

Inspection report

East Renfrewshire Council

April 2005

Regulation & Inspection

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Summary

The inspection of East Renfrewshire Council took place in November and December 2004. We awarded the following grades:

Housing management	B	Good	Many strengths and some areas where improvement is needed
Property maintenance	C	Fair	Some strengths, but with many areas where improvement is required or with a small number of significant weaknesses
Homelessness	C	Fair	Some strengths, but with many areas where improvement is required or with a small number of significant weaknesses

Inspection Findings

East Renfrewshire is one of the smallest Local Authority areas in Scotland. Located to the south of the City of Glasgow it has a growing population of around 89,000. The area is part of a wider Clydeside housing market which includes Glasgow. The Council owns 3,695 houses and has 2,637 applicants on its housing list. In 2003/04, 403 households applied to the Council as homeless and the Council let 295 houses; 23.4% of these lets were to homeless applicants.

The largest political group on the Council is the Labour Party; the administration is formed from a Labour/Liberal Democrat coalition. Members manage the Council through a five member cabinet. There were a number of significant changes in the senior management of the housing service in the six months prior to the inspection. Housing services are split between a number of departments with most services managed as part of the Environment Department through a housing services section. Rent collection and arrears are managed within the Revenues Department.

The Council has a good range of structures in place to involve tenants in planning and delivering services. The effectiveness of these structures has been significantly reduced by tensions between representative organisations and between the Council and tenant representatives themselves. The Council is aware of this and has recently take steps to address the problem.

The Council's current approach to how it plans, monitors, controls and reports its delivery of housing services is underdeveloped. There are particular weaknesses in the collection of performance information for its response repairs service and its collection and use of tenant satisfaction information in its housing management and property maintenance services and its monitoring of outcomes for homeless people applying to the Council for assistance. This has had a significant impact on the Council's ability to identify and respond to weaknesses

in its services. Recent changes in the management of the service have, however, begun to address this problem.

Key strengths in East Renfrewshire Council's services:

- the Council has significantly increased its investment in its houses over the last year;
- it has a good approach to responding to incidents of antisocial behaviour;
- it is meeting housing need when it lets its houses;
- it gives almost all its tenants a full Scottish secure tenancy
- it has a low level of evictions;
- it promotes its homeless service well; and
- it makes good use of feedback from homeless applicants to improve its service.

Key areas for improvement in the Council's service:

- planning and performance management for improvement;
- its poor management of gas safety in its houses;
- its approach to access to its housing for out of area applicants;
- its approach to ensuring best value in the procurement some property maintenance contracts;
- its lack of recording and monitoring of first contacts with homeless applicants;
- its reliance on out of area bed and breakfast in providing temporary accommodation to homeless applicants and the absence of any systems to ensure the quality or value for money of this aspect of its service or manage risk for the Council or clients; and
- its restriction of homeless applicants' choice in making offers of permanent accommodation and its failure to assess outcomes compared with others housed from its waiting list.

The inspection report sets out the key areas for improvement that the Council should address in its improvement plan for the service.

Next steps

East Renfrewshire Council should produce an improvement plan to show how it intends to respond to our findings. The plan will be agreed with us.

How to get more information and contact details

If you would like to see East Renfrewshire Council's improvement plan you should contact:

Iain Maclean
Head of Housing
East Renfrewshire Council Offices
211 Main St
Barrhead
East Renfrewshire
G78 1SY

Telephone: 0141 577 3720
Email: iain.maclea@eastrenfrewshire.gov.uk
Website: www.eastrenfrewshire.gov.uk

The full report is on our website at <http://www.communitiesscotland.gov.uk>.

This Summary can also be made available on tape, in Braille, large print and community languages. For information please contact Janette Campbell on 0131 479 5163 or email janette.campbell@communitiesscotland.gsi.gov.uk.

1. Introduction

About this inspection

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

How we assessed performance

1.2 Our inspectors asked two key questions:

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

1.3 In order to answer these questions inspectors:

- spoke to tenants, 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;
- analysed published performance and financial information.

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

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

The inspection team

1.5 The inspection team was led by Tony Cain (Inspection Manager) and included Fiona Selkirk, Robbie Fraser and Lindsay Stother (Inspectors), Iain Fitheridge (Inspection Officer) and Michael Cheung (PATH Trainee). We were on site between 15 November and 3 December 2004. We would

like to thank everyone involved in the inspection, particularly the councillors, staff and tenants for their time and co-operation.

Responding to this inspection

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

2. Context

Geography

- 2.1 East Renfrewshire covers an area of approximately 67 square miles (174 square kilometres) and is one of the smallest Local Authority areas in Scotland. It is located to the south of the City of Glasgow. Approximately two thirds of East Renfrewshire is rural farm land encompassing the villages of Neilston, Uplawmoor, Waterfoot, Eaglesham, whilst the remaining area is made up of the mainly suburban residential areas of Thornliebank, Giffnock, Clarkston, Newton Mearns Netherlee, Stamperland, and the town of Barrhead.
- 2.2 The unitary authority area of East Renfrewshire was created in April 1996. This brought together two very different areas in Eastwood and Levern Valley. Prior to 1996, the Levern Valley (consisting of Barrhead, Neilston and Uplawmoor) was part of Renfrew District Council and the rest was under Eastwood District Council. Prior to the creation of East Renfrewshire, there was little to connect the two areas in spite of their geographical proximity. Each area has its own distinct history; Eastwood having always been primarily residential in nature whilst the Levern Valley developed around an industrial base.
- 2.3 Strategically East Renfrewshire is part of a wider Clydeside housing market area which is largely made up of Glasgow, East Dunbartonshire, West Dunbartonshire, Renfrewshire, Inverclyde and East Renfrewshire. In housing terms the Eastwood and Levern Valley areas are distinct housing markets which impacts on housing demand - the former which has very close links to Glasgow and the latter with close links to Paisley.

Population

- 2.4 The latest census figures indicate the population of East Renfrewshire to be just over 89,000 people.
- 2.5 The number of people living in East Renfrewshire has continued to increase over the last 20 years, with current population having risen around 11%¹ during this period. This trend is forecast to continue, with a further 10% increase in population by 2016. The sharpest population rise is amongst elderly people (41%) with those economically active rising by 10%; however there is a decline of children up to the age of 16. As a result, East Renfrewshire has an above average percentage (2nd highest in Scotland) of people aged 75 years or over.

¹ Statistics in this paragraph are based on Census projections

- 2.6 The black and minority ethnic (BME) population in East Renfrewshire accounts for a higher proportion of the total population in East Renfrewshire than in any other Council area in Scotland. East Renfrewshire also has the fastest growing BME population in Scotland. The visible BME population in the area was 3,435 (3.9%), at the time of the 2001 census, an increase of 70% from 1991. Not reflected in the census figures is the significant Jewish population in the area. Most of the Jewish and visible BME population is resident in the Eastwood side of the authority.
- 2.7 The visible BME population is a youthful one which is likely to form households at a higher rate in the future, placing demand on housing and other services. In contrast to the visible BME population, the size of the Jewish population in East Renfrewshire has reduced from around 16,000 at its peak to 6,000 – 8,000 today. This decline is set to continue as young people move out of the area for social and economic reasons.

Economic Factors

- 2.8 East Renfrewshire has high levels of economic activity, low levels of unemployment, low levels of benefit dependency and higher than average household incomes. East Renfrewshire's general unemployment rate in December 2004 was around 1.8% which is lower than the Scotland average of 3.3%. Employment in East Renfrewshire relies heavily on the service sector. However, levels of employment vary significantly across the area with particular concentrations of disadvantage in the Levern Valley area.

Social Housing Supply

- 2.9 There has been a significant decrease in the supply of social housing in the area. Since the introduction of right to buy the proportion of council housing has decreased by 43%, to 3,695 houses (of which, around 3,460 are considered lettable by the Council). The Council's stock is spread unevenly across the area with 67% of its houses located in the Levern Valley area. Just under a quarter of all social rented housing in East Renfrewshire is provided by eight other social landlords most of whom specialise in accommodation for older people.

Council Membership

- 2.10 20 elected members serve on the Council and its current political make up is as follows:
- 8 Labour
 - 7 Conservative
 - 3 Liberal Democrat

- 2 Independent
- 2.11 The Council's administration is formed from a coalition of Labour and Liberal Democrat members. The Council is managed through a cabinet of 5 elected members chaired by the Council Leader. Monitoring and scrutiny functions are conducted by the Council's Audit Committee and Policy Review Committee.
- 2.12 In August 2001 the Council established a Housing Advisory Group which comprises 10 elected members and 9 tenant members representing 9 management areas of East Renfrewshire. The group has a budget for small housing projects. The Council has also registered and supports 11 tenants' organisations including an area wide federation and one unregistered tenants and residents group.

Organisation of the Council

- 2.13 The Council's Chief Executive was recently appointed to this position having previously been the Director of Finance. The Council employs over 4,000 people and delivers its services through 7 Council Departments. Housing is part of the Environment Department. 41 staff work directly within the Housing Service, funded from the Housing Revenue Account. A further 24 staff members are funded from various grant funding sources and Supporting People funding. The post of Head of Housing was vacant for two years before being filled in October 2004.

Homelessness in East Renfrewshire

- 2.14 Over the last 8 years (1996/97 to 2003/04) homeless applications in East Renfrewshire have increased, with the Council now receiving about 400 applications per year. The scale of this increase, 37%, is greater than the general trend across Scotland, where the increase has been 34% over the same period. The number of applications is still low when compared with the whole of Scotland. Only 0.45% of East Renfrewshire's population made homeless applications in 2003/04 compared with 1.08% for Scotland.
- 2.15 In addition to an increasing number of applications there are other factors that affect the Council's provision of homelessness services:
- A low proportion of applicants in East Renfrewshire are assessed as in priority need. Last year 45% of all applicants in East Renfrewshire were assessed as being in priority need in contrast to the national average of 56%.
 - There has been a change in the nature of homelessness, with young people having overtaken dependent families as the largest single group of priority need applicants. In 2003/04, 60% of applicants were single.

Key facts

	2002-2003	2003-2004	2004-2005*
Houses owned	3,991	3,804	3,695
No of applicants on waiting list as at 31 March	2,098	2,292	2,637
Employees	52	56	65
HRA Gross Capital Expenditure (incl. Capital Funded from Revenue (CFCR))	£2,200,000	£1,600,000	£3,700,000
Total possible rental income	£7,290,333	£7,372,031	£7,420,100
% of Rental income from Housing Benefit (HB)	56.5%	62%	61.2%
% of tenants in receipt of HB	41.1%	44.3%	46.1%
% of Rent Arrears	9.3%	10.1%	9.5%
Average weekly rent	£39.16	£41.51	£42.74
Average rent increase	5%	6%	5%
Houses re-let	301	295	74
Responsive repairs carried out	11,662	14,411	3,915
Maintenance spend per house	£881	£1,406	N/A
Supervision and management spend per house	£480	£473	N/A
Right To Buy sales	183	108	17
Homeless Presentations	395	403	100
No. of Evictions	5	13	4

Sources: East Renfrewshire Council's Inspection Submission & SE Statistical Bulletins

* as at 30 June 2004

3. Housing management services

3.1 The grade awarded for housing management is:

B	Good	Many strengths and some areas where improvement is needed
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We explain at the end of this section how the assessments we have made result in this grade.

How good is the service?

Access

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

- 3.2 East Renfrewshire Council has good arrangements in place to encourage access to its housing and is working with others to improve the service. These measures include:
- establishing a working group including tenants and representatives of local housing associations to develop a common housing register;
 - arranging for the translation of leaflets and other material into Braille, audio, large print or community languages;
 - providing access to a translation service to assist those service users who do not speak English as a first language;
 - participation in the HOMES² scheme;
 - working with the Disabled Persons Housing Service to assist people with disabilities to find suitable accommodation in the area, to provide information, advice and advocacy service on other housing issues; and
 - publishing a “Housing Options Guide” which is available on line and at local offices.
- 3.3 The Council also provides good options advice to individual applicants and ensures that it has accurate information through ‘prospect’ interviews. These interviews are also used to provide additional information to applicants and are a good way of ensuring the applicants maximise their chances of housing.
- 3.4 However, the Council has been slow to advise existing applicants of recent changes to its allocations policy and the implications these may have for their prospects of rehousing.

