific service objectives through its Housing Service Plan and its performance framework. Its key strategic aims are:

- ensuring the plan to deliver the SHQS is implemented effectively, gives value for money and is affordable by tenants;
- together with partners, ensuring that the variety and quality of affordable homes in Dundee is increased;
- together with partners, ensuring that stable, attractive and popular neighbourhoods are created through investment and regeneration; and
- ensuring that the full range of services and how they are delivered are subject to a process of continuous improvement.

5.5 The Council aims to tackle low demand through a number of comprehensive regeneration initiatives including demolition and redevelopment. It works well with its partners in these initiatives to enable the supply of affordable housing in these locations. It includes residents in a comprehensive master planning process for its regeneration areas, similar to that which facilitated the renewal of Ardler estate.

5.6 The Council's approach to assessing the sustainability of its housing stock is undermined by weaknesses in its information base. It bases its stock retention and demolition decisions on housing need and demand projections from a study it commissioned in 2002, which it has fed into the Council's Regeneration Master Plans for priority areas of the city. However, the Council established criteria to identify stock it considers at risk and therefore to be demolished in 1999, and revised these in 2004. The Council told us that it uses a range of performance and management information to inform stock management decisions, but we saw no evidence of it using robust option appraisals to inform decisions on the sustainability and disposal of its stock. In its follow up audit of the Council, Audit Scotland has highlighted that its approach to option appraisal remains underdeveloped. The criteria the Council uses to identify "at risk" housing stock are comprehensive, but weaknesses in its information base undermine its ability to make robust and transparent decisions on the future of its housing assets.

- 5.7 In particular, the Council does not have robust or detailed information on the level of demand or need for its own housing. It has taken some steps to improve its awareness, including commissioning external studies of housing demand and supply within the city. The Council has recognised that it needs up to date and comprehensive information on current and future need and demand for its housing, and commissioned a new study in October 2007. The study will cover all social housing in Dundee. The Council plans to use the study, which was due to report in late 2008, to inform updated versions of its key housing strategies.
- 5.8 We saw some evidence of the Council involving tenants in identifying investment priorities, although it did not broaden its discussions beyond its recognised tenants groups. The Council does not carry out regular tenants surveys to determine investment priorities. The Council has a better tenant focus when it is delivering its investment programme; it gives tenants choices in the style and design of new kitchens and bathrooms, and the Council has responded to tenants' and staff feedback to streamline the way tenants are involved in the planning, delivery and completion of individual investment projects. The Council has increasingly targeted its investment focus at ensuring its houses meet the SHQS by 2015, but it is aware there is scope to develop more ways to involve tenants in determining its investment plans.
- 5.9 The Council is currently revising an Owners Charter it established with Dundee Association of Council House Owners (DACHO) in 2007. The Charter outlines service standards, communications protocols and charging policies. The Council meets regularly with DACHO to discuss operational and strategic issues, the outcomes being fed into the investment programme. This is a positive approach to ensuring all sectors of the community are involved in the investment and regeneration programmes.
- 5.10 The Council commissioned a survey of the condition of its housing stock in 2008, focusing on the elements required by the SHQS. The Council now has full stock condition information covering 30% of houses. This has improved its information base, but its reliance on information cloned across similar house types to cover the remaining 70% is a risk. The Council is aware of this and is updating its

database with stock condition information from its ongoing investment work, but has no other firm plans to increase the coverage of its stock condition information. We found that the Council is using this information base and the knowledge of its staff in its investment planning.

5.11 Scottish Ministers have set a target that all social landlords' houses should meet the SHQS by 2015. Communities Scotland accepted the Council's current Standard Delivery Plan (SDP) in 2006, and highlighted a number of key risks within it:

- reliance on generating substantial income through land sales, including land currently occupied by Council housing stock;
- reliance on receipts from house sales through the Right to Buy; and
- reliance on effectively controlling rising management and maintenance costs.

5.12 The Council worked well in 2007 to exceed its target for the number of houses it aimed to bring up to the SHQS, although its targets and plans at that point were not based on up to date stock condition information. However, it faces a significant challenge in going forward. While the Council is balancing its HRA, both the Scottish Government's review of the Council's progress in February 2008 and our inspection found there are continuing risks around its funding and efficiency assumptions in its SDP. These are:

- the Council plan relies on achieving £30m in land sales to contribute to the costs of meeting the SHQS, and much of that depends on the Council demolishing high rise stock. Current market conditions expose the Council to risks in achieving these receipts;
- its loan charges have risen higher than it expected, and its debt per house has also risen, due to a number of factors including a rise in non-SHQS related capital spending, loss of houses through Right to Buy and demolitions;
- it increased rents in line with its projections at inflation +1%, but has lost more rent due to empty houses than it expected; and
- it had projected reductions in its management costs by 1% each year, but these increased by 32% between 2005/6 and 2006/7.

- 5.13 The Council is currently undertaking a fundamental review of its assumptions and plans to meet the SHQS, using outcomes from the recent stock condition survey to provide a better basis for investment decisions. It aims to have this review complete in early 2009 before developing a revised SDP.
- 5.14 The Council responded positively to its internal audit recommendations on weaknesses in its SHQS performance monitoring framework in 2007, and now effectively monitors its housing investment programme on progress with SHQS works against annual targets. Its Housing Capital Investment Management Team meets monthly to review progress on all capital investment, and this group reports progress in turn to a SHQS Project Board. The Council regularly reports its performance to elected members and senior officers on progress against annual targets for increasing the number of its houses that meet the SHQS.
- 5.15 In summary, Dundee City Council is developing a strategic framework for the management of its housing assets, although it has a number of areas of weakness in its approach to making decisions about the sustainability of its housing. It has recognised the importance of holding good information on its stock, and its new stock database is an effective tool for this work, although its use of cloned information remains a risk. The Council faces a number of significant risks to its plans to achieve the SHQS and is fundamentally reviewing its assumptions on this before resubmission of its plans later in 2009.

Investment & home safety

- 5.16 The Council spent £14.1m on capital and planned works to its houses in 2005/06 rising to £21m in 2006/07. Its average per house investment was above that for Scottish councils as a whole in both years, and was the eighth highest of 28 councils in 2006/07. In 2007/08, the Council reduced its overall expenditure on capital and planned works although at £1,026 per house it is still above the average for Scottish councils. It has focused its spending on replacing central heating systems, installing new kitchens and bathrooms, re-wiring, and controlled entry installations.
- 5.17 The Council has not been effective in projecting its required spend to meet its programme targets in each of the last three years. In 2005/06 it overspent

- against its target by 4% (£0.5m), but the next year it underspent by 2% (£0.4m). In 2007/08 it overspent by 11% (£1.1m), mainly because it had to increase its programme of kitchens and bathrooms replacements from 80% to 100% of all its houses following its recent stock condition survey, and an increase in non-SHQS investment. Its performance in matching its spending with its projections to date reflects the lack of up to date stock condition information before 2008. The Council is focusing its investment plans on meeting the SHQS. It plans its investment over a rolling three year period, with programmes reviewed annually and performance monitored monthly by the Housing Capital Investment Management Team.
- 5.18 The Council provides good information to tenants who have investment work carried out on their homes. Council staff speak to tenants individually regarding the proposed works, and it gives tenants clear written information on what is involved. The Council arranges for tenants to have a choice of design layout and style in its kitchen replacements. It has also developed a Code for Contractors in response to tenants' and staff concerns about variations in the conduct of different contractors, and publicises the Code through leaflets to tenants affected by capital works.
- 5.19 Where it replaces heating systems, the Council's Energy Advice Team visit to provide information on energy efficiency measures, reducing fuel bills and ensuring that tenants know how get the maximum benefit from their new system. This is a positive approach to tackling fuel poverty
- 5.20 The Council acknowledges that there are weaknesses in its approach to collecting satisfaction information from tenants on investment works. It collects feedback through lengthy written standard questionnaires, which it only issues to tenants once all work is completed. It has a relatively low response rate of around 33% of tenants surveyed. During our inspection the Council confirmed that it plans to pilot telephone surveys for capital works before the end of 2008/09. The Council told us that it uses tenant feedback to inform its reviews of capital and improvement works once they are complete. We saw some examples of where the Council had changed elements of its approach, such as providing decoration vouchers to tenants where damage resulted from works carried out

- and changes to the information given to tenants. However we saw little evidence that feedback directly and routinely influences changes or improvements in the programming and delivery of investment works.
- 5.21 The Council carries out cyclical maintenance on an 8-9 year cycle, covering external paintwork, gutters and rainwater pipes, external doors and windows, and fences and railings. The Council recognises that its current approach is not effectively prioritising work where it is most needed first, which sometimes results in it carrying out the work through individual response repairs. It plans to review its approach as part of the wider repairs and investment reviews that are currently underway.
- 5.22 By law, Dundee City Council must make safety checks every 12 months on all gas appliances and flues that it provides for its tenants. We found that the Council has poor and contradictory management information on gas safety, including on the number of its houses that have gas. It provided us with different figures for the percentage of its houses with a current inspection certificate, ranging from 85% to 90%. The Council could not demonstrate to us how it had calculated these figures. During the inspection we were able to do only limited direct sampling of the Council's performance because of the limitations in its management information for gas safety. Through this, we found that between 25% and 30% of the properties we checked did not have continuous cover of inspection certificates.
- 5.23 We found major weaknesses in the Council's management of gas safety, including:
- a number of its houses have not had a safety check for up to four years – the Council has started legal action to gain access for some of these;
 - the Council does not have accurate information on the number of cases where it is taking legal action;
 - the Council has no clearly assigned management responsibility for gas safety and no regular or effective management reporting on its gas safety performance;

- it has poor operational awareness of its statutory duties, and it has an inconsistent approach to the management and retention of gas safety certificates; and
- it does not have a clear target for the proportion of safety checks it will quality assure, nor does it monitor and report the results of these.

5.24 Following our feedback during the inspection, the Council told us that it planned to take emergency action to tackle the backlog of outstanding safety checks over a six week period, that it will move to a ten-month inspection cycle and is reviewing its legal process for gaining access. We saw slow progress on this during our inspection and there was little material change in the updated figures the Council subsequently gave us. We advised the Health and Safety Executive (HSE) of our concerns on gas safety. It subsequently met with the Council and has advised us that it is satisfied with the Council's improvement plans, which now include a new gas safety management structure. The HSE intends to hold a further meeting at a future date with the Council to review progress and audit its new systems. By January 2009, as a result of the new measures the Council has implemented, it told us it had a current inspection certificate for 99.7% of its houses. However, the number of gas safety checks it carried out within 12 months of the previous check fell from 88% in August 2008 to 54% in January 2009.

5.25 From May 2004 social landlords have had a statutory duty to manage asbestos in the common areas of their properties, and to produce an asbestos management plan by May 2004. The Council has had an asbestos management plan in place since 2004 and revised it in 2006. The Council has not surveyed all common areas of its housing, but it has plans to ensure it has done this by 2010. The Council carries out surveys prior to all planned works and includes asbestos surveys of the houses and attached communal areas within this. The Council has an asbestos register, maintained by a dedicated asbestos coordinator, who updates it with the results of planned and reactive inspections. The Council is working to provide a direct link to this information from the repairs computer system. All the Council's Building Services' and housing staff who visit tenants' homes have received asbestos awareness training and Building Services have a working procedure in place to help ensure its staff who are likely to come into

- contact with asbestos know about its location and condition. The Council gives tenants information on asbestos in its tenants handbook and on its website, and encourages them to contact it if they find damaged asbestos.
- 5.26 As we mention in paragraph 4.58, the Council does not have a formal relet standard for its empty houses and those we saw that it was ready to let were in poor condition. The Council does not provide prospective tenants with clear guidance on the standard of its let houses. It collects limited feedback from new tenants on the condition of their new homes and does not routinely collate and review information on the reasons people refuse offers of its houses.
- 5.27 In summary, Dundee City Council has started to address some of its major weaknesses around the management of gas safety and has increased the number of its houses with current gas certificates, although it does not yet meet its statutory obligation for a number of its houses with gas. It is poor at ensuring the empty houses it relets are of a good standard, although it is improving the condition of its stock through investment. It is good at working with tenants during the delivery of investment works, and at managing asbestos within its housing.

Response repairs

- 5.28 The Council's response repairs service is accessible. Tenants can report repairs by telephone or in person to the Council's repairs centre, at its district offices, in writing or through the Council's website. The Council gets around 75% of repairs reported by telephone to its repairs centre. Tenants we spoke to thought that access to the Council's repairs service is good, and this is confirmed by the Council's tenant survey in which 100% of respondents found accessing the service easy. The Council is considering extending ways to report repairs to include email and text messaging.
- 5.29 The Council provides good information on its repairs service to tenants in a range of ways and makes effective use of different ways to publicise the repairs centre telephone number, including on pens and keyrings and on stickers left on tenants' heating boilers.

5.30 The Council does not operate a formal appointments system, but offers tenants a morning or afternoon slot for non-emergency repairs, and also makes more specific informal appointments on request. The Council does not monitor its performance in keeping appointments, but does ask tenants for feedback on the time taken to complete their repairs in its regular survey of tenants who have had a repair done. In 2007/08, the Council reported that 97.4% of tenants surveyed said their repair was carried out within the expected time, and 99.3% said their repair was carried out within a reasonable time. As we report above, this is based on a small sample.

5.31 The Council’s targets for response repairs are: 24 hours for emergencies; five working days for “quick fix” repairs; 15 working days for routine repairs and other miscellaneous repairs. The table below summarises the Council’s reported performance in completing response repairs within its target timescales.

	Target response time	Performance (%)			
		2005/06	2006/07	2007/08	National median 2006/07
Emergency	24 hours	95.1%	95.1%	94.1%	94.1%
Quick Fix	5 working days	83.8%	81.5%	79.0%	87.9%
Routine	15 working days	88.5%	89.8%	85.9%	89.1%
Misc.	15 working days	86.1%	87.1%	84.6%	85.1%
% of repairs due to be completed within 24 hours completed within target		95.1%	95.1%	94.1%	93.9%
% of all repairs completed in target		90.6%	90.5%	88.6%	89.4%

Source: Audit Scotland’s published performance indicators & the Council’s inspection submission

5.32 The Council’s performance in completing its repairs on target was above the national figures in all but one category. Its performance on emergency repairs was 1% above the national figure in 2006/07; for routine repairs it performed slightly better than the national figure; and its performance in miscellaneous repairs was 2% above the national figure. However, its performance for “quick fix” repairs was below the national performance in 2006/07, and its performance across all repairs categories declined in 2007/08.

5.33 The Council’s integrated repairs computer system gives it good information on the status of repairs and enables it to keep tenants up to date with the progress of their repair. However, we found that the Council does not provide tenants with written confirmation of the repairs they report.

- 5.34 The Council told us that it had not been operating the statutory Right to Repair scheme for a number of years, but reintroduced it in early 2008. However, we found that it is not yet fully meeting many of its statutory obligations. This is a significant weakness. It does not:
- publicise the scheme annually;
 - always accurately identify qualifying repairs;
 - advise tenants of their right to compensation, or pay this when it has not carried out qualifying repairs in the statutory timescales;
 - attach sufficient priority to some types of repair to meet the statutory repair timescales;
 - provide tenants with written confirmation of their rights when reporting qualifying repairs; and
 - monitor or report on performance in meeting the requirements for completing qualifying repairs.
- 5.35 Pre and post inspections are important ways of ensuring that repairs are carried out to a high standard and targeted accurately. The Council is not making effective use of inspections of its repairs. It has not set a target for the proportion of repairs it will pre inspect, and beyond focusing on non-standard or complex repairs does not have criteria to identify which repairs it will pre inspect. The Council's information shows that it has pre inspected around 35% of all repairs in each of the last three years. This is a relatively high level and the Council has not reduced this level as it would have expected having established more standard or "benchmark" repairs in its Repairs Partnership Agreement. The Council is aware it is not meeting its target timescales for carrying out pre-inspections.
- 5.36 The Council does not use post inspections in a targeted way to check the quality of its completed repairs. It post inspected less than 1% of all its repairs in each of the last two years, and the majority of post inspections are triggered in response to tenants reporting unsatisfactory work. The Council has not set a target time for the completion of post inspections. We found that it does not use information gained from its inspections to identify potential improvements to its repairs service. The Council plans to introduce targets for post inspections.