² An explanation of the HOMES scheme is provided in the glossary

- 3.5 East Renfrewshire Council does not operate an open housing list. Whilst anyone resident in the Council's area over the age of 16 can apply at any time the Council is not registering or assessing applications from out with its area unless they have a defined "local connection".
- 3.6 We found 484 out of area applications that had not been either registered on the list or assessed against the Council's allocations policy. In addition a number of the applications that we reviewed included letters indicating that the application would be added to the housing list but this had not been done. The Council is aware of this weakness and, following a recent review of its allocations policy, has taken steps to address it. It is however, significant that it has not complied with its legislative duty since the introduction of the Housing (Scotland) Act 2001.
- 3.7 The Council sets a target to process housing applications within 21 days, as a service standard. Its performance against this target is good; during 2003/04 93% of applications were processed within the target time.
- 3.8 East Renfrewshire Council does not actively manage its housing list. A partial review of applications was carried out in 2003 but a full review has not been undertaken since 2001, as a result the Council's list is not always accurate and up to date. The main reasons for nearly half of refused offers are a change of applicant's details or that the applicant wishes a different area. The Council is aware of this weakness and has plans in place to address it.
- 3.9 The Council is using suspensions appropriately and in line with its own policy. Its approach to suspensions is set out clearly in its published policy and when making offers. We reviewed five suspended applications and found that the policy had been applied correctly. However, suspended applicants are not always advised that a suspension has been applied or provided with the information necessary for them to appeal such a decision.
- 3.10 The Council has a good approach to monitoring the ethnicity of those who apply for and get houses and is developing its approach to promoting access to its housing for the Jewish and black and minority ethnic (BME) communities in its area. It has recently established a post of BME Outreach worker to help it to do this. The BME Outreach worker is also involved in the working group for the development of the Common Housing Register.
- 3.11 The Housing (Scotland) Act 2001 requires that social landlords do not take account of the age of an applicant in the allocation of housing. During our inspection, the Council was still bypassing applicants in order to let certain properties which were designated for people of pensionable age only. A

change in this policy was agreed in November 2004 and although we are satisfied that the Council is now complying with its legislative duty, it has done so only after a significant delay.

- 3.12 East Renfrewshire Council provides fair access to its housing lists; it gives good advice to applicants and is working with partners to improve access to housing particularly for black and minority ethnic applicants. Its approach to the management of its lists and to advising current applicants of changes in allocations policy that may impact on their prospects for re-housing could be improved. The Council should have acted more quickly to comply with the requirements of the 2001 Acts in respect of out of area applicants and age restrictions.

Meeting need and maximising choice

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

- 3.13 East Renfrewshire Council prioritises its allocations based on a range of housing needs which clearly reflect the statutory reasonable preference categories. All the allocations we reviewed were to people with one or more of these needs.
- 3.14 The Council has a clear and well audited approach to its selection process. All lettings and nominations are checked and confirmed by another Allocation Officer to ensure that policies and procedures have been correctly followed. Staff also have discretion not to offer a particular house to the next needs group in the cycle and have clear guidance on when and how this discretion should be used. The Council is not currently recording or monitoring the impact of this on the different needs groups. However, we saw relatively few instances of this discretion being used and the Council has already accepted the need to monitor this process in the future.
- 3.15 The Council's allocation policy provides for the designation of "initiative areas" where there is a high level of empty properties. In response to concerns expressed by local residents the Council implemented a local letting initiative for low demand properties at Madras Place in Neilston. However, the Council took a poor approach to publicising the changes generally, did not involve residents directly in the development of the initiative and did not publicise details of how properties under the initiative were to be allocated. The initiative has since been withdrawn but the Council has not formally evaluated it or published any assessment of its outcomes.

- 3.16 The Council gives applicants an opportunity to apply for a range of property types, lettings areas and other housing options. As previously highlighted, its use of prospect interviews reinforces the availability of this level of choice but its notification letters do not summarise the applicants details, provide a breakdown of the points awarded or confirm the waiting list areas and house types they are being considered for.
- 3.17 The Council has a number of nomination agreements in place with local RSLs that give applicants a further range of housing options. Its approach to the selection of nominees mirrors its own allocation process and this allows a transparent and efficient response to nomination requests. However, the outcomes from its nominations process are poor with only 22% of its nominations in 2003/04 resulting in a successful let, this compares with a national average of 51.6%.
- 3.18 East Renfrewshire Council is good at meeting housing need and providing choice to applicants. The Council is not, however, making best use of the housing opportunities available from other housing providers.

Sustaining tenancies and preventing homelessness

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

- 3.19 East Renfrewshire Council has achieved the sign up of 94% of its tenants to Scottish secure tenancy (SST) agreements. It has a clear policy on the use of short Scottish Secure Tenancies (SSSTs). Of the 54 SSSTs granted in 2003/04 all but 1 were issued on the basis that the tenant required housing support. The Council's policy sets out a range of indicators of a possible support need and there are good arrangements in place for assessing those new tenants that may need assistance sustaining their tenancies.
- 3.20 The Council also has a good approach to the monitoring of those tenancies where SSSTs have been granted. This includes an early new tenancy visit being carried out jointly with the support provider and case review meetings with the support provider for younger tenants. The Council sets a review period to decide the continuation, conversion or termination of the SSST.
- 3.21 The Council's arrangements for sharing information between housing and support staff are under developed. It does not, for example, record enough details of support needs or provision in housing management files to demonstrate that the SSST has been used appropriately or to allow

- housing management staff to respond sensitively to the specific needs of the tenant when delivering other services.
- 3.22 The Council has a comprehensive tenancy sign up process. Its sign up interviews are used to advise tenants of their rights and obligations and tenants are provided with a tenants' pack. Although the staff are customer focused these interviews are process orientated in terms of the length of time and the information that is given, tenants are not provided with a summary of their tenancy agreement and estates management staff are not directly involved. The tenants' pack has a number of weaknesses in terms of the quality and volume of information it contains. The Council is aware of this and work is underway to replace it with a tenants' handbook and to develop a summary version of the tenancy agreement. The Council is good at carrying out new tenancy visits and tries to carry these out within 20 working days, 14 days for SSSTs. Tenants are advised at the sign up interview of the intended date of this visit.
- 3.23 Abandoned tenancies represent just under 10% of all tenancy terminations in East Renfrewshire. The Council has a good awareness of the issues that contribute to abandonments, particularly amongst young tenants, and monitors the number of abandoned properties for both housing management and homelessness strategy purposes. The Council has introduced a range of measures to assist young people to sustain their tenancies and has had some early success in addressing this issue.
- 3.24 East Renfrewshire Council takes eviction action only as a last resort. Its rent arrears procedures highlight to staff the need to ensure that all other remedies have been exhausted prior to taking legal action. In 2003/04 the Council issued 566 notices of proceedings for recovery of possession and initiated court actions against 211 resulting in 13 evictions including 1 abandonment following the granting of a decree.
- 3.25 The Council's evictions rate of 0.35%³ compares favourably to the national average for local authorities for 2003/04 of 0.59%, and has shown a significant decline in the six months to September 2004. Our review of case files found that even where there were substantial rent arrears the Council carried out an assessment of the consequences of eviction and took alternative action where this was appropriate. In addition the Council makes good uses of alternatives to eviction in dealing with cases of antisocial behaviour. This issue is considered further later in this report. It is looking at ways of improving its approach to serious rent arrears cases through the establishment of an Evictions Panel that would include representatives from Housing, Social Work, Money Advice and Finance.

³ The eviction rate is the number of evictions, including post-decree abandonments, as a percentage of total housing stock.

3.26 At the time of our inspection the Council routinely advised local members of the identities of tenants in their ward who were subject to eviction. This practice is contrary to the provisions of the legislation covering the protection of personal information⁴. Council took immediate steps to comply with the relevant legislation once it was made aware of this issue.

3.27 East Renfrewshire Council has a good approach to maximising security of tenure and to helping people to maintain their tenancies and avoiding evictions. The Council is aware of issues which can put a tenancy at risk and has developed effective responses to help avoid or deal with these difficulties.

Quality of neighbourhoods

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

3.28 East Renfrewshire Council's estates include areas of high demand mixed tenure housing and less popular areas with high turnover rates, highly visible void properties, vandalism and other antisocial behaviour problems. The Council uses a range of approaches targeted at the most difficult to live in areas including:

- the provision of a community flat;
- estate walkabouts involving tenants and local members;
- community wardens;
- estates caretakers;
- joint working with the Police and other agencies; and
- the use of CCTV cameras.

3.29 It also ensures that staff maintain a visible presence in housing areas and have a good knowledge of their properties and tenants. Many of these approaches were developed following a Best Value review of estates management in 2001. However, the Council does not have a strategic or planned approach to the management of its estates. Estate walkabouts for example are demand led rather than planned and the actions agreed are not always followed up fully nor are the outcomes of the walkabouts always communicated to local residents effectively. The Council is aware of some of these issues and has been preparing a regeneration strategy for its estates. It intends to consult on this during 2005.

3.30 Its estate caretakers cover all areas where there is Council stock. Their work was targeted at specific areas immediately prior to our inspection

⁴ The protection of personal information is covered by the Data Protection Act 1998

and made a noticeable difference, the Council has, however, only recently started developing a planned work programme for them.

- 3.31 The Council has recently introduced the posts of community wardens and investigation officers. They are already seen as a positive resource by tenants and residents. The nature of their funding allows them to do cross boundary working in the mixed tenure estates throughout East Renfrewshire.
- 3.32 The Council's community wardens cover specific areas agreed in consultation with community groups. They will assist other staff members where there is an identified problem with targeted patrolling of 'hotspot areas' within their defined areas of work including checking the security of void properties. Feedback suggests that residents consider that the vandalism in these areas has decreased since regular checks have been introduced.
- 3.33 The Council responds effectively to reported incidents of antisocial behaviour. Officers keep in regular contact with complainants to offer support, advice and assistance and use a range of tools including incident diaries, surveillance and noise monitoring equipment to assist in the management of cases. The Council has used, and is in the process of developing, a range of initiatives to address antisocial behaviour issues, these include:
- mediation;
 - antisocial behaviour orders;
 - interim antisocial behaviour orders;
 - other legal remedies;
 - effective use, monitoring and management of Short Scottish Secure Tenancies;
 - management transfers; and
 - acceptable behaviour contracts.
- 3.34 The Council has good policies and procedure in place to support officers in responding to incidents of antisocial behaviour and their work is monitored via a comprehensive database. The Council also collects formal feedback from complainants on their satisfaction with how their case has been handled. Tenants are positive about much of the work that is being done around antisocial behaviour.
- 3.35 East Renfrewshire Council's approach to improving the quality of its neighbourhoods is good. It has recently undertaken a peer review assessment of its estate management with other local authorities and has prepared a regeneration plan for consultation with tenants. It is in a strong position to develop its current service provision in a more strategic manner.

Responsiveness to tenants

Social landlords should place the people they serve at the heart of their work, treat them with respect and be responsive to their views and priorities.