5.37 In summary, the Council's response repairs service is accessible. Its performance in completing repairs on time is fair although deteriorating. Its use of inspections is weak and is not an efficient use of resources. It does not fully comply with the statutory requirements of the Right to Repair scheme.

Value for money in procurement

5.38 The Council delivers its responsive repairs service through a Repairs Partnership Agreement with its in-house partner, Contract Services. It also commissions Contract Services to provide empty house repairs, planned maintenance and some capital investment work. It established the current partnership agreement in 2004, and is due to review it by April 2009. We found no evidence that the Council had formally considered alternative contractor options for the procurement of its maintenance services or tested if it represented value for money.

5.39 A key feature of the Partnership has been a move away from using a Schedule of Rates (SOR) to delivering repairs through a system of benchmark repairs. The Council told us that this has been effective in reducing the historic levels of variance between committed and billed costs for repairs. The Council has not reviewed the partnership or market tested the costs related to its "benchmark repairs", although it has done some limited benchmarking with other local authorities. This is a significant weakness that limits its ability to demonstrate that the partnership provides Best Value. It has used the current review of the partnership agreement to carry out analysis of the relative cost of the repairs service against pre-partnership levels, and this has provided some favourable comparisons highlighting the Partnership's performance in reducing repairs costs in real terms. However, the Council's approach to benchmarking its performance on repairs costs and quality is underdeveloped.

5.40 The Council's average spending on maintenance and repairs in 2007/08 was £1,110 per house, compared to a national figure of £1,026, the eighth highest of Scottish local authorities. In 2006/07, the Council spent 27% on response repairs and 68% on planned and cyclical repairs; but spent proportionately less (52%) in 2007/08 on planned maintenance.

- 5.41 While the Council is aware that it carries out a high and increasing proportion of response repairs as emergencies (up from 48% in 2005/06 to 50% in 2007/08), it has not analysed the reasons for this nor does it have clear plans in place to address this.
- 5.42 The Council's policy is to cancel only repairs where it did not get access. In 2007/08, it cancelled 6,920 (or 9%) of repairs. This is a similar proportion to that of the previous year, however the Council has no firm plans in place to reduce the number of repairs cancelled. The Council does not monitor or report on the number or level of repairs it varies. Its use of a system of benchmark repairs is intended to minimise variations while allowing minor related repairs to be carried out when a tradesperson visits a tenant. It does monitor and report on total billed repairs spending against committed or benchmark repairs costs. In 2006/07, the Council's repairs spending was £160,588 more than projected, and in 2007/08 this had risen to £176,474.
- 5.43 The Council told us it has established a Corporate Procurement Strategy in 2007 that sets a framework for procurement decisions across the Council and its services. However, we found that the strategy document was not easily accessible from the Council's systems, and that housing staff did not know about the strategy or were not clear about its status. The strategy focuses mainly on general and corporate purchasing decisions, and has little detail on how the Council will make procurement decisions on housing assets and their maintenance. Audit Scotland recently carried out a review of the Council's progress in addressing its recommendations on best value and found that the Council's procurement strategy is not well embedded throughout its operations, and that staff awareness of it across the Council's services is limited.
- 5.44 The Council uses a combination of traditional and partnering procurement methods for its housing investment programmes, and procures contracts on a price/quality basis. Its Financial Regulations set out the approach to be adopted, depending on the cost of the project involved. The Council told us that it delivers the majority of its capital investment work through partnering arrangements with its contractors. The Council has established formal guidance on partnering arrangements, which outline the process and criteria for selecting partner

- contractors. However, we found that the Council held little information that demonstrated how or why it selected the successful contractors in the procurement exercises we reviewed, or that these ensure that it is getting best value. This is a significant weakness.
- 5.45 During our inspection, we reviewed the Council's recent decision to purchase 15 new build homes from a private developer. The Council agreed to purchase the houses for around £2.2 million. It then let the houses to homeless people and to people on its housing list. The Council told us that the decision to purchase the houses was opportunistic and we saw that officers took the authority to proceed from a policy previously approved by Committee, to increase its stock of houses that are suitable for people with disabilities. However, all of the houses it purchased are mainstream general needs houses on two floors, and we saw little evidence that any of the properties were let to people with any specific need for more accessible housing. The Council's officers purchased the properties subject to Committee approval. Its Economic Development Committee subsequently approved this transaction on the basis of the previous approval to purchase accessible houses.
- 5.46 The purchased houses were built on land previously owned by the Council, where it had demolished its own houses that had been identified as surplus stock. We saw no evidence that the Council had considered a robust business case to inform its decision to purchase.
- 5.47 The Council has set the rent charges for these houses at a significantly higher level than the rent for the equivalent size of houses it already owned, and at higher levels than those it originally projected. We saw no evidence that the Council had considered affordability in calculating rents for these houses. The purchase has also added to the Council's Housing Revenue Account debt burden at a time when it is facing real financial challenges, particularly to secure the funding it needs to deliver the Scottish Housing Quality Standard.
- 5.48 In summary, the Council has not effectively translated its strategic approach to procurement into operational practice, and we found weaknesses in its approach to ensuring that it makes well-informed, transparent procurement decisions that

demonstrate a focus on value for money. This is an area of significant weakness.

6. How well is Dundee City Council delivering services for homeless people?

In this section we set out our assessment of the Council's performance in delivering services for homeless people.

Grade

Dundee City Council has achieved a **C** grade for services to homeless people. This is a **fair** performance.

- 6.1 Our overall assessment is that Dundee City Council's homeless service has some strengths, but a range of weaknesses that impact to varying degrees on the quality of service that homeless people receive. The Council has some self-awareness of its weaknesses and had taken some action to make improvements to services. Its staff demonstrated both a customer focus and a willingness to make further improvements and tackle issues we raised during the inspection. The award of a C grade takes into account this customer focus, completed improvement work and its responsiveness to feedback.
- 6.2 The Council has developed a good homelessness strategy that identifies key areas for improvement, SMART objectives and a clear action plan. The Council has good access to services and publicises these well. It has worked well with partners to develop a wide range of temporary accommodation, reduce the use of bed and breakfast accommodation and improve the quality of temporary accommodation it uses. These are balanced against the weaknesses that we found.
- 6.3 It has significant weaknesses in its performance management information on its homeless services that undermines the reliability of some of its reported performance and statistics. It also means that the Council does not know if it always discharges its duties to homeless people, or how it is placed to meet the Ministerial targets for 2009 and 2012. It does not always record sufficient information for out of hours calls or when providing information and advice to demonstrate it is meeting its duties. It has high levels of repeat homelessness and loses contact with a high number of applicants before it reaches a decision.

Access to service

- 6.4 In 2007/08, Dundee City Council received 2,359 applications for assistance under the homelessness legislation, an increase of more than 60% since 2004/05. This contrasts with the trend in Scotland with a peak in applications in 2005/06 and an annual decrease of 5% in applications for 2007/08. Over the last 3 years, the percentage of all households in the Council's area making a homeless application has been higher than the national figure and increased every year from 2.1% in 2004/05 to 3.4% in 2007/08. Nationally the figure has increased from 2.4% in 2004/05 to 2.5% for 2005/06 and 2006/07. The Council commissioned research in 2007 that focused on understanding single homelessness in Dundee, but has not yet established the reasons for the significant increase in applications from all household types.
- 6.5 The Council's Lily Walker Centre is the main homeless reception centre, and is situated in the Hilltown area of Dundee. The Centre provides office accommodation for homeless interviews and assessments work, and a direct access hostel. Homeless applicants can also access the Council's service through its three Advice and Information teams, located in each of its area offices and its advice office. It also provides access through a 24 hour freephone Homeless Advice Line.
- 6.6 To help improve access to the homeless service, the Council has trained its advice and information teams and key staff in partner organisations to help homeless people to complete an application form. Since March 2008, it has made its homeless application forms available to these partners for them to help homeless people to complete a homeless application and send it into the Lily Walker Centre. This is a positive initiative, although the Council is not yet monitoring where forms are coming from to help it evaluate the success of the initiative.
- 6.7 The Council operates a duty appointment system for homeless people during office hours and has a target to provide people who are not roofless with an appointment within three working days. The Council does not monitor its performance against this target or how many homeless people it loses contact with before it interviews them. However, the Council plans to address these