- 3.36 East Renfrewshire Council has a good range of structures and opportunities in place for involving tenants in the development and delivery of housing management services. These are underpinned by a tenant participation strategy and action plan developed with tenants. The Council has registered and provides practical support to, 11 registered tenants' organisations (RTOs) including an area wide tenants' federation and has established a number of other groups including:
- a Tenant Participation Working Group;
 - the Housing Advisory Group; and
 - a rent setting working group.
- 3.37 The Council also consults well with non registered tenants' organisations and other groups such as sheltered housing residents and elderly forums.
- 3.38 The Housing Advisory Group (HAG) was set up in 2001 as a formal committee of the Council. It includes the 10 local members with over 100 council houses in their ward and 9 tenant representatives elected directly by tenants. HAG is the primary mechanism for reporting back to tenants and for consulting on service performance and development. The group reports its views directly to the Council's cabinet but has no mechanism for reporting back to tenants and no formal relationship with local tenant and resident groups.
- 3.39 Relationships between the HAG, the registered tenants organisations, individual tenants' representatives, senior council officers and local members have deteriorated significantly in recent years. We found widespread mistrust and suspicion between the various groups and between these groups and the Council. All the tenant representatives we spoke to, including those on the HAG, expressed significant doubts about the extent to which the Council was prepared to listen to their views. Both tenants and Council representatives expressed doubts as to the extent of good faith with which the other entered into consultation. This is having a significant impact on the effectiveness of tenant participation and the ability of the Council to involve tenants in service development.
- 3.40 The Council is aware of these problems and is preparing to commission consultants to review its tenant participation structures and the effectiveness of its current approach. It has had some recent success in improving the effectiveness of joint working with tenants through its consultation with the rent setting working group over the 2005/06 rent increase. The Council balloted all its tenants on the recommendations of the rent setting working group. Around 10% of tenants voted and

- overwhelmingly supported the group's recommendation. Following joint scrutiny of its housing revenue account (HRA) with tenants' representatives, the Council has agreed cost savings resulting in a rent increase close to that recommended by tenants and significantly less than the 4.6% originally proposed by officers.
- 3.41 Tenant representatives we spoke to felt that this process was positive and robust and have reported improved relationships with the Council following recent changes in the senior management of the service.
- 3.42 The Council uses a variety of publications to communicate with its tenants including a quarterly newsletter, leaflets on specific subjects and its website. However, its approach to gathering feedback in key areas of its housing management services is underdeveloped and does not, for example, include seeking feedback from new tenants about the letting and sign up process or a more general satisfaction survey on wider aspects of the service.
- 3.43 The Council uses the corporate 'Let Us Know' scheme as its main complaints process. The Council monitors the response times to ensure that it is meeting the targets outlined in its service standards and identifies any equalities issues that may arise. The Council generally performs well against its targets and its monitoring systems ensure that all complainants receive a response. However, the Council does not monitor the outcome for complainants or analyse the types of complaints or the areas of service that they arise in, nor does it use this information to inform service improvements. The Council is aware of these issues and has developed plans to address them.
- 3.44 The Council has a suite of Service Standards that cover its full range of activities. Twelve of these relate to its housing management service and were recently reviewed in consultation with tenants. The Council monitors its performance against these standards and this is communicated to staff through regular monthly meetings. The Council also reports its annual performance to its Audit Committee. Not all the standards are SMART⁵ nor do they cover all the areas of performance or service delivery that impact on the quality of service experienced by tenants. Never-the-less they demonstrate a clear attempt to generate a tenant focused view of the service and its performance.
- 3.45 The Council works well with organisations representing the local Jewish and black and ethnic minority communities and has a good approach to the provision of interpreting services and the translation of leaflets and other material into community languages.

⁵ SMART objectives are Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Relevant and Timed

- 3.46 The Council also works well with disability interest groups. The Council's offices have good levels of accessibility for those with disabilities. It has an on line "Access Guide" developed as a joint venture between the Council and East Renfrewshire Access Panel, that comprises a number of disabled people. The guide provides excellent practical information for those with disabilities. The Council also has a good approach to making written information available in Braille, large print or audio formats.
- 3.47 The Council has a fair approach to responding to tenants in its housing management service. It has a good range of structures in place to encourage tenant participation and uses a variety of methods to provide good information. The council is also sensitive to the needs of tenants with disabilities and the Jewish and black and minority ethnic communities in its area. However, its approach to tenant participation is significantly weakened by the tensions between the Council and many of its tenants representatives. In addition the Council is not collecting or using enough tenant satisfaction information or analysing the pattern of complaints in improving its services.

Is the service managed for improvement?

Resource management and efficiency

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

- 3.48 The Council offers tenants a wide range of methods by which they can pay their rent, this includes in person at two of its offices in Barrhead and Giffnock, at local post offices, by standing order and by debit card.
- 3.49 The table below summarises East Renfrewshire Council's performance in collecting rent arrears.

	2002-03			2003-04		2004-05*
	East Renfrewshire	National		East Renfrewshire	National	East Renfrewshire
Avg		Rank	Avg			
Current tenant arrears as % of net rent due	9.3%	7.4%	25	10.1%	7.9%	9.5%
% of current tenants owing > 13 weeks rent (where >£250)	6.6%	4.8%	25	6.5%	4.9%	6.0%
Total former tenant arrears (£)	£26,8072			£346,065		£327,210
Rent arrears written off (£)	£36,624			£9,989		N/A

- 3.50 The Council is a fair performer within the group of city and urban authorities and its performance has remained relatively constant over the

last three years. Its current arrears figure of 9.5% is above the Scottish Average of 7.4%, it is also above the 7.0% target set by the Accounts Commission for city and urban areas. The percentage of tenants with serious rent arrears has decreased over the last two years to 6.0%. As with the overall figure, this remains above the Scottish average.

- 3.51 The Council's former tenancy arrears are increasing. It takes a corporate approach to the recovery of former tenant arrears through its Corporate Debt Team that is underpinned by a clear debt recovery policy and associated procedures. It has good monitoring arrangements in place on the current status and actions being taken. In addition it has a clear approach as to the write off of debts that is made public through its rent arrears prevention and control strategy as well as its debt recovery policy.
- 3.52 The Council is aware of its strengths and weaknesses in relation to its management of rent arrears and has introduced, or is in the process of developing, new initiatives which should contribute positively to the prevention of rent arrears, these include:
- a publicly available rent arrears prevention and control strategy;
 - comprehensive procedures for revenues staff that mirror good practice guidelines and that are continuously reviewed and developed;
 - revenues staff involved in the sign up of new tenants;
 - housing benefit forms completed at the time of sign up, whenever possible;
 - early new tenancy visits;
 - the introduction of the post of arrears control liaison officer;
 - a close working relationship between the various services involved in the management of tenancies, arrears and benefits both at a service delivery level as well as at management level through regular rent arrears meetings;
 - the development of a tenants handbook with a comprehensive section on rents and benefits;
 - proposals for an arrears campaign; and
 - the use of benchmarking with high performing local authorities to explore new ways of working.
- 3.53 We found that the Council has clear and comprehensive records of its arrears cases with all action and communication with the tenant recorded. The action taken mirrored that outlined in its procedures. The sign up process is used to advise tenants of the amount of rent due, the range of payment methods and the provision of a temporary payment card. Customer First staff also assist with the completion of benefit forms. The Council plans to improve this service by providing staff with a benefit calculator to assist in the provision of advice on how much rent tenants can expect to have to pay.

- 3.54 The Council takes prompt action when its tenants fall into arrears with an initial letter being issued within two weeks of the arrears arising. The Council makes regular and sustained contact with tenants in arrears but this is largely through standard letters and is not adequately supported by early or regular direct contact with tenants.
- 3.55 Our case reviews show that the Council has had difficulties in the management of its rent arrears and the management of working relationships between the various services responsible for tenancies. However the Council is aware of this problem and of the impact of a lack of direct contact with tenants. It has taken steps to promote better working relationships between services especially between Revenues and the Arrears Control Liaison Officer as well as the Estates staff. In particular there is increasing emphasis on the work of these post holders in the prevention of homelessness and tailoring the approach to arrears management where there is evidence of vulnerability.
- 3.56 The Council has in place arrangements for identifying vulnerable tenants to allow arrears procedures to be tailored to their needs but this is not always used effectively. In two of the cases we reviewed we found that although it was noted on file that the tenant had learning difficulties letters were still used as the main contact method and no additional efforts were made to make direct contact.
- 3.57 The Council is supportive of tenants who fall into financial difficulty and provides them with good information on its approach to rent arrears as well as providing details of specialist money advice services. The Council does not have a formal referral process in place to ensure that tenants get access to independent advice and is not monitoring the effectiveness of these services in reducing arrears and preventing evictions.
- 3.58 The Council routinely serves notices of proceedings for possession on all tenants with a continuing arrears balance of over £100 even where they are maintaining a repayment agreement and there is no intention to raise a court action.
- 3.59 The table below summarises East Renfrewshire Council's reported performance in letting houses that have become empty.

	2002-03		2003-04		2004-05*
	ERC	National	ERC	National	ERC
Turnover (no. of new vacancies as % of total dwellings)	8.38	10.81	8.98	11.48	
Total no. of re-lets	301		295		74
% re-let in <2 weeks	15.6%	14.5%	21.7	16.4	9.46%
% re-let in 2-4 weeks	26.6%	20.3%	25.4	24.9	17.57%
% re-let in >4 weeks	57.8%	65.2%	52.9%	58.7	72.97%
Average time to re-let	69 days	76 days	70 days		51 days
% of total annual rental due lost due to voids	2.48%	2.81%	2.07%	2.7	2.41%

- 3.60 In 2003/04 East Renfrewshire Council's lost 2.07% of its rental income because of houses lying empty. This is fourth lowest out of the 13 local authorities in its city and urban authority peer group. Average relet times have improved over the past two years although recent figures show a decline in performance which is a cause for concern.
- 3.61 The Council sets and monitors targets for selecting new tenants, relet times and rent loss and has developed a range of specific responses to address low demand within its stock including the completion of improvement works such as the installation of new kitchens and bathrooms prior to reletting. It also uses accompanied viewings with prospective tenants to provide a range of information including relet standards and what repairs a tenant can expect to be attended to before occupation and those that will be attended to after.
- 3.62 East Renfrewshire Council's costs for the supervision and management of its houses were £480 per unit for 2003/04. The figure is up from £424 the previous year. The Council is ranked 18th of 29 councils in terms of management costs and is slightly higher than the national average of £455 for 2003/04. The Council has examined its staffing, administration and finance costs in relation to its rent setting process and has reported to Cabinet that it is currently considering options in relation to its staffing structures within its housing service.
- 3.63 The Council has a fair approach to maximising its income both in terms of rent arrears and rent loss from void properties. In both areas there are some areas of weakness that are impacting on the strength of its overall performance.

Performance management

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

- 3.64 The Council's approach to planning its housing services is shaped by its Corporate Strategy. The Council's Policy and Financial Plan 2004-2007 sets out 6 objectives and 24 actions for the housing service including the development of a housing services plan by April 2005. The Council also has in place a number of function specific strategies including its Tenant Participation Strategy and Rent Arrears Prevention and Control Strategy. However, it does not have an overarching plan for the service linking work carried out across departments like housing advice, rent arrears and debt advice and work to support vulnerable tenants. The Council is aware of this weakness and, as well as proposing to develop a housing services plan, has commissioned an option appraisal study to consider the longer term development of the service.
- 3.65 The Council has good policies and procedures covering its housing management activities. These are reviewed and developed to meet changing legislative requirements and new service development such as the Antisocial Behaviour Investigation Officer role.
- 3.66 The Council sets a wide range of performance targets for its housing management service including its service standards and generally monitors and reports performance against these well. Its staff management structures are used to ensure that staff are aware of planning and performance issues. Performance reports are also discussed at senior management team and summary reports prepared on a quarterly basis for discussion with the relevant Departmental Directors and Chief Executive. However, the Council does not report to elected members in a way that gives an overview of performance across the departments delivering the housing service including information on rent arrears, former tenants arrears and evictions actions in a way that gives a rounded picture of the service delivered to tenants.
- 3.67 Overall the Council's approach to performance management is fair. There are a number of targets and standards in place and performance is monitored against these. In addition the Council has responded well to a number of external policy initiatives aimed at improving services. However, the Council does not yet have a clear plan for the future development of its housing service bringing together relevant strategic objectives and actions across the departments delivering the service.