- weaknesses through its new ICT system. It interviews people who are roofless on the day they present, although we saw this can result in a substantial wait for some homeless people.
- 6.8 The Council publicises its homeless service on its website and through a good range of publicity information including posters and leaflets. Our tenant assessors found this information to be clear and easy to understand. The Council prominently displays its publicity material and distributes it widely across the City in a range of locations where homeless or vulnerably housed people would see it, including in offices of partner agencies and other landlords. The Council has procedures to ensure it maintains this level of publicity. Homeless people we spoke to said they found it easy to access services.
- 6.9 The Council works with partners to provide training for workers who work with homeless people or those at risk of homelessness across the Council, NHS Tayside and other health organisations, local housing associations and support agencies. As a direct result of feedback from this training, the Council developed a booklet detailing basic information about the range of organisations that can provide services for homeless people. This is an excellent partnership approach to ensuring agencies working with homeless people are aware of services and how to access them.
- 6.10 The Council's 24 hour freephone Homeless Advice line is the main access route to its out of hours service and it publicises this well. It provides its out of hours service from the Lily Walker Centre with applicants able to phone or come into the Centre for assistance. During 2007/08, the Council received 517 calls to its out of hours service and it provided 29% with temporary accommodation. We found the Council's out of hours records do not always note whether temporary accommodation needs have been discussed and met where necessary. This means it cannot always demonstrate it handles these calls appropriately and is meeting its duties to homeless people out of hours. Third parties told us that the Council does not always meet its duty to provide temporary accommodation. When we highlighted this weakness in its record keeping, during the inspection, the Council took action to address this.

- 6.11 The Council makes all its homeless information available in alternative languages and formats and clearly states this on all its publicity material. In addition, it also provides a translation service and recently started to provide access to Language Line. Staff we spoke to were aware of how to access translation and interpretation services when necessary.
- 6.12 In summary, the Council publicises its homeless services well and provides good access to them. It works well with partners to make this happen. It has not yet established the reasons for the significant increase in homeless applications from all household types, although it has carried out research to better understand single homelessness across the City. It does not monitor the number of people it loses contact with between initial presentation and interview, but has plans to address this gap through its new ICT system. The Council cannot demonstrate it always meets its statutory duties to provide temporary accommodation to people who seek assistance out of hours.

Advice and prevention

- 6.13 The Council has recognised the importance of information and advice in its homelessness strategies, which clearly set out a number of relevant SMART objectives. It identified a need to develop and implement an Information and Advice Plan, to get HomePoint Type I accreditation for its Homeless Services Unit and produce a directory of services in its first homelessness strategy. It has progressed these actions, but at a much slower pace than it originally planned to.
- 6.14 The Council has a duty to ensure that homeless people can access good quality, free advice and information about homelessness and prevention in its area. Residents of Dundee can access free and impartial housing and homeless advice through a range of agencies including Dundee North Law Centre, Shelter, the Citizen's Advice Bureau and Hillcrest Advice Centre. The Council provides homeless people with contact details of these agencies on its website, in its booklet on local services for homeless people and in its leaflet about how people can ask for a review of its decisions. It also provides access to trained advisors through its well publicised 24 hour freephone Homeless Advice line. HomePoint auditors recently highlighted to the Council that it did not always record information on advice cases when it did not progress these to homeless

- applications. The Council plans to address this weakness later this year through an action plan in response to the HomePoint audit.
- 6.15 The Council's Homeless Services Unit completed the HomePoint accreditation audit during 2008, which required the Council to develop and submit an action plan to meet the accreditation requirements by October 2008. HomePoint plan to carry out a follow-up accreditation visit during January 2009.
- 6.16 The Council's homelessness strategy also identifies prevention as one of its key objectives, along with working to develop sustainable accommodation and support projects. The Council is currently planning to restructure the homeless services unit to concentrate on the assessment of applications, providing emergency accommodation and preventing homelessness. Through this it will create a homelessness prevention team.
- 6.17 The Council works well with a wide range of partners across many different types of project to prevent homelessness and help people take up and sustain permanent accommodation, including;
- working with Hillcrest Housing Association to provide a financial pre-tenancy service worker;
 - a reviewed rent deposit guarantee scheme and Dundee HomeFinder with Dundee Cyrenians to provide private rented access and support for homeless people;
 - the long-established Dundee Families Project with NCH Action for Children (now Action for Children) to provide intervention, support and advice to families at risk of becoming homeless as a result of anti-social behaviour;
 - a parenting project and supported tenancy initiative for young people;
 - furniture recycling and household starter pack projects;
 - the Independent Living for Hostel Residents project to support homeless people to move into resettlement or permanent accommodation; and
 - the Moving Forward project to provide homeless people staying in temporary accommodation with support and to develop skills for independent living.

These are positive initiatives, although the Council does not effectively monitor or fully evaluate the contribution of all of these, particularly in the context of its increases in homeless applications.

- 6.18 The Council had identified the development of discharge protocols for people leaving armed services and institutional care as key actions in its first and subsequent homelessness strategies. This is of particular significance in Dundee, as a 2006 Council commissioned report into understanding single homelessness found that it had significantly higher than national levels of people who were homeless following discharge from an institution. The Council has developed a hospital discharge protocol in partnership with the Tayside Health and Homelessness Group. It has been slower to develop other discharge protocols. It is working with Tayside Community Justice Authority and other partners to develop a discharge protocol for HMP Perth and a throughcare aftercare discharge protocol.
- 6.19 The Council told us that in 2006/07, 84% of homeless households housed by the Council were still in their tenancy after 12 months, compared to 86% for all new tenants. This has improved since 2003/04 when 67% of previously homeless households were still in their tenancy after 12 months compared to 73% for all new tenants. This is a positive improvement. The Council told us that it does not yet routinely monitor tenancy sustainment levels; this is a weakness.
- 6.20 The Council reports that it has reduced levels of repeat homelessness from 9.1% in 2004/05 to 2.7% in 2007/08. However, one of the findings of the research into single homelessness was that significant numbers of homeless people had made previous applications and the Council told us it thought its reported figures on repeat homelessness were an underestimate. This is a weakness. The Council recognises repeat homelessness for certain groups is an important issue in Dundee and plans to address this issue through its homeless strategy action plan.
- 6.21 The Council has, in its first homelessness strategy, identified the need to develop an approach to respond to potential eviction actions in the private rented sector. Its timescale for this was 2004/05, but it has taken no action to address this

objective. We also found that the Council's housing management teams do not refer tenants it intends to evict to its homeless service. This is an area of significant weakness. The Council has identified that it needs to improve in this area but has not yet made the necessary arrangements to prepare for the commencement of Section 11 of the Homelessness etc. (Scotland) Act 2003, within its own stock or the private rented sector.

6.22 In summary, the Council publicises its advice and information services well on its website and in other publications. It has some strengths in its developing approach to preventing homelessness, particularly around its partnerships for supporting people to sustain their tenancies. It has been slow to progress a number of its homeless strategy actions around prevention and it has weaknesses in its monitoring information, although it has taken some steps to identify the gaps.

Assessment of homeless people

6.23 The Council has a duty to make all necessary inquiries to satisfy itself whether homeless applicants are homeless or threatened with homelessness, have a priority need, and became homeless or threatened with homelessness intentionally. The table below provides an overview of the Council's assessment decisions for people who apply to it for assistance.

	2004/05		2005/06		2006/07		2007/08
	Dundee	Scotland	Dundee	Scotland	Dundee	Scotland	Dundee
All applications assessed in period	1,301	57,030	1,889	60,058	1,933	58,663	2,531
% priority unintentional	41%	52%	49%	53%	47%	52%	48%
% priority intentional	0.2%	2%	0.3%	2%	0.7%	2%	0.3%
% non priority	4%	18%	7%	17%	11%	17%	12%
% not homeless	0.9%	9%	0.9%	9%	1.1%	8%	1.5%
% lost contact/withdrew before assessment	31%	12%	25%	13%	28%	13%	24%
% resolved prior to assessment	23%	6%	19%	7%	12%	7%	12%
Proportion of assessments completed within 28 days	66%		63%		58%		68%

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

- 6.24 The Council told us that it has serious concerns about the accuracy of some of the figures it reported in the past, but that its figures for 2007/08 are correct. In a recent statistical bulletin on homelessness the Scottish Government stated that the Council had been unable to supply it with some information due to technical difficulties with its electronic reporting system. The Council's patterns of assessment decisions are distinctly different to the national figures. Its level of lost contact / withdrew before assessment and resolved prior to assessment decisions account for over a third of decisions in 2007/08, significantly above the national figure for the previous year. The Council's figures in all other categories are below the national figures.
- 6.25 The Council assesses a significantly higher proportion of applicants as threatened with homelessness than the national figure: 26% compared to the national figure of 7% for the previous year. We found that the Council interprets homelessness narrowly as rooflessness and the need for temporary accommodation. When we highlighted this to the Council during the inspection, it agreed to take immediate action to review its interpretation and produced staff guidance to highlight the distinction between homelessness and threatened with homelessness.
- 6.26 Scottish Ministers have set a target to reduce by 50%, the number of applicants given non priority decisions by 2009, and to abolish priority need by 2012. The Council reported that it assessed 12% of applicants as non priority in 2007/08, well below the national figure for the previous year. However, this is a threefold increase on the Council's reported figure in 2003/04, and its figures for the percentage of applicants it assesses as in priority need have remained largely unchanged over the last three years. The Council expanded the categories of applicants it considers as in priority need from 1 August 2008 to help it work towards the Ministers' targets.
- 6.27 The Council acknowledges that it has difficulties maintaining contact with some applicants and that it has high levels of lost contact decisions. The Council does not have a clear analysis of the reasons for this. Officers told us it is due to workloads, the Council's prioritisation of work to move people on from temporary

- accommodation and because it does not always quickly follow up on initial interviews. This is a weakness.
- 6.28 We saw that the Council interviews homeless people in private and that officers are sensitive to applicants' circumstances. Service users we spoke to said they were very satisfied with how the Council treated them during interviews. However, we saw that the Council does not always explain to applicants their right to temporary accommodation, check whether they need temporary accommodation or give them information on how to access services out of hours.
- 6.29 The Council follows the correct sequence of inquiries and it generally has good levels of evidenced investigation and can clearly demonstrate how it reached its decisions, particularly for intentionally homeless cases. The Council had identified the need to improve notes on decisions and had recently carried out training with officers. It has also developed staff guidelines and procedures on many aspects of its homeless application and assessment process over the last 18 months. We found one key gap in the guidelines, but the Council immediately took action to address this when we highlighted it during the inspection. The Council has a good approach to ensure appropriate levels of investigation and consistency across all its decisions, although we saw that it has not used this to identify potential improvements to its decision making processes and its approach has resulted in significant delays in some cases.
- 6.30 The Code of Guidance recommends that councils should notify people of the outcome of their application as quickly as possible, and suggests a target of 28 days. The Council has a target of completing 70% of assessments within 28 days. Over the last four years, its performance against this target has fluctuated between 58% and 68%. From cases we reviewed, we saw that it took the Council between 5 and 160 days to reach an initial decision and up to 59 days to authorise these. It told us that this was due to resource limitations, delays in getting information from others and its practice of prioritising some decisions over others rather than using date order. The Council agreed to review its management of this to improve customer service.

- 6.31 The Council's decision letters to homeless people clearly state its decision, what will happen next and give advice on the right to request a review of the decision, referring applicants to an enclosed leaflet which clearly explains the reviews process. However, its does not always clearly explain how it reached its decision in its letters.
- 6.32 The Council has statutory duties to provide advice and assistance to homeless applicants it assesses as non priority or intentionally homeless. We saw that the Council's advice and assistance interviews are customer focused and provide applicants with a good range and quality of information and advice. We found that the demand for this service results in significant delays in the Council contacting some non priority applicants and it loses contact with a significant number of applicants before fully discharging its duties to them.
- 6.33 Regulations prescribe the types of advice and assistance the Council must provide for homeless people who are intentionally homeless or not in priority need. The Council has a useful advice checklist for homeless staff and we saw it give people general housing options advice and signposts to other advice providers. The Council does not always record the advice it provides, nor does it record or monitor formal referrals to other advice agencies. Its HomePoint accreditation audit identified these weakness and the Council is taking action to address them.
- 6.34 The Council has a duty to advise homeless applicants of their statutory right to request a review of decisions within 21 days. The Council's review process meets legislative requirements. It received 10 requests for reviews against decisions on applications during 2007/08 and it upheld 5. It does not currently monitor or report how many requests for reviews it receives about offers of temporary or permanent accommodation. It gives homeless people good information about the right to review, including where to go for free independent advice. It does not, however, include information about the Scottish Public Sector Ombudsman nor the applicant's right to temporary accommodation if required during the review.

6.35 In summary, the Council generally makes good decisions, although it can take a long time to do so. It loses contact with a high proportion of applicants, and it is aware that it has had weaknesses in its reporting of homelessness. The Council has expanded its priority need targets to work towards meeting targets for 2009 and 2012. It responded positively to our feedback during the inspection.

Securing accommodation

6.36 The Council has a wide range of temporary accommodation for homeless people. It provides approximately half of this in its own houses and hostels and half in partnership with external agencies. The Council has worked well with these partners to provide six direct access hostels and eight resettlement projects. This is an excellent approach to partnership working and developing specialist projects to meet particular needs in locations across the city.

6.37 We found that the Council does not always record when it secures temporary accommodation for homeless people, particularly where it is provided by a partner agency. It is not always able to maintain contact with these people and loses contact with a number of them. The Council was not able to give us reliable information on its level or use of temporary accommodation or the time people spend in this accommodation. This is a major weakness. The Council knows that its monitoring systems for placements with other agencies are underdeveloped. The Council's Homelessness Strategy outlines its plans to review the usage of current temporary accommodation and to put in place monitoring systems to ensure that there is a sufficient supply of temporary accommodation available to meet demand.

6.38 The Homeless Persons (Unsuitable Accommodation) (Scotland) Order 2004 prohibits councils from using unsuitable accommodation for households with children and pregnant women for longer than 14 days unless exceptional circumstances apply. The Council reported 22 and 24 breaches of the Order during 2005/06 and 2006/07, and none in 2007/08. The Council told us it achieved this improvement by actively pursuing a policy of using bed and breakfast as a last resort. However, the weaknesses in its management information on temporary accommodation undermines confidence in this level of improvement.

- 6.39 We visited a number of furnished flats and hostels used by the Council and found these all to be of a good standard. All of the service users we spoke to were happy with the standard of their temporary accommodation. The Council reviewed the standards for the bed and breakfast accommodation in 2005 and developed a service level agreement outlining minimum standards it required. It asked all bed and breakfast establishments it used at the time to sign up to a service level agreement which included detailed costs and routine checks by the Council's officers. It has identified improving the quality of temporary accommodation more broadly as an action in its restructuring of the homelessness service and its Homelessness Strategy.
- 6.40 The Council has two officers who work with those it places in its furnished flats and has a good information leaflet about its flats. However, information about what may happen if the person is asked to leave temporary accommodation is inaccurate as it suggests that this will discharge its duty to provide permanent accommodation. It also arranges for support to be provided to people in its temporary accommodation by external agencies including Positive Steps, Cyrenians and the Salvation Army.
- 6.41 In summary, the Council has a well developed range of temporary accommodation provided directly and by partners across the city. The Council recognised it was over reliant on bed and breakfast accommodation and that standards needed to improve and took action to address these points. However, its lack of a comprehensive and robust monitoring of all temporary accommodation placements is a major weakness. The Council plans to tackle this weakness through its restructuring of the homelessness service.
- 6.42 The Council has had an objective to increase the percentage of its houses it lets to homeless applicants since 2006/07. In 2005/06, it allocated only 20% of its houses that were available to let to homeless people, and increased this to 29% in 2006/07 and to 42% in 2007/08. It introduced a target of 40% of lets to homeless people in March 2008, and by August 2008 it was making 48% of lets to homeless people. At the time of our inspection, it had approximately 700 homeless people waiting to be rehoused.