Public reporting

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

- 3.68 The Council provides a wide range of performance reports to the Housing Advisory Group as well as the Tenant and Residents Associations. Some of these reports, like those covering its investment programmes are very detailed. The Council does not, however provide any reports on rent arrears performance or financial matters relating to the service.
- 3.69 The Council recognises that although it is providing a great deal of information it does not provide an easily accessible overview of performance across the service, and is working to address this issue.
- 3.70 East Renfrewshire Council is also required under the Local Government in Scotland Act 2003 to make service performance information available to the public. It meets this requirement through the provision of a range of publication of its performance against all the Statutory Performance Indicators and its service standards. It makes these publications available in libraries and other public buildings as well as posting them on its website. In addition, it provides a booklet that outlines in more detail its performance in relation to meeting its commitments to the Corporate Strategy. It also provides information to the Housing Advisory Group and tenants organisations and includes details on its performance in its 'er' magazine delivered to all households in the Council's areas and regular "er housing specials" that are delivered directly to all the Council's tenants.
- 3.71 Overall the Council's performance on public reporting of its housing management service is good. A range of performance related material is available both to tenants and the wider public although it does not cover all aspects of the service.

Grade and overall assessment of housing management

- 3.72 Our overall assessment of East Renfrewshire Council's housing management service is good. We found a number of strengths and a some weaknesses that impact to varying degrees on the quality of the service tenants experience. We set out below the key factors we have taken account of in coming to our overall assessment.
- 3.73 East Renfrewshire Council has a number of strengths in areas that impact directly on the users of its housing management service particularly in housing people in need, maximising security of tenure, avoiding evictions and its management of the support arrangements for Short Scottish Secure Tenancies. We saw good performance in some aspects of the management of rent arrears, improving performance in reletting empty

properties and the approach to antisocial behaviour. The Council has also put in place a good range of structures for involving and consulting with tenants.

3.74 The Council has a number of weaknesses that impact on users and which, at least in part, detract from the impact of the stronger areas of the services we have identified. These include:

- limited management of its housing lists;
- the exclusion of some out of area applicants from its lists;
- a limited approach to the assessment and use of tenant satisfaction information in improving services;
- limited progress in reducing the overall level of rent arrears;
- weaknesses in the overall effectiveness of its approach to tenant participation; and
- gaps in the performance reporting framework both internally and to the public.

3.75 Whilst the Council has an awareness of some of the strengths and weaknesses in its housing management service, most of the drivers for improvement that have impacted on the service over the last two years have been external rather than based on a strategic approach to continuous improvement. Nevertheless, the Council has shown a capacity to address poor performance and the recent restructuring of the services senior management has already had a positive impact on management for improvement.

4. Property maintenance

4.1 The grade awarded for property maintenance is:

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

How good is the service?

Access to the repairs service

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

- 4.2 East Renfrewshire Council's responsive repairs service is accessible. Tenants can report repairs in a variety of ways including by phone, in writing or directly at the Council's offices. Tenants are given good advice on how to report repairs through; the Council's website, at sign up for new tenants and from time to time in Council publications.
- 4.3 Most repairs are reported by phone through a repairs call centre. The call centre was established in 1998 and has experienced some problems in ensuring all calls are answered or answered on time. Performance in this respect has improved over the last two years', figures for the period from April to September 2004 showed that 87% of all calls to the centre were answered and within them 88% were answered within 20 seconds.
- 4.4 The Council is taking steps to improve monitoring of the call centre to support continued improvements in performance. The Council does not, however, consistently provide tenants with a repairs receipt or confirm the work details or timescales for all repairs.
- 4.5 East Renfrewshire also operates an accessible out of hours service. Tenants we spoke to who had contacted either the out of hours service or the daytime call centre were happy with repair reporting arrangements.
- 4.6 The Council operates an appointment system for some non emergency joinery, gas servicing, electrical and plumbing repairs. However, recent figures show a reduction in the number of appointments made from a figure of 22% of all repairs in the last two quarters of 2003/04 to 15% in the first quarter of 2004/05. Appointments are not offered for all repairs included in the appointment categories and it is unclear how a decision is

made to offer an appointment. The Council performs well in keeping appointments, achieving this in over 80% of cases.

- 4.7 Access to East Renfrewshire Council's repairs service is good. Tenants get good information on the repairs service and are able to report repairs easily.

Speed and quality of response repairs service

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

- 4.8 East Renfrewshire sets a challenging four hour target for its highest priority repairs. Only five other Councils adopt a shorter target for this category. However, it is not always clear that the Council seeks to complete repairs in this time or simply make safe. Timescales for other repairs categories are also challenging compared to other authorities.
- 4.9 The Council reports above average performance against all its repair categories suggesting that it delivers its response repairs faster than most other local authorities, however we found some weaknesses that suggest the figures do not accurately reflect the service received by tenants. The Council's published performance figures for the year to date and the past two years are set out in the table below.

	East Renfrewshire target response time	Performance				
		East Renfrewshire			National median 2002/03	National average 2002/03
		2001/02	2002/03	2003/04		
A3 Repairs	4 hours	84.2%	80.2%	89.4%		96.1%
A2 Repairs	24 hours	81.1%	77.7%	84.4%		92.6%
A1 Repairs	10 days	76.4%	84.5%	88.4%		91.9%
A Repairs	25 Days	85.2%	85.3%	89.2%		86.7%
All 24 hours Repairs Completed in target		96.0%	95.7%	96.6%	93.8%	92.1%
% of all repairs completed in target		86.0%	90.3%	90.3%	83.4%	86.1%

Source : Inspection submission and Audit Scotland Performance Indicators

- 4.10 The Council's Best Value Review from 2002 highlighted as areas of tenant concern:
- inability to complete the full repair in one visit, sometimes several trades are needed;
 - poor quality repairs, where the fault re-occurs within a few weeks of the repair; and
 - repairs that take several visits/several weeks to complete.

We found examples of all of these weaknesses and they were raised with us by tenants during our time on site.

- 4.11 Our review of repairs files identified a number of weaknesses in the reporting of repairs performance including:
- Repairs defined as falling into the 4 hour emergency category are recorded as 24 hour repairs during office hours.
 - In some instances four hour emergency repairs are recorded as complete when they have only been made safe.
 - Where a repair can not be completed within the time provided works orders may be closed as complete within time and further works orders are required to complete the repair.
 - In some instances the Council issues separate lines for different trades for a single reported repair.
- 4.12 As a result the reported figures overstate the Council's actual performance. We re-calculated the Council's performance over a three week period (a sample of 560 completed response repairs). We found that where the Council's approach would have reported 87% of repairs completed on time, with multiple lines removed and completions re-adjusted to reflect the actual time a tenant waits to have a repair completed, performance dips to 81%. The Council is not aware of the impact these practices have on the reliability of its performance figures or how the practice of issuing multiple lines for single reported repairs affects the speed of the service experienced by tenants or the cost of the service to the Council.
- 4.13 Pre and post inspections are important tools for ensuring repairs are targeted accurately and carried out to a high standard. Pre inspections can be arranged by appointment with inspectors in East Renfrewshire and tenants we spoke to found this system convenient. Tenants were able to ask inspectors about the progress of repairs or ask questions they may have on repairs.
- 4.14 East Renfrewshire sets a target of 5% for post inspections, in addition works carried out by private contractors, tenant complaints and those works where the final costs are more than 5% higher than the original estimate are post inspected. However, the Council achieved only 1.8%

post inspections during the first quarter of 2004/05. The Council inaccurately reports performance against this target, recording non access and inaccessible repairs as completed inspections. In addition, whilst the Council follows up on post inspections where work is unsatisfactory, it does not analyse these outcomes and whilst all work carried out by private contractors is post inspected none of these inspections are recorded or reported on within the Council's main ICT system. This weakens the Council's understanding of the service provided to tenants and prevents any analysis of repair quality, as experienced by tenants, to help improve the service.

- 4.15 The most recent tenant satisfaction survey, covering the period from January to June 2004, showed that 77.3% of tenants were satisfied with the overall way in which their repair was dealt with, although only 6% recorded that they were dissatisfied with the service. However, almost 1 in 6 (16%) of respondents provided negative comments on the service in their returns. All of the tenants organisations we spoke to also raised significant concerns over the quality of the repairs service and identified it as the area of the housing service most in need of improvement. While on site we carried out a telephone survey in which 7 of 21 tenants complained about aspects of the response repair process.
- 4.16 East Renfrewshire Council does not operate a Right To Repair scheme that complies with the statutory requirements. The Council was late in introducing a scheme in October 2004, although it was publicised in May. It is operating poorly and we observed tenants reporting qualifying repairs which the Council failed to identify. In addition, where the Council does identify a qualifying repair the alternative contractor identified to tenants is the Council's own "Non Housing DLO"⁶ Whilst this part of the Council is operated under distinct management and accounting arrangements the labour force is shared with the "Housing DLO" and does not constitute a genuine alternative.
- 4.17 East Renfrewshire Council's performance in respect of speed and quality of repairs is fair. Whilst the majority of repairs are done on time and to a reasonable standard its published figures for its performance on the speed of its repairs service are unreliable, and the Council is not assessing the outcomes from post inspections to monitor and improve the quality of the service. The Council's own tenant satisfaction survey reports a low overall level of satisfaction suggesting problems with the quality of the service, which has not been acknowledged or responded to by the Council. This view of the service was strongly supported the great majority of tenants we spoke to.

⁶ An explanation of the term Direct Labour Organisation, is provided in the glossary

Physical quality of houses

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

- 4.18 Scottish Ministers have set a target that all social landlords' houses should meet the new Scottish Housing Quality Standard (SHQS) by 2015. Landlords are required to prepare a plan showing how they will achieve this, by April 2005. East Renfrewshire Council already includes some aspects of the standard in its investment programmes, is confident that all its houses will meet the SHQS by 2015 and is preparing its plan for achieving this. As the Council had not completed its plan at the time of our inspection, it is too early to assess how it will be implemented.
- 4.19 East Renfrewshire undertook a Best Value review of its repairs service in 2002, this study concluded that "the housing stock needs considerable investment." The Council's planned maintenance programme is based on information from a 100% stock condition survey carried out in 2000. The relative age of this information means that the condition of properties has to be confirmed on site as part of the preparation for specific investment or planned maintenance works. The Council is aware of this weakness in the information it holds and has recently taken steps to put in place systems to allow its stock condition information to be updated.
- 4.20 The Council has taken positive steps to ensure the safety of its tenants in line with the requirements of the SHQS. It has fitted mains or battery operated smoke detectors in all its houses. The Council also installs hard wired smoke detectors with any new gas central heating systems as well as carbon monoxide detectors and cold alarms. The Council has plans to introduce a lead pipe replacement programme, although these plans as they currently stand will not achieve the 2013 target set by the water quality regulations.
- 4.21 The Council has programmed to replace all the doors, kitchens and bathrooms in its houses in line with its stock condition survey information; on a 'worst first' basis by April 2009. However, the programme is also structured to ensure a spread of works between wards. This may mean that some tenants with poorer condition properties may have to wait longer where investment has been diverted to other wards to ensure a geographical spread in investment.
- 4.22 The Council has also identified suitable areas and blocks for the installation of door entry systems. However, it has experienced some difficulties in arranging to complete this work in blocks containing owner occupiers and has put in place specific measures to address these problems.

4.23 Social landlords are required to carry out safety checks every 12 months on all gas appliances and flues which it provides for its tenants' use. The Council is not meeting this duty for a significant number of its houses. At 20 October 2004, 134 (5%) properties out of 2,669 with gas appliances had no certificate in place. Where safety checks are carried out the Council does not always achieve continuity between certificates; there was a gap between safety checks in 54% of houses: The gap was more than one month in 25.9% of houses. This is a significant weakness. The table below summarises the Council's performance in carrying out gas safety checks.