- 6.43 The Council told us that this increase in the level of lets to homeless people has helped it to decrease the length of time a homeless person waits for permanent accommodation. In 2006/07 it took an average of 206 days to secure permanent accommodation for a homeless person, and decreased this significantly to 160 days in 2007/08.
- 6.44 We found that the Council does not offer homeless people the same quality of permanent accommodation as it offers to other applicants. We found, however, that the Council takes some account of homeless people's needs to live in a particular area and allows them the same number of offers as other applicants.
- 6.45 The Council developed a Section 5 referral protocol in 2006 with RSLs in its area to access permanent accommodation for homeless people. The Council gives RSLs an annual target based on the level of turnover in their houses. In 2007/08, the Council referred 221 homeless people to RSLs, but only 102 were successfully rehoused. RSLs in Dundee made only 10.6% of their lets to homeless people through Section 5 referrals, down from the previous year's figure of 16.4%. The Council told us that it also nominated 85 homeless people to RSLs during 2007/08, but was unable to tell us how many of these were successful. The RSLs told us that they had housed eight homeless people nominated by the Council in this period.
- 6.46 The Council has a 50% target for RSL lets to Council nominees and Section 5 referrals. However, it has no clear guidelines on targets or relative priority of different groups in this process, and it manages its nominations through its lettings team and Section 5 referrals through its homeless team. We found the Council had no overall control of these processes to ensure that RSLs adhere to agreements and assist the Council in meeting housing need. The Council accepted that this is a weakness and agreed to develop a more effective monitoring and control process.
- 6.47 In summary, the Council has increased the overall percentage of its houses it lets to homeless people, and has improved the time it takes to provide them with a permanent let. It does not provide the same quality of accommodation to

homeless people as it does to other applicants, and it does not use Section 5 referrals and nominations effectively to maximise lets to homeless people.

7. Is the housing service at Dundee City Council managed for improvement?

Leadership and strategic planning

- 7.1 The Council has a clear strategic planning framework. It has submitted its Single Outcome Agreement (SOA) to the Scottish Government in April 2008. The SOA is the Council's over-arching statement of its strategic focus. It outlines the 31 Dundee City Council Outcomes that articulate its contribution to the national priorities set by the Scottish Government and local priorities it identified through consultation with its strategic partners in the local community. The Council sets out its values and its full range of corporate objectives in its Community Plan and Council Plan, which it has used to develop its SOA outcomes. All of the Council's strategic plans are available on its website.
- 7.2 The Council's service plans demonstrate clear links to its corporate strategic objectives, LHS objectives and, where appropriate, its homelessness strategy. However, it does not support these service objectives with SMART action plans, although it regularly monitors and reports progress against most, but not all, of its service plan objectives.
- 7.3 We saw some evidence of the Council's ability to manage change effectively; for example, it introduced its repairs partnership and recently made some improvements to its homelessness services. It has also changed the department's structure and introduced two new district offices, incorporating contact centres, with the aim of improving customer care and service delivery. The Council had previously identified a number of the weaknesses in service delivery we highlight in this report, but it has failed to drive improvements in spite of this awareness. We saw a real disconnect between the Housing Department's strategic improvement work and its operational work.
- 7.4 More generally, we saw a lack of strong and effective management in the Council's Housing Department. We found confusion over roles and responsibilities, in part due to its recent restructuring of services. We saw serious gaps in management responsibility for recognising and responding to poor performance, particularly around lettings and gas safety. We also saw that,

despite high scores in other parts of a staff survey carried out during the restructure in 2007, Housing Department staff, in comparison with the Council as a whole, were less likely to agree that they had an effective management team, that changes in the department contributed to improvement or that they got encouragement and recognition.

- 7.5 These major weaknesses represent a significant challenge for the Council to make and sustain the significant improvements needed across its services.

Performance management, planning and reporting

- 7.6 The Council is developing its approach to performance management at a corporate level. Audit Scotland's Best Value audit in 2005 found that there was a need for greater corporate leadership on performance management and improvement. The Council responded to this by introducing a new Corporate Management Team (CMT) and a best value sub committee, which reviews a performance monitoring report at least twice a year. The Chief Executive and department heads meet monthly to review performance and strategy. The Council makes these reports available on its website. The Council has also introduced online corporate performance monitoring and plan monitoring systems.
- 7.7 The Council has some strengths in its approach to performance management in its Housing Services. In 2005 Audit Scotland commented that the Housing Department had a strong system in place for measuring and managing performance based on SPIs and other locally developed indicators. Its quality and improvement team has a good level of awareness of performance in some areas of service delivery, and has proposed improvement actions for a number of these. We also saw some examples of it using performance information to drive service improvements. The Council has established and continues to develop a Performance Management Framework (PMF) which contains a range of performance indicators with improvement targets. Managers meet monthly to discuss these and the Council regularly shares them with tenant representatives. It reports on these monthly to its managers. The Council has shown some commitment to identifying areas where improvement in housing services is

- required, and it participates in a range of benchmarking networks and in peer reviews. It is undertaking external accreditation exercises.
- 7.8 However, as we report above, the Council is poor at acting on the information it has to effect real improvements. Although it gathers a lot of performance information, it does not analyse and use it effectively; as a result, it does not fully appreciate the significance of its poor performance in some areas. We also found it difficult to get accurate performance information from the Council and we were often given contradictory information. The Council does not have an accurate picture of how it is performing, particularly in access and lettings and across key parts of its homelessness functions. It has recently taken steps to improve its information base for gas safety work.
- 7.9 The Council is working to develop its homelessness services and is planning to make changes to how the service is structured and delivered. The Council has some knowledge of where it needs to make improvements, partly because of its participation in peer reviews and external accreditation. It is still relatively early in this change process, but we saw that it is making some progress.

Customer focus and influence

- 7.10 The Council has a comprehensive set of Service Standards, which it developed in consultation with its service users and staff. Its standards cover all of its key Housing Services and it publicises them on the Council website. It gave all its tenants a booklet detailing the standards they should expect and explaining what to do if the service they receive is not up to that standard. The Council told us that it has not yet developed effective mechanisms to monitor and report on performance against all of these standards, but plans to do so in the near future.
- 7.11 The Council reports its performance against its service targets through its annual tenants newsletter, the Council wide Annual Performance Plan and on its website. Tenants representatives also attend meetings with the housing management team to discuss key results on a quarterly basis. The Council has recently installed plasma screens in the reception areas of its district offices and intends using these to publicise its performance on an ongoing basis.

- 7.12 The Council makes housing information easy to access for its customers. Its forms, leaflets and documents are in Plain English and it makes them available on request in a range of formats and community languages. It advertises its translation service on its publications. Our tenant assessors found the Council's website to be easy to use and contained helpful information.
- 7.13 The Council has recently opened two purpose built offices in the East and West of the city. These comply with the Disability Discrimination Act and provide good facilities for service users. The Council also offers services from offices in the city centre and its homelessness services are delivered from the Lily Walker Centre in Hilltown.
- 7.14 We found that the Council's Housing Department is further developing its approach to gathering the views of its tenants and service users. It has not carried out a comprehensive satisfaction survey of its tenants in recent years, preferring to use a range of techniques and approaches to gauge customer satisfaction and collect feedback on its performance, including:
- regular service-specific satisfaction surveys;
 - new tenants survey;
 - exit surveys for people using support and homelessness services; and
 - estate walkabouts.
- 7.15 We saw some examples of the Council using the feedback it gets from these sources to change how it delivers its services. However, its approach to estate walkabouts is inconsistent across the Council areas and although tenants we spoke to welcomed the Council's approach, they told us that the Council is generally slow to respond to their comments. Its feedback mechanisms for its repairs service provide high levels of tenant satisfaction, but the sample size is extremely low. In 2007/08 it measured the satisfaction levels of 154 tenants who had had a repair carried out, against a total of 78,127 repairs for that year. This represents less than 0.2%.
- 7.16 The Housing (Scotland) Act 2001 requires Dundee City Council to publish a tenant participation strategy. The Act also requires landlords to inform and consult tenants about significant changes to its services and take tenants' views

- into account when making decisions that will affect them. The Council is currently revising its strategy in conjunction with tenants representatives.
- 7.17 In 2007 the Council had a peer review of its approach to tenant participation. The review assessed the Council's approach to tenant participation as fair. Although it found some areas of good practice, it identified several areas where improvement was required. The Council has used the findings of the review to make improvements to the ways it makes information available to tenants and also to inform its new strategy. Examples of the main changes to its approach include:
- engaging with a wider range of tenants through twice a year area forums;
 - changing the role of its tenant participation officers to be more pro-active in consultations and gathering information on customers;
 - revised customer satisfaction surveys for tenant participation; and
 - developing a "SMART" Annual Participation Action Plan.
- 7.18 The Council told us that it has had a long standing commitment to tenant participation. It supports 21 Registered Tenant Organisations (RTOs) and works with the city-wide Dundee Federation of Tenants Associations (DFTA). Most of the RTOs are affiliated to DFTA. The Council offers assistance in two main ways; through the provision of grants; and offering support and advice. The Council has four tenant participation officers who work with the groups, and it also uses independent advisers to assist on specific areas of work. The tenant groups that responded to us in writing, as well as those we spoke to during the inspection, were generally unhappy with the Council's approach to consultation and participation, stating that it relied overly on the Federation for its main consultation exercises and effectively excludes them from becoming involved. Staff we spoke to during the inspection also expressed concerns about the effectiveness of the Council's approach to consultation. The Council has become increasingly aware of these concerns, partly through the work of the peer review, and is reacting positively by working to increase the opportunities for involve tenants other than those in the Federation.
- 7.19 The Council's approach to its annual rent increase is influenced by a commitment to ensure all its houses achieve the Scottish Housing Quality Standard (SHQS)

- by 2015. Based on its current cost estimates and its aim to maintain current levels of service, the Council calculates that to achieve the standard it needs annual rent increases of inflation +1% up to 2015. The Council told us that it has responded to some negative feedback it received about its tenant consultation process for rent increases in 2008/09. In future as well as publicity in its tenants newsletter it plans to use its area forums as a focus for consultation on rents, and will dedicate more of the tenant participation officers' time to support the consultation. The Council will set out its proposed approach to rent increase consultation in its Annual Participation Action Plan.
- 7.20 The Council recently introduced a new service to provide over bath showers at an additional cost of between £5 and £10 a week for the lifetime of a tenancy. This is likely to provide the Council with a revenue stream that far exceeds the costs of the installation and maintenance of the shower. DFTA members and the Council's RTOs that we spoke to during the inspection told us that the Council did not consult with them on the specifics of this service before its introduction. When we raised this with the Council it told us that, as participation is voluntary, it did not consider that formal consultation on the introduction of the service was required, although it listed the DFTA as formal consultees in the paper on which its Committee based its decision to agreed to the service.
- 7.21 The Council provides an accessible way for people to complain about its services, and it uses a traffic light system to monitor whether it deals with complaints within target timescales. We saw instances where the Council had used complaints to identify staff training needs, specifically relating to customer care, and that it had subsequently provided necessary training. We also saw that complaints had led it to change the way it delivers capital programmes and tenants allowances. However, we also saw examples where the Council had responded poorly to complaints, and offered little information or assistance to help address the concerns of the complainants.
- 7.22 Despite the introduction of its contact centres, we saw that the Council does not yet have a strong customer focus in the delivery of its services, particularly in housing management. We saw service users receiving poor quality housing advice, housing options and arrears information and that staff were reluctant to

provide information or help to get information in areas that were not related to their own immediate responsibility. We also saw poor communication between different teams within the housing department. This all impacts directly on the quality of service that people receive from the Council.

Equalities and diversity

- 7.23 The Council has completed Race, Disability and Gender Equality schemes and is due to complete schemes covering Age, Sexual Orientation and Religion/Belief in 2008. It sets equalities objectives in its SOA, Council Plan and Community Plan and has recently produced its first annual report for its Gender Equality Scheme.
- 7.24 The Council operates a number of equalities working groups and completes equalities impact assessments for its policies. Its Housing Department has a good focus on equalities and its staff charter covers equalities issues. It makes all its published information available in alternative languages and formats and states this clearly on all its publicity material. It also provides a translation service and the homeless services unit started to subscribe to Language Line during our inspection, to address an area of weakness it had previously identified. Staff we spoke to were aware of how to access translation and interpretation services when necessary.

Efficiency and value for money

- 7.25 In 2007/08, the Council charged its tenants an average rent of £50.34 per week, up from £48.41 in 2006/07 which was above the Scottish figure of £46.65. It has increased its rents by around 4% each year since 2005/06, although its total rental income is reducing each year through Right to Buy sales and demolitions. These factors constrain the Council's ability to grow its housing income. The Council has stated that these rent increases are necessary to fund an increase in its capital investment programmes in order to maintain and improve its houses to achieve the SHQS by 2015. However, as we report above, we found weaknesses in the Council's planning for the SHQS and it has not demonstrated that it plans its repairs and investment programmes to achieve value for money.
- 7.26 The Council's Housing Services reported management and supervision expenditure has risen between 2005/06 and 2007/08; its cost rose to £761 in

- 2006/07 up by £325 on the previous year. This was partially due to its restructuring of the sheltered warden service and its transfer to the Housing Department in 2006. It has budgeted for increased costs in 2008/09 of £819, the highest supervision and management cost of all Scottish councils and 19% above the average. Its costs are increasing more rapidly than the retail price index and the average for Scottish councils, despite reductions in the number of houses it manages.
- 7.27 The Council told us that this was because the figure includes some costs relating to provision of its homelessness services, but that this and its sheltered warden service are self funding and when these elements are netted out, its management costs are £633. The Council considers this figure to be below a Scottish average figure which it uses, of £673. The Council told us that it feels its relatively high costs and rents are justified by its service delivery levels. However, its generally poor service outcomes and variable levels of service user satisfaction, challenges this view. The Council does not have a clearly articulated value for money or efficiencies strategy for its housing service.
- 7.28 The Council's housing debt is amongst the highest in Scotland, and its financing costs are relatively high. It has identified prudential borrowing as one component of its funding of the SHQS. Its capacity for further prudential borrowing will be challenged, given the current position of the Council's Housing Revenue Account with relatively high management costs, loan charges and rents, if it does not realise its anticipated receipts from land sales or if these are delayed. It does not have a clearly articulated contingency position if risks in its planned funding strategy for the SHQS materialise.
- 7.29 The Council has worked to reduce its income loss from rent arrears and empty properties, although these remain high. More positively, it has significantly lowered its expenditure on bed and breakfast accommodation and recoups high levels of rental income from its own temporary accommodation units.
- 7.30 The Housing Department was restructured in 2005/06 and has undergone a significant period of change. The service moved from three area offices with a further two sub offices to two district offices, covering the east and west of the

- city. Two contact centres were set up. The Council retained an advice and information team in its city centre headquarters. It is currently working on a review to determine the final district office structure. However, we found that while the Council's work on its restructuring was aimed at improving service delivery, it does not have a clear focus on value for money. The Council told us that the exercise realised more than half a million pounds in revenue savings.
- 7.31 The Council cannot demonstrate a focus on value for money in its procurement of works contracts for housing repairs and investment. It has recently introduced a corporate procurement strategy and has completed some benchmarking with other local authorities on costs, but it has extended its contracts with Building Services without assessing whether these continue to provide value for money. Its current review of the partnership agreement has identified reductions in repairs costs against pre-partnership levels, although it has not fully assessed this against broader benchmarks. Audit Scotland raised the demonstration of value for money in procurement as an issue for the Council in its 2005 Audit of Best Value and Community Planning.

8. Next Steps

8.1 This report highlights our findings following this housing inspection. We expect all organisations to respond effectively to our recommendations using their own improvement planning processes. We ask organisations that receive fair or poor assessments in their housing management, asset management and repairs service or homelessness service to submit an improvement plan to us within eight weeks of the publication of this report.

8.2 Dundee City Council's improvement plan should show how it intends to respond to our findings in housing management, asset management and repairs service and services for homeless people. The plan will be agreed with us. We follow up improvement plans at regular intervals and will re-inspect the Council's housing management and asset management and repairs services.