	20 October 2004	
	Number of houses	% of houses
Houses with gas appliances	2,669	100
Houses with current gas safety certificates	2,535	95
Houses where current safety check was carried out within 12 months of previous check	1,216	45.5
Houses where service was carried out:		
• During the month after the due date	623	23.3
• between one and three months after the due date	417	15.6
• more than three months after the due date	279	10.4

Source: East Renfrewshire Council inspection submission October 2004

4.24 Our file checks confirmed this poor level of performance with some appliances not serviced for up to seven years. The Council was not aware of this poor performance prior to completing its inspection submission. However, it has accepted the need for improvement and has begun the process of amending its procedures relating to gas safety.

4.25 From April 2004 social landlords have had a statutory duty to manage asbestos in common areas of their properties. East Renfrewshire Council has carried out some initial work on identifying asbestos in its homes but has not yet fully complied with the published guidance relating to the preparation of an asbestos management plan. In addition the Council has failed to meet its own policy requirement in this area agreed in 1999. This is a significant weakness.

4.26 The Council has a good void relet process, recent figures have shown that the repair condition of empty houses does not have a significant impact on tenants' reasons for refusals of offers.

4.27 The Council works to a lettable standard for void houses that requires; all services and appliances are working and safe, the dwelling is free from rubbish, infestation, penetrating dampness, and has adequate food storage and that there will be no leaks in pipe-work. In addition the

Council has a good approach to considering the condition of void houses during the relet process to decide if capital work such as fitting new kitchens, doors or electrical rewiring works should be carried out.

- 4.28 In order to reduce void times the Council carries out minor repairs after the property has been let. Tenants are advised of what work will be undertaken after they move in as part of the tenancy sign up process.
- 4.29 The Council carries out 100% post –inspections in void houses and the relevant repairs officers work closely together in following up unsatisfactory work. However, as with other post inspections, the results are not collated or analysed to assist in monitoring contractor performance or to improve services.
- 4.30 The Council has a poor approach to ensuring that its houses are in good physical condition. Whilst it is in the process of improving its information on the condition of its houses and has increased its overall level of investment, these and other areas of strength are significantly undermined by its failure to comply with its statutory obligations in respect of safety of gas appliances and weaknesses in the management of asbestos.

Responsiveness to tenants

Social landlords should place the people they serve at the heart of their work, treat them with respect and be responsive to their views and priorities.

- 4.31 The Council collects feedback on its service through the tenants satisfaction survey sent as part of repairs receipt and the “Let Us Know” corporate complaints system. The Council does not collect information on tenant satisfaction for all repairs. Information is gathered mostly from 10 day repairs, although not all repairs in this category receive a receipt. In the sample we examined only 262 repairs received receipts from a total of 560 response repairs.
- 4.32 However, overall, this approach provides a good picture of tenants’ satisfaction with the repair service and we have used some of the results of these surveys in earlier sections of this report.
- 4.33 The Council reports the results of its satisfaction survey and follows up comments made through its “Let us Know” system well. Further details of the treatment of comments made through the “Let us Know” scheme are set out in paragraph 3.42. However, in responding to the information these systems provide in respect of property maintenance the Council has focused on the relatively low numbers of tenants actively expressing dissatisfaction; these are typically in the order of 5%. Until recently this

- analysis was further distorted by including non responses in the “satisfied” total.
- 4.34 The Council has relied on this approach and the high levels of reported performance against response repairs targets to support its view that tenants are generally satisfied with the quality of the service being provided. For example the 2002 best value review of repairs reported that that tenants give “consistently high satisfaction ratings” to the service.
- 4.35 This approach has prevented the Council from responding not only to the low levels of satisfaction expressed by tenants in its survey but also the critical assessment of the service provided by tenants representatives. Tensions in the tenant participation structures, reported elsewhere, may have contributed to the tendency not to take the views expressed by tenants representatives on the property maintenance service at face value.
- 4.36 The Council responds well to individual complaints about its service and has a good system in place for tracking responses and ensuring remedial action is carried out. However, it underreports repairs complaints through its corporate ‘Let us Know ‘scheme. The Council defines complaints as, “...a communication from a customer (by telephone, visit or letter), where a customer expresses dissatisfaction with any aspect of the services provided by a department.” Using the Council’s own definitions we identified 24 complaints about the repairs system made through the “Let us Know” system over nine month period to September 2004. The Council had reported that 12 complaints had been made. In addition, the Council does not analyse information from the complaints system and use this to identify options for service improvements.
- 4.37 The overall result of these weaknesses has been a failure to recognise and respond to problems tenants have with the effectiveness of the repairs service.
- 4.38 The Council provides comprehensive reports to both the Housing Advisory Group (HAG) and tenants groups on some aspects of repairs, notably capital work and repair reporting. The HAG is also involved in some environmental improvement works and the Council plans to consult tenants on the delivery plan of the SHQS. The process of involving tenants in the development of the whole repairs service is, however, not well advanced. Tenants’ groups we spoke to did not feel that they had significant influence on repairs issues although they did acknowledge the better information provided to them about some Council repairs areas.
- 4.39 East Renfrewshire Council, although offering good opportunities for tenants to feedback, is poor at recognising and responding to tenants’

views as expressed either through the tenant participation structures or satisfaction surveys. Whilst the Council deals with individual complaints well, it does not use information from its complaints service as part of its service improvement process.

Is the service managed for improvement?

Resource management and efficiency

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

- 4.40 East Renfrewshire Council spent an estimated £907 per house on repairs and maintenance in 2004/05. They were ranked 12 highest out of 29 local authorities managing council houses in Scotland. This figure represents a decrease on both of the previous two years.
- 4.41 The Council organises its repairs service through an in house direct labour organisation (DLO). The DLO were successful in gaining this contract in 1997 through the Compulsory Competitive Tendering regime. The Council's 2002 Best Value Review records that the DLO have benchmarked costs with other similar sized authorities and compare favourably.
- 4.42 The DLO has preferred bidder status for capital programme work in the areas it trades and is subject to in house best value comparison by specialist staff in the Council's Property & Technical Services (P&TS) Department. The Council is aware that this approach lacks the transparency and robustness of competitive tendering in demonstrating that best value is being achieved but has no plans in place to address the issue.
- 4.43 East Renfrewshire has faced delays in tendering a number of contracts for kitchen and bathroom renewals, resulting in significant slippage in these works programmes this year. Whilst these problems have now been overcome, the Council has been slow to contact tenants about possible delays.
- 4.44 East Renfrewshire has developed good operational controls on variations⁷, currently running at 16% (over £200,000 in each of the last 2 complete years). However, East Renfrewshire does not always analyse the pattern of variations to review its Schedule of Rates. The issue of the

⁷ An explanation of the term variations is provided in the glossary the 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.

raising of multiple repair lines may mask a number of repairs that should have been varied rather than re-raised.

- 4.45 Overall the Council's performance in managing its resources in its property maintenance service is poor. Whilst it has carried out a best value assessment of the service, its overall approach to tendering for both response repairs and planned works is not fully transparent nor sufficiently robust to demonstrate that best value is being achieved.

Performance management

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

- 4.46 The Council does not have an overall strategic plan for the development of its property maintenance service. Some objectives are set out in the Council's repairs policy but this is in draft form and does not provide enough strategic direction for repairs. Nor is it easy to ascertain the long term aims of the service. The Council is aware of this weakness and is in the process of commissioning a comprehensive option appraisal study to consider the long term development of the service.
- 4.47 The Council has established a number of service standards dealing with aspects of both responsive repairs and major works. However, the standards do not always use SMART criteria and some that do, simply mirror performance measures provided elsewhere, notably Audit Scotlands' repair category performance. The Council's information technology systems are capable of providing a wide range of performance monitoring reports and we did see positive examples of this being used to record performance, for example tenant information in the capital programme and timescales in attending to pre-inspection requests. The process of using performance information as a driver for improvement is, however, underdeveloped and this has been acknowledged by the Council.
- 4.48 The Council is aware of some of the weaknesses in its property maintenance service but we identified a number of significant failings, including those in respect of gas maintenance, asbestos management, post inspections and its measurement of response repair times, that its performance management and self assessment had not identified prior to our inspection. In general the Council reacted positively to these findings and acted to address the issues whilst we were on site. However a number of other weaknesses including tenant satisfaction with the service had been identified through the 2002 best value review and not addressed.

4.49 East Renfrewshire's approach to performance management in its property maintenance service is poor. The Council does not have an overarching strategy for the development of the service, is not using a sufficiently wide range of performance related information and is not always using the information it does have to best effect. As a result it has been unable to identify and address key weaknesses in its performance. However, staff are committed to delivering high quality services and recent changes in the management of the service have had a positive impact on the Council's performance focus.

Public reporting

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

4.50 The Council provides a range of performance information on its property maintenance service to tenants through the HAG and tenants' organisations. These reports cover; statutory performance indicators for repairs, types of repairs, pre inspections, post inspections, repairs by appointment and the capital investment programme. However, some significant areas of service provision, for example gas safety, are not reported on. As a result they do not provide a readily accessible picture of overall performance.

4.51 A similar range of performance information including some benchmarking information, is published in "er" magazine, "er housing specials" and the Council's annual performance reports. It is also made available in libraries and other public buildings and on their website. In addition the Council provides a booklet that outlines in more detail its performance in relation to meeting its commitments to the Corporate Strategy.

4.52 Overall the Councils' performance on public reporting of its property maintenance service is good. A wide range of performance related material is available both to tenants and the wider public. The extent to which this provides a clear overall picture of performance is, however, limited by the inaccuracy of some of the information and the absence of reports on some important areas of the service.

Grade and overall assessment of property maintenance

4.53 Our overall assessment of East Renfrewshire's property maintenance service is fair. We found a number of strengths and a range of weaknesses that impact to varying degrees on the quality of the service tenants experience.

- 4.54 In coming to our overall assessment we have taken account of the balance of strengths and areas for improvement across the service. Tenants find it easy to report repairs. The Council has a good process in place for assessing the condition of empty properties and carrying out necessary works and has plans in place to improve the quality of its stock condition information. The Council has increased its capital investment substantially in recent years and has plans in place to undertake a full option appraisal for the future management and maintenance of its stock. The Council has a number of weaknesses that impact on users and which in part undermine the stronger areas of the services we have identified. These include:
- a significant weakness arising from failing in its statutory duty in respect of gas safety and in the management of asbestos;
 - not operating a Right to Repair scheme correctly;
 - performance management is underdeveloped and there are weaknesses in the collection and analysis of key performance information; and
 - the approach to procurement of key contracts lacks transparency and may not be providing best value.
- 4.55 Overall tenant satisfaction levels with the service are relatively low and although it has had this information for some time, and been aware of some of the weaknesses in the service, the Council has not sought to understand the reasons for the low levels of tenant satisfaction nor has it acted to improve the service. This is a also significant weakness.
- 4.56 The Council does not have a clear strategy for developing its service or the objectives it is seeking to achieve, although it has increased its level of investment in its houses substantially over the last year. Recent changes in the management of the service have, however, had a positive impact on the Council's focus on service improvement.

5. Homelessness services

5.1 The grade awarded for homelessness services is:

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

How good is the service?

Access to homelessness services

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

- 5.2 East Renfrewshire Council provides good information on how to access its homelessness service. The service is publicised on the Council's website and through posters and business cards in a range of locations where people facing homelessness are likely to see them. The Council ensures that material is available in these locations and checks and replenishes them every six months. The leaflets, website and business cards include the direct dial number for the homeless persons officer and also list telephone numbers of other agencies who may be of assistance including Shelter's helpline number and the East Renfrewshire Citizen's Advice Bureau.
- 5.3 We found that material was available in most of the Council's own offices and a range of other locations. Most of the homelessness service users we spoke to, and all the organisations involved in supporting homeless people, were positive about the availability of information on the service and they confirmed that people knew which services were provided and were able to access them when required.
- 5.4 The Council has a range of leaflets for anyone who requests a homeless appointment, these include a clear outline of the assessment process and what to expect. In addition, the Council's leaflets advise in community languages that a translation and interpreting service is available, and that information can also be provided in large print, audio or Braille. This is a good approach to assisting people who do not speak English as their first language or require a different format.

- 5.5 To ensure that homeless people receive an appropriate response when they first contact the Council, reception staff have been provided with good guidance on what action to take at the initial point of contact. This guidance is clear that interviews should be provided within five working days of first contact, the same day if the person is roofless or on the first working day after an out of hours contact. However, we found that in a separate homeless procedures document, there was a more challenging target of two working days to interview.
- 5.6 East Renfrewshire Council operates an out of hours service that can be contacted through a freephone number. This service works well, out of hours applicants are placed in bed and breakfast accommodation and where necessary provided with transport to the accommodation. They are advised to come in for an interview as soon as possible after their placement.
- 5.7 Referral arrangements with other agencies working with homeless people are informal but work well. All the agencies we spoke to said that they routinely referred service users to the homeless team, usually phoning the officer directly to make an appointment. However, the Council neither records referrals received from other agencies nor how applicants found out about the service. As a result it is not able to assess the effectiveness of referral and other access arrangements or target efforts to improve them.
- 5.8 The Council records the ethnicity of all homeless applicants, but analysis and reporting of this information is under developed. Although the number of applications from the black and minority ethnic (BME) community can be reported, the Council does not currently use this information to check that BME people are getting fair outcomes from the service.
- 5.9 The Barrhead office, where the homeless team is based, is the main access point for the public and is easily accessible for people with mobility difficulties. Most homeless interviews are carried out in this office but the homeless persons officer can arrange a homeless interview in either the Thornliebank office or, if required, at the person's home address. Interview rooms and toilet facilities all have disabled access and there is also a loop system in operation in interview rooms. However pressure on available interview rooms, shared with other services, occasionally results in delays in carrying out interviews.
- 5.10 East Renfrewshire Council provides good access to its homelessness service. Agencies working with homeless people and service users were all aware of the services available and how to access them. The Council publicises its services and provides good information in a range of ways including in other formats and languages.

Assessing homeless applications

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

- 5.11 East Renfrewshire Council has seen an increase in the total number of presentations since 1998/99, but the number of households applying as a percentage of all households remains half that of the national figure. Some key statistical information on homeless presentations in East Renfrewshire is set out in the table below:

	2002-03		2003-04	
	East Renfrewshire	National	East Renfrewshire	National
No. of applications made under homeless legislation	395	51,738	403	54,829
No. of households applying as a percentage of all households	1.02%	2.08%	1.06%	2.29%
No of households assessed as homeless as percentage of all households assessed	44%	78%	61%	77%
No of households assessed as priority homeless as percentage of all households assessed	32%	57%	45%	56%

Source: Scottish Executive Statistical Bulletins and East Renfrewshire Council submission

- 5.12 As a percentage of all households assessed, the proportion the Council assesses as homeless or potentially homeless has increased over the last two years from 44% in 2002/03 to 61% in the 2003/04. Although moving closer to the Scottish figure, this remains below the national figure of 77% for 2003/04. An overview of the outcomes for homeless applicants is set out in the table below:

	2002-03		2003-04		2004-05 *
	East Renfrewshire	Scotland	East Renfrewshire	Scotland	East Renfrewshire
Total number of applications assessed in period	395	47,740	403	49,937	100
Priority unintentional	28.6%	54%	41.19%	54%	44%
Priority Intentional	3.03%	3%	4.218%	2%	4%
Non-priority	11.39%	21%	14.39%	21%	14%
Not homeless	33.67%	9%	23.57%	8%	20%
Lost contact/withdrew before assessment	22.278%	9%	12.9%	9%	17%
Resolved prior to assessment	1.012%	4%	3.72%	6%	1%
% of applications assessed in period	99.98%	100%	99.98%	100%	100%

Source: Scottish Executive Statistical Bulletins and East Renfrewshire Council submission

- 5.13 Of those applications assessed, the percentage of not homeless decisions has decreased from 33.67% in 2002/03 to 20% by 2004/05 but remains more than twice the Scottish figure of 8% for 2003/04. Levels of lost contact/withdrew before assessment are also higher than the Scottish figures but are on the decrease from 22% in 2002/03 to 17% in 2004/05.
- 5.14 The Council does not have a detailed picture of outcomes for homeless people. During 2002/03 of 133 households who were assessed as duty to house, only 52% were housed through nominations to RSLs or within the Council's own stock. In 2003/04 this figure dropped to 49% and in the first half of 2004/05 only 36% of offers to homeless people were accepted. The Council is unclear what the outcomes were for the remainder of those households it had a duty to secure accommodation for. This is a significant weakness.
- 5.15 We reviewed 51 homeless applications and found that the Council generally follows the correct sequence of enquiries, but the recording of decisions and evidence varies between officers and is generally poor. In particular, there is insufficient recording of personal information to ensure that a person centred service is being provided. Our case history reviews also identified inconsistent and inaccurate decision making particularly around 'lost contact' and 'not homeless' decisions. The Council is aware of these weaknesses and has recently introduced measures to address them.
- 5.16 One of the agencies providing services to people with drug or alcohol misuse problems expressed some concern about the approach to assessments for this client group. All the other organisations contacted were content that decision making was fair for homeless applicants.
- 5.17 Over the last 2 years, East Renfrewshire Council's reported performance in making decisions on applications within 28 days has been poor and has declined from 74% in 2003/04 to 62.% for the first 2 quarters of 2004/05. We reviewed a sample of 48 cases and found an average of 17 days to decision. In 71% of these cases a decision was made within 28 days. However, this average covered a wide range of performance. Where a decision had taken less than 28 days, the average time taken was only 7 days. For those that took longer than the target time, the average was 45 days. The longest time taken to make a decision in this sample was 78 days. We found no evidence that those cases which took longer to assess were more complicated or involved delays in gathering evidence. The Council is aware of these issues and has taken action to address them.

- 5.18 Decision letters are always issued quickly, usually the same day as the decision, and advise the applicant of their right to appeal. However they do not:
- set out clearly the Council's decision;
 - provide clear reasons for the decision including matters which were taken into account;
 - personalise the information and tailor specific information to the individual's circumstances; or
 - include information on the appeal process in the main letter (this is included in a separate sheet).
- 5.19 In addition, where permanent accommodation will be offered, the decision letters state that individuals are entitled to two offers but do not provide any further detail. The Council is aware of these shortcomings and is planning to review these letters in the future.
- 5.20 The quality of homeless assessments decision is fair. Officers making decisions follow the correct sequence of inquiries but the recording of evidence is weak and the Council takes too long to reach a decision in a significant number of cases. The levels of 'lost contact/withdrew before assessment' decisions are above the Scottish average and we found evidence of inaccurate and inconsistent decision making in some of these cases. The Council is aware of these problems and has taken steps to improve its performance.

Temporary accommodation

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

- 5.21 East Renfrewshire Council has 10 dispersed short-stay flats and a small supported accommodation project with 9 self contained flats located at Overlee House in Clarkston. However, 73% of all placements in temporary accommodation during 2003/04 were in out of area bed and breakfast accommodation mainly in Glasgow, Paisley and Johnstone, this is an increase on the figure for 2002/03 of 60%. This compares with a national figure for 2002/03 of 36.7% of placements in bed and breakfast accommodation. Key figures on the use of temporary accommodation by the Council are set out in the table below. They show that whilst the average length of stay in bed and breakfast accommodation is significantly shorter than the national figure the Council's use of bed and breakfast accommodation has risen significantly over recent years.

	2000-01	2001-02	2002-03	
	East Renfrewshire	East Renfrewshire	East Renfrewshire	National
Number accommodated in bed and breakfast accommodation	37	69	66	6,446
Percentage accommodated in bed and breakfast accommodation	50%	53.50%	60%	36.7%
Average length of stay in bed and breakfast accommodation	10 days	16 days	16 days	26 days
Number accommodated in Council furnished accommodation	47	66	44	9,240
Percentage accommodated in Council furnished accommodation	47%	45.80%	40%	25.6%
Average length of stay in Council furnished accommodation	113 days	47 days	56 days	142 days

Source: Audit Scotland and East Renfrewshire Council's inspection submission

5.22 Most applicants placed in bed and breakfast are young, single people some of whom are vulnerable. Families are usually accommodated in the Council's own accommodation. However, the only provision available out of hours is bed and breakfast, and the Council acknowledges that there are occasions when families and pregnant women are placed in bed and breakfast before they are moved to alternative accommodation.

5.23 The Council provides temporary accommodation quickly when it is required and support arrangements for those placed in Overlee House or the Council's dispersed lets are good. However, we identified a number of weaknesses in the Council's provision and management of temporary accommodation:

- Placements do not take account of the homeless person's support networks or the need to be close to schools or places of work.
- Only very limited accommodation suitable for disabled people is available and none is available out of hours.
- The Council provides only very limited support for those placed in bed and breakfast accommodation.
- The Council does not assess the quality of the bed and breakfast establishments it uses and is not aware if:
 - they require to be licensed as Houses of Multiple occupation;
 - they meet basic health and safety standards; or that
 - the Council is getting best value from them.

- 5.24 All of the bed and breakfasts used are also used by other neighbouring local authorities as temporary accommodation. The Council has no control over the mix of residents and can not be sure that any particular placement is suitable. The Council has not carried out any risk assessment of its use of bed and breakfast accommodation and has no effective system in place for managing the risks involved for homeless people or itself. This is a significant weakness.
- 5.25 Service users and other agencies we spoke to confirmed that these issues have caused problems for some applicants in temporary accommodation. We also identified a number of applicants who had been asked by the owner to leave a bed and breakfast, sometimes on more than one occasion. Whilst the Council responded positively in these circumstances and provided other placements, there was no clear assessment of the reasons why they had been asked to leave, what support may be required, or what other action the Council should take in response.
- 5.26 The Council is aware of its heavy reliance on bed and breakfast and the need to comply with The Homeless Persons (Unsuitable Accommodation) (Scotland) Order 2004. The Council is committed to reducing its use of bed and breakfast accommodation in its Homelessness Strategy. It has set a target for reducing expenditure on bed and breakfast by 50% during 2005/06.
- 5.27 The Council is also aware of gaps in the provision of temporary accommodation for women fleeing domestic abuse and supported accommodation for young people. The homelessness strategy sets out a number of objectives in respect of improving temporary accommodation and the Council is working with Women's Aid, Barrhead Housing Association and Quarriers to address these issues. The Council also has plans to provide five short stay flats from within its stock from early 2005. The Council does not, however, have a well developed strategy for ensuring that it has sufficient good quality temporary accommodation to meet the needs of homeless people.
- 5.28 East Renfrewshire Council has a poor approach to the provision of temporary accommodation for homeless people. The Council provides temporary accommodation quickly for those that need it but it relies heavily on out of area bed and breakfast establishments. It provides little support for people placed in this accommodation, has not assessed the risks involved and is not controlling the quality of the accommodation or value for money. In addition, the Council has failed to make provisions for the temporary accommodation needs of disabled applicants and has no clear strategy for improving provision or meeting future needs. This is a significant weakness.

Permanent accommodation

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

- 5.29 East Renfrewshire Council is good at making offers of permanent accommodation quickly. It takes on average 2.8 weeks to make a first offer. In addition, the percentage of re-lets to homeless people within the Council's own stock has increased over the last 3 years from 18% in 2002/03 to 27% in the first two quarters of 2004/05. However, recent changes to the allocations policy restrict all single people from being allocated two bedroom properties. This may increase the time taken to house single homeless people and further restricts the choices available to them.
- 5.30 East Renfrewshire Council treats homeless people the same as those on the general waiting list, providing them with two offers. However, homeless people are not given any choice over the area where they are offered accommodation and they are excluded from being considered from some high demand properties, typically cottage accommodation, across the Council's area. These restrictions are not set out clearly in the Council's published allocations or homelessness policies.
- 5.31 The Council does not always take into account the particular needs of homeless people to be housed close to support networks, schools or places of work. Whilst we saw some good examples of young people being made offers that take into account their support needs, we saw one case where the individual successfully appealed both the initial assessment decision and then subsequent offers because their full circumstances had not been considered. Between April 2004 and October 2004, 26% of offers to homeless people were refused because they wanted a different area.
- 5.32 The Council regularly provides vulnerable homeless people with short Scottish secure tenancies and appropriate support packages, as agreed with the tenant and support providers; it reviews these arrangements after six months. This is an effective way to meet support needs and help people to work towards independent living. However, the Council does not make these tenants aware that, regardless of the outcome of these interim accommodation arrangements, it still has a duty to secure them permanent accommodation.
- 5.33 East Renfrewshire Council is not currently making best use of the opportunities provided by other social landlords in its area to house homeless people. Nearly a quarter of the social rented houses in East Renfrewshire are provided by RSLs and the Council has statutory powers

under section 5 of the Housing (Scotland) Act 2001 to require these landlords to house homeless people. The Council has voluntary nomination agreements in place with all the RSLs in its area but the success rate for nominations has generally been low over the past three years. Nominations are discussed in more detail in the Housing Management section of this report.

- 5.34 The Council has made five referrals under section 5 to date, only one of which was successful. In the first six months of 2004/05 the Council successfully nominated one homeless person to an RSL house. The Council is aware of these issues. It has recently undertaken joint training with housing association staff on the operation of section 5 and is currently reviewing its existing section 5 protocol with Barrhead Housing Association. Further discussion are also planned with other RSLs to address these issues.
- 5.35 The Council's performance in providing permanent accommodation to homeless people is fair. It is quick to make a first offer of accommodation and homeless applicants get the same number of offers as those on the waiting list. The strengths of its approach are, however, undermined by the lack of choice that is offered to homeless people, the Council's limited approach to responding to their particular needs and the Council's poor performance in accessing accommodation provided by RSLs locally.

Preventing homelessness

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

- 5.36 East Renfrewshire Council sets out its approach to preventing homelessness and repeat presentations through its homelessness strategy and has made significant progress in implementing the associated action plan. The Council has effective arrangements for assessing and meeting the support needs of young homeless people as well as a range of initiatives to assist in establishing and sustaining tenancies. These include:
- accessing Communities Scotland's furniture grant scheme and targeting assistance to those most at risk of repeat homelessness;
 - providing basic kitchen equipment, depending on household need, to those assessed as priority homeless to help them establish their tenancies successfully;
 - assisting any homeless person being housed, regardless of priority status, to access furniture through referrals to the Salvation Army for furniture packs;
 - establishing a rent deposit scheme for non-priority or intentionally homeless applicants;

- agreeing a 12 month pilot project with the Govan Law Centre for the provision of free legal advice and representation for home owners facing repossession;
 - appointing a Rent Arrears Liaison Officer to support Council tenants at risk of eviction;
 - appointing a Housing Information and Advice Officer within the homelessness team; and
 - developing a programme to provide information on housing and homelessness in all secondary schools in the area.
- 5.37 The Council monitors repeat applications from homeless people, and in 2003/04, 18.9% of those assessed as homeless or potentially homeless had previously applied to the Council. This figure is slightly higher than the national rate of 16.3%. The Council is aware of the issues involved in avoiding repeat homelessness and has a number of initiatives to address them.
- 5.38 The Council has also agreed discharge protocols for people leaving the army and prison to assist them in finding suitable accommodation. It has not yet, however, agree similar arrangements for people leaving hospital. The Council is aware of the significance of this and is in discussions on this issue with the two health boards that deliver services in East Renfrewshire.
- 5.39 The Council has made good progress in meeting its statutory obligations in respect of information and advice and gives this work a high priority in its homelessness strategy. It has recently published a number of leaflets and a comprehensive housing options guide available in local offices and on its website. The Council is working towards meeting HomePoint standards for information and advice by providing training up to level II for seven Council staff including a dedicated housing advice worker. The Council ensures that type III⁸ advice is available by funding an independent advice worker based in the local Citizen's Advice Bureau.
- 5.40 East Renfrewshire Council has a good approach to preventing homelessness and has made significant progress in implementing its homelessness strategy action plan. The provision of information and advice has been an area of particular focus.

⁸ An explanation of the term HomePoint, is provided in the glossary

Responsiveness to homeless people

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

- 5.41 The Council's homelessness strategy sets out a service statement identifying what applicants can expect from the Council and how they will be treated. The Council has also published six specific service standards relating to its homeless service. Five of these standards simply restate the Council's obligations under the homeless persons legislation and only one, the commitment to complete assessments within 28 days, is properly measurable as a standard of service to applicants. These clear statements of intent are supported by a positive and supportive attitude to homeless people on the part of Council staff.
- 5.42 East Renfrewshire Council ensures that homeless applicants are able to contact the Council if they have concerns with how their case has been handled or treated and if they wish to appeal either their homeless decision or an offer. The Council has been seeking feedback from service users since 2000 using a variety of methods including:
- service user surveys;
 - questionnaires;
 - exit questionnaires at Overlee House;
 - service user interviews; and
 - focus groups.
- 5.43 Questionnaires have been issued with every homeless decision letter requesting feedback on all aspects of the service since May 2003. The return rate is around 15% and the results are reported to the homeless team. However, response rates for exit questionnaires from the Council's temporary accommodation have been low and the Council has introduced one to one interviews with service users to strengthen the quality of the service user feedback.
- 5.44 We saw evidence of the Council making good use of the results of this feedback to improve services. In particular it has improved the availability of information and advice, the quality of the Council's own temporary accommodation and the accessibility of staff.
- 5.45 The Council's approach to appeals against homeless decisions meets statutory requirements but it is not properly recording appeals against offers of permanent accommodation. A leaflet on the right to appeal the homeless decision is included with decision letters and is also referred to in the Housing Options guide, other leaflets provided to homeless people and on the Council's website. The Council does not, however, provide

clear advice on how to appeal when making offers of permanent accommodation. The Council also has an inconsistent approach to recording of appeals information including the date an appeal is received, heard and what the outcome is.

- 5.46 During the first quarter of 2004/05, 50% of appeals against homeless decisions were successful and issues arising from these have been taken up with officers during one to one supervision. However, the Council does not evaluate and report or record the outcomes of appeals in a planned and managed way which would help to identify areas for improvement in service delivery.
- 5.47 East Renfrewshire Council is good at treating homeless people with respect and responding to their views. This is reflected particularly in the good use of feedback from clients and was commented on positively by a number of the Council's partner organisations. The strength of this approach is, however, undermined by the weaknesses in the Council's approach to appeals.

Working with partners

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

- 5.48 East Renfrewshire Council works with a wide range of partner organisations both in planning and delivering services to homeless people. It has established a homelessness strategy working group that meets quarterly and attendance overall is good. The Council is working with its partners to develop a range of projects including:
- Quarriers, who provide an outreach support service to those aged between 16 and 25 years.
 - East Renfrewshire Citizen's Advice Bureau which operates the Rent Deposit Guarantee Scheme and provides independent housing advice and advocacy services.
 - The Govan Law Centre which has agreed a pilot scheme to provide free advice and court representation to residents of East Renfrewshire area facing mortgage repossession proceedings in court.
 - Women's Aid who provide advice and support to women fleeing domestic abuse.
- 5.49 The partner organisations we spoke to were positive about the Council's commitment to working with them and about communications with the Council. They specifically identified the opportunities for informal discussions about particular work or cases as a strength. A number of staff from both internal and external partners have attended homeless

staff team meetings to assist with partnership working and encourage understanding.

- 5.50 The Council works well with partners in planning services for homeless people. Communications between the Council and its partners are good and the Council has a positive approach to involving and supporting other agencies in the provision of services for homeless people.

Is the service managed for improvement?

Performance management

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

- 5.51 The aims and objectives of the homeless strategy are clearly outlined with a clear Strategy Action Plan detailing how each objective will be met. There are also clear targets outlined for the initial 12 months of the strategy including a review that was due to take place during April 2004. This review has not been carried out yet. Currently there is no monitoring and evaluation framework in place to evaluate progress of the homeless strategy action plan, although an evaluation sub-group has been established. Its first meeting is due to take place early in 2005.
- 5.52 There are a number of weaknesses in the Council's overall approach to the management of the performance of its homelessness service. Whilst the homeless team receives reports on performance, these focus on statutory performance indicators. Some of the performance targets for the service are unclear, for example that for time taken to provide an initial interview, and the overall approach to the monitoring and reporting of a number of important areas of service delivery are underdeveloped, these include:
- the number of first contacts that attend for interview;
 - the time taken to provide interviews;
 - the time taken to complete appeals;
 - outcomes from the assessment process and in the provision of permanent accommodation;
 - the use and outcomes of referral arrangements with partner organisations;
 - the effectiveness of many aspects of the Council's approach to preventing homelessness; and
 - the extent to which the black and minority ethnic community access the service.

- 5.53 As a result the Council does not have an accurate picture of the overall effectiveness of its service, can not be certain that it is effectively meeting the needs of homeless applicants who apply for assistance and can not measure the effectiveness of its strategies for the prevention of homelessness or reducing repeat homelessness. This is a significant weakness.
- 5.54 The Council has recently made a number of significant changes to the management and staffing of the homelessness service. As a result, officers making assessment decisions receive regular supervision and all case files and decisions are being checked by a senior officer once completed. These are likely to have a positive impact on the effectiveness of the management of the service.
- 5.55 The Council held a review day for staff in the homelessness service to consider current strengths and weaknesses. It has an awareness of some of the areas of strengths and weaknesses within the service and has developed an action plan to address most, but not all, of them.
- 5.56 The Council has good arrangements in place for staff training and development including a structured training plan. Recent training events have been held to ensure that staff are aware of the implications of developments in the homelessness legislation.
- 5.57 The homelessness policy and procedural framework is updated as legislation changes and is currently being developed further, particularly around the provision of support at Overlee House and information and advice procedures. The Council's main homeless procedures document covers most aspects of the homeless service and provides general guidance for staff. However, the quality of the Council's written guidance and procedures for officers on assessing vulnerability, and carrying out investigations into 'not homeless' and 'lost contact' decisions is poor. The weakness in the guidance available in these areas was evident in some of the decisions that we reviewed. The Council is aware of this weakness and is working to address it.
- 5.58 The Council's approach to performance management is poor. Staff are committed to delivering a high quality service and there is a limited number of targets and standards in place and the Council has recently improved the level of support and quality control in the decision making process. However, the Council does not effectively monitor or report key areas of the service and is not assessing outcomes for homeless people. This is a significant weakness.

Resource management and efficiency

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

- 5.59 East Renfrewshire Council carried out a best value review of its homelessness service in 1999/2000 and carried out an internal audit report on the service in 2003/04. This most recent report highlighted a number of areas where improvements in achieving best value could be made, including the use of bed and breakfast accommodation. The Council has acted on some of these recommendations, including improving its approach to the procurement of services for cleaning temporary accommodation and supplying new furnishing and fittings. The Council has, however, made only limited progress in ensuring that it is getting best value from its use of bed and breakfast accommodation.
- 5.60 Overall East Renfrewshire Council's approach to managing its resources is fair. A best value review and internal audit of its homelessness services have been carried out and some changes made. However, the Council cannot clearly demonstrate best value from its use of bed and breakfast accommodation and there is no clear strategy in place for addressing this.

Public reporting

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

- 5.61 East Renfrewshire Council's approach to public reporting on homelessness services is poor. Whilst some information is provided to tenants through HAG and other tenants organisations, the Council has not published any information on its performance against the homelessness targets within the East Renfrewshire Council Policy and Financial Plan 2004-2007 or in its homelessness strategy and service standards.

Grade and overall assessment of homelessness services

- 5.62 Our overall assessment of East Renfrewshire's homelessness service is fair. We found a number of strengths and a range of weaknesses that impact to varying degrees on the quality and consistency of the service applicants receive. We set out below the key factors we have taken account of in coming to our overall assessment.
- 5.63 The Council promotes its service widely and provides good information on how to access the service. For most applicants, it makes good decisions quickly and operates an effective appeals process. Council staff have a strong client focus; there are good systems in place to gather service

users views and these are used to improve services. The Council's work in preventing homelessness and with its partners is good. The Council has a number of weaknesses that impact on service users and which at least in part, undermine the stronger areas of the services we have identified. These include:

- not recording initial contacts with applicants and those who fail to keep appointments;
- a significant weakness in its approach to the provision of temporary accommodation including its high level of use of bed and breakfast and its failure to manage the risks to homeless people arising in this accommodation;
- inconsistencies in some decision making and inadequate recording of evidence, decisions or outcomes in many cases;
- restricting homeless people's choices and not always taking into account their particular needs when making offers of permanent accommodation;
- weaknesses in the administration of appeals and the use of appeals outcomes in service improvements; and
- not publicly reporting on the performance of the service.

5.64 There are also significant weaknesses in the performance management of the service, the Council does not have good information on outcomes for homeless people and does not have a full awareness of the weaknesses in the service. Recent changes in the management of the service have, however, had a positive impact on the Council's focus on service improvement.

6. Areas for Improvement Action

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

Across all of its activities East Renfrewshire Council should:

- tackle the weaknesses in its service planning and performance management systems;
- work with tenants to address the tensions in its tenant participation framework;
- improve its approach to collecting and using service user feedback and complaints and appeals information, in service development and improvement;
- improve its approach to monitoring and reporting access and outcomes in service delivery for members of the Jewish and black and minority ethnic communities; and
- improve its public and internal performance reporting to ensure that it provides tenants, service users and other stakeholders with an accurate picture of performance in each service area and across the service as a whole.

In housing management, the Council should:

- ensure that it complies with its statutory duties in respect of open access to its housing lists;
- improve the management of its waiting list;
- improve the effectiveness of joint working between housing and revenues staff in tackling rent arrears; and
- improve its performance in collecting rent particularly in respect of direct contact with tenants in arrears.

In property maintenance, the Council should:

- ensure that it complies with its legislative duties relating to gas safety;
- ensure that it complies with its legislative duties relating to the management of asbestos;
- ensure that its right to repair scheme is operated correctly; and
- improve its approach to ensuring best value in the procurement of repairs and improvement works.

In homelessness, the Council should:

- monitor and report on outcomes for all aspects of its homeless service and use this information in planning service improvements;
- ensure that it has an adequate supply of directly provided accommodation to meet the needs of applicants, particularly those with disabilities or support requirements;

- Where bed and breakfast accommodation is used, ensure that quality, value for money and risks to the Council and clients are properly managed;
- accurately record and report first contacts with homeless applicants;
- ensure that homeless cases are actively managed and decisions are correct and consistent;
- improve the level of choice in permanent accommodation and monitor the quality of outcomes for homeless applicants compared to other housing applicants; and
- improve its management, recording and reporting of all appeals by homeless applicants including their outcomes.

Next Steps

- 7.1 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 overall in their housing management, property maintenance or governance and financial management to submit an improvement plan to us within eight weeks of the publication of this report.
- 7.2 East Renfrewshire's improvement plan should show how the Council intends to respond to our findings in property maintenance and homelessness. The plan will be agreed with us. We will inspect once every five years and follow up improvement plans at regular intervals.
- 7.3 If you would like to see East Renfrewshire Council's improvement plans you should contact:

Iain Maclean
Head of Housing
East Renfrewshire Council Offices
211 Main St
Barrhead
East Renfrewshire
G78 1SY

Telephone: 0141 577 3720
Email: iain.maclean@eastrenfrewshire.gov.uk
Website: www.eastrenfrewshire.gov.uk

Sources of Evidence

Groups and third parties consulted

- Auchenback Tenants and Residents Association
- Eaglesham Tenants and Residents Association
- Hillside Tenants and Residents Association
- Mearns Village Community Association
- Uplawmoor Tenants Association
- Arklet Housing Association
- Crown Housing Association
- Hanover (Scotland) Housing Association
- Horizon Housing Association
- Margaret Blackwood Housing Association
- Trust Housing Association
- West of Scotland Housing Association
- Auchenback Active
- Care and Repair Renfrewshire
- Citizens Advice Bureau
- East Renfrewshire Women's Aid
- Homeless Strategy Working Group
- Quarriers Stay Project
- Shelter Scotland
- Strathclyde & Central EEACs
- Voluntary Action- DPHS

Public Agencies consulted

- East Ayrshire Council
- Glasgow City Council
- North Ayrshire Council
- South Lanarkshire Council
- Argyle & Clyde Health Board
- Greater Glasgow Health Board
- Ombudsman
- HomePoint
- Communities Scotland Area Investment Team
- Communities Scotland Tenant Participation Development Team
- Scottish Executive Development Department Antisocial Behaviour Team
- Audit Scotland
- KPMG, External Auditor
- Scottish Executive Homelessness Team

Meetings with Tenants Groups (Total of 58 Tenants attended)

- Housing Advisory Group Tenant Representatives
- East Renfrewshire Tenants Federation
- Dalmeny Tenants & Residents Association
- Hillside Tenants and Residents Association
- Mearns Village Community Association
- Uplawmoor Tenants Association
- Residents of Kirk Glebe, Neilston

Interviews / meetings

Councillors

Iain Drysdale (Conservative)

Alan Lafferty (Labour)

George Napier, (Liberal Democrats)

Ian Hutchison (Conservative)

Chief Officers

- Chief Executive
- Director of Environment Department

Housing Division Staff

- Head of Housing
- Business Manager Development & Strategy
- Business Manager Property Services
- Operations Manager Construction Services Housing
- Principle Officer Repairs
- Property Services Office Supervisor
- Call Centre Staff
- Repairs Inspectors
- Principal Officer Monitoring and IT Development
- Capital Works Programme Officer
- Information and Research Officer
- Property Technical Services
- Q Pulse Co-ordinator
- Allocation Officers
- Principal Officer Tenancy Services
- Tenant Participation Officer
- Rent Arrears Control Liaison Officer
- HAG Liaison Officer
- Estates Officers
- Antisocial Behaviour Team Leader
- Development Officer CHR
- Out of hours Homelessness staff
- Senior Officer (Homelessness)
- Temporary Accommodation Support Workers

- Support Worker at Overlee House
- Homeless Information & Advice Officer
- Homeless Persons Officer
- Technical Officer

Staff in Other Council Departments

- Head of Revenue Services
- Senior Clerical Officer Revenue Services
- Arrears Officer Revenue Services
- Office Supervisor Revenue Services
- Supporting People Co-ordinator
- Service Manager, Children and Families
- Team Manager, Throughcare
- Senior Social Worker - Criminal Justice
- Substance Misuse Officer
- Principal Solicitor

Reality checks

- Attendance at weekly void meeting
- Attendance at Rent Setting Working Group meeting
- Attendance at Estate Management Team Meeting
- Attendance at Monthly Discussion on Non Arrears Legal Cases
- Attendance at Case Conference meeting to discuss Young Tenants Under 25 in receipt of support packages
- Attendance at Repairs Focus Meeting at Kirk Glebe, Neilston
- Attendance at Eviction Case Conference & Follow up Conference
- Observation of Out of Hours Staff
- Observation homeless interviews
- Observation of Customer First Sign Ups
- Observation of Estate Walkabout Craigheads area
- Observation of Homeless Team Meeting
- Observation of Short SST sign up
- Observation of sign up interviews (1 of which for SSST, 1 of which was a conversion from SSST to SST)
- Shadow/Observation of Front Reception
- Shadow/Observation of Call Centre Staff
- Shadowing Repairs Inspectors
- Shadowing homeless staff
- Shadowing Technical Officer
- Shadowing Interviews with Support Workers
- Anti social behaviour case reviews
- Application case reviews
- Arrears case review
- Estate Caretaker Records for October reviewed

- Eviction case reviews
- Detailed bypassed applicants case reviews
- Gas Safety case reviews
- Homeless Appeals Case Reviews
- Homelessness Case Reviews
- House file reviews on Tenancy issues
- Housing Management Case Reviews
- Repairs Case reviews
- Rent Arrears Case Reviews
- Short SST case reviews
- Successful allocations case reviews
- Suspended applicants case reviews
- Void management case reviews
- Capital Programme Visits
- Capital works site visit
- Estates visits
- Discussion with Customer First on Access Issues
- Phone survey, of Tenants, on Repairs Service (21 tenants consulted)

Key documents reviewed

- Inspection Submission

Policies and Procedures: Housing Management

- Sheltered Housing Revised Policy (draft)
- Allocation Policy (former and new)
- Housing Management Procedures
- Anti social behaviour procedures and policy (including ASBO policy)
- Racial Harassment Policy
- Policy on the management and recovery of arrears

Publicity / Public Material for Housing Management

- Tenant newsletters and leaflets
- Consultation documents on recent annual rent increase
- Cabinet report
- HAG report
- tenant consultation material

Outcome Reports: Housing Management

- Reports & analysis of tenant satisfaction work and other feedback exercises relating to housing management services in the last 2 years
- Best Value reports
- Outcome report and most recently updated action plan from service reviews, Best Value reviews & internal audit reports relating to housing management undertaken in the last two years

Policies and Procedures: Property Maintenance

- Response repairs policy (including access arrangements, procedures for pre and post inspections)
- The standard(s) to which houses are repaired / decorated before they are re-let
- Corporate Procurement Strategy and Procedures
- Current planned and cyclical maintenance programme
- Corporate Health and Safety Plan
- Anite Housing Repairs Asbestos Attributes User Guide
- Stock Condition Report
- DTZ Business Planning Spreadsheets

Publicity / Public Material: Property Maintenance

- Examples of publicity for repairs service (e.g. posters, leaflets, adverts, etc.)

Outcome Reports: Property Maintenance

- Best Value Review of Council Owned Property 2002 – report and appendices
- Tenant Satisfaction Reports

Policies and Procedures: Homelessness

- Updated homelessness strategy (including the action plan)
- Service delivery plan(s) for the homelessness service, including statement of the Council's objectives and key targets for the homeless service
- Homelessness policy and procedures
- Homelessness appeals policy and procedures
- Copy of homeless assessment form
- Procedural guidance for staff on the allocation of temporary accommodation
- Homeless referral protocols in place with partner organisations, including Section 5 protocols
- Discharge protocols with other partner organisations (hospitals, Children's Services, prisons etc)
- Service level agreements with key partners
- Information and advice strategy (draft)

Publicity / Public Material: Homelessness

- Examples of publicity for homeless service, out of hours service and translation/interpreting service available to households presenting as homeless
- Leaflets providing housing information and advice to homeless people

Outcome Reports: Homelessness

- List of all lets in most recent full financial year showing source of applicant (homeless, transfer, housing list), property type and letting area

Policy and Publicity Material: General

- Policy and Financial Plan 2004-07
- Policy and Financial Plan Guidelines
- Tenants Handbook
- Tenant participation strategy
- Statement on customer care standards in housing management, property maintenance and homelessness, and associated publicity material
- Publicly available reports, newsletters, etc. published in the last two years on the performance of housing management, property maintenance and homelessness services

Performance Reports

- Needs 2004/2005
- Tenancies granted (e.g. SSTs, short SSTs)
- Management of anti-social behaviour
- The management of local areas (e.g. estate management)
- Most recent annual rent increase
- Collection of rent and management of arrears
- Performance against your equalities and diversity objectives
- Responsive repairs service (including response times, pre and post inspections, right to repair)
- Repairs 2004/2005
- Performance of planned and cyclical maintenance programmes
- Gas safety management
- Performance in achieving customer care standards for housing management and property maintenance services
- Analysis of complaints / appeals in your housing management and property maintenance services
- Outcomes for homeless applicants
- Progress against the homelessness strategy action plan
- Reports and minutes for most recent