8.3 If you would like to see Dundee City Council's improvement plans you should contact the Council by:

Telephone: 01382 307401

Website: www.dundee.gov.uk

Sources of evidence

Groups and third parties consulted

- Dundee Federation of Tenants Associations (DFTA)
- Tenants' and Residents groups
- The Council's external auditor
- Scottish Government – Housing and Regeneration Team
- Homepoint
- Scottish Government's Homelessness Team
- Scottish Public Service Ombudsman
- Citizens Advice Bureau
- Neighbouring Local Authorities
- Local Registered Social Landlords
- Women's Aid
- Shelter
- TPAS

Interviews/Meetings

- Elected Members
- Chief Executive
- Director of Housing
- Corporate Performance Manager
- Staff from the Housing Department
- Staff from Building Services

Reality checks

- Observation of information and advice to service users
- Observation of hostel and bed and breakfast accommodation
- Shadowing of allocations
- Shadowing of tenancy sign up interview
- Shadowing of an accompanied viewing
- Shadowing of assessment and follow-up interviews with homeless people
- Shadowing of temporary accommodation visits
- Shadowing of repairs call handling
- Shadowing of repair pre and post-inspections
- Shadowing of void repairs visits
- Review of short SST's
- Review of housing list applications and allocations
- Review of information for applicants and tenants
- Review of homeless assessments and appeals
- Review of complaints
- Review of antisocial behaviour cases
- Review of arrears cases
- Review of legal actions against tenants
- Review of reported repairs
- Review of planned maintenance and improvement projects
- Empty property visits
- Estate visits

Key documents reviewed

- Dundee City Council's Inspection Submission
- Housing management performance reports
- Repairs and maintenance performance reports
- Relevant policy and procedures
- Minutes of meetings and associated reports
- Tenants' newsletters and other publicity material
- Council's website
- Outcome reports for housing management, property maintenance and homelessness
- Protocols with other agencies
- Local Housing Strategy
- Homelessness Strategy
- Scottish Housing Quality Standard Delivery Plan
- Single Outcome Agreement
- Community Plan
- Corporate Plan
- Service Plans
- Corporate Procurement Strategy

Examples of Positive Practice

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

Interagency Homeless Training Workshops

It was recognised that many voluntary and statutory agencies in Dundee were in contact with people who may be homeless or at risk of becoming homeless. However, it was apparent that there was a knowledge gap about homelessness and organisations were often unaware or unclear of how they could help homeless people. The Council's homeless unit and homeless strategy officer worked with representatives from Dundee Cyrenians and NHS Tayside to develop a training session on Homelessness for workers in statutory and voluntary agencies who may be in contact with homeless people.

The training session was developed taking into account the fact that staff in many agencies across Dundee would come into contact with homeless people in their work and all had a role to play in preventing and tackling homelessness. Participating in the training would raise awareness of homelessness issues in Dundee, provide staff with information on the range of services available and as a consequence improve joined up working and service provision to homeless people.

10 training sessions were held over 4 months and in 2 different venues to encourage participation with each session having a mix of staff from different agencies to encourage discussion and understanding of the different roles of staff across agencies. The session was also developed with an aim to help participants use the training as a credit towards an SVQ in Housing, Health or Social Care.

The objectives for the training were:

- to develop an awareness of homeless services;
- to develop an understanding of issues by removing the stigma and attitudes homeless people experience;
- to bring different disciplines together to share in experiences and to develop effective partnership working;
- to have an effective homelessness workforce; and
- to have an awareness of current legislation, Dundee Homeless Strategy and current research into the field of homelessness in Dundee.

Participants were asked to complete feedback forms and the training was formally evaluated. Overall 118 people attended the training, of whom 50% were from the local authority, 25% from the voluntary sector, 10% from the NHS, 8% from housing associations and 7% from other organisations. Feedback clearly demonstrated that the content of the course and its delivery were highly valued by participants, many of whom said that it would be useful in their day to day work. As part of the evaluation report, 5 recommendations for future training sessions in homelessness were made.

Glossary

Anti Social Behaviour Order (ASBO)	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.
Asset management	Ensuring that current and future assets (houses, land, etc) fully support the organisation's objectives – working towards having the right assets, of the right quality, in the right place at the right time.
Benchmarking	A process used by organisations to systematically compare service processes and performance to identify best practice.
Capital Programme	Programme of major repair works funded mostly from borrowing.
CFCR	Capital funded from current revenue
Common housing register (CHR)	A register of all applicants for social housing used by two or more landlords within an area.
Direct Labour Organisation (DLO)	Internal organisation which carries out work on behalf of housing departments.
HomePoint	<p>A team within the Scottish Government that supports providers of housing information and advice services.</p> <p>HomePoint has broken down advice activities into three types:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Type I active information, sign-posting and explanation.• Type II casework.• Type III advocacy, representation and mediation.
Housing list	A list of applicants for housing that is used by the local authority to allocate its housing stock.
Housing Revenue Account (HRA)	The budget a local authority has from rental income for managing and maintaining its houses and housing services.
ICT system	Information and communication system.
Notice of Proceedings (NOP)	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.
Partnering	In contract management, a structured approach to improving efficiency and quality of work. It aims to reduce confrontation between the Council and its consultants and

contractors. Partnering requires formalised objectives, agreed problem solving methods and an active search for continued measurable improvements.

Performance Standards	Housing standards for all social landlords in Scotland, jointly agreed by the SFHA, COSLA and Communities Scotland.
Planned maintenance	The planned renewal or maintenance of key property components.
Pre-inspections	Inspections undertaken to ascertain the nature of the repair required.
Post inspections	Inspections undertaken following work to check the suitability and quality of repairs.
Procurement	The way an organisation obtains services or materials from other organisations or agents.
Qualifying Repair	Repairs that qualify for inclusion in the Right to Repair scheme.
Registered social landlord (RSL)	A landlord providing social rented housing that is registered and regulated by the Scottish Housing Regulator.
Registered Tenant Organisation (RTO)	A tenant-representative group meeting certain conditions set down in the Housing (Scotland) Act 2001 and registered with a social landlord.
Response repairs	Day to day repairs carried out on a reactive basis, distinguishable from planned, capital or cyclical maintenance.
Right to Buy	The right of many Scottish tenants to buy their property at a discounted price, depending on length of tenancy.
Right to Repair	Statutory scheme which sets out timescales for some repairs, and what can be done by a tenant if a landlord does not do the repair within the timescales.
Schedule of Rates (SOR)	A costed list of all or most of the day-to-day repairs that a client is likely to instruct a contractor to do.
Scottish Housing Quality Standard (SHQS)	A minimum quality standard for all of Scotland's social homes. Landlords should achieve the standard by 2015.

Scottish secure tenancy (SST)	The Housing (Scotland) Act 2001 establishes the Scottish Secure Tenancy as the tenancy for all tenants of social landlords in Scotland.
Short Scottish secure tenancy (SSST)	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.
Section 5 referral	Where, under Section 5 of the Housing (Scotland) Act 2001, a local authority can request a registered social landlord that has accommodation in its area to provide accommodation to homeless people.
Shadowing	An inspection technique that involves accompanying and observing staff while they carried out their day-to-day tasks.
SMART criteria	Performance management acronym for: Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Relevant and Timebound.
Statutory Performance Indicator (SPI)	Indicators of local authorities' performance that are published by the Accounts Commission for Scotland.
Stakeholder	Any person or organisation using a landlord's service, affected by the landlord's actions or having an interest in the landlord's activities – an interested party.
Tenancy agreement	Legal document or contract between landlord and tenant setting out the rights and responsibilities of each.
Tenant assessor	Trained tenants (not of the landlord being inspected) who are part of the inspection team. They are involved in preparing for inspection, reading landlord materials and on-site visits as well as talking to tenants.
Tenure	The method by which a person occupies a property i.e. tenant, lodger, owner-occupier.
Variations	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.
Void	A property without a tenant. Voids occur in the period between one tenant leaving and another taking over the tenancy.

About the Scottish Housing Regulator

The Scottish Housing Regulator (SHR) is an executive agency of the Scottish Government. We exercise independently the regulatory powers of Scottish Ministers in the Housing (Scotland) Act 2001. We register and regulate independent social landlords. These are usually housing associations, but they can also be housing co-operatives or companies limited by guarantee. We also inspect the housing and homeless services provided by local authorities.

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 supports the Chief Executive to manage and direct the organisation.

Our purpose is to:

- protect the interests of current and future tenants and other service users;
- ensure the continuing provision of good quality social housing in terms of decent homes, good services, value for money, and financial viability; and
- maintain the confidence of funders.

Our work supports the principles of public service reform by promoting good services that are organised around the needs of the people who use them. We encourage registered social landlords (RSLs) and local authorities to be open, accountable, efficient and well governed. And we expect them to provide equal opportunity and open access to their services.

www.scottishhousingregulator.gov.uk

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Availability in other formats

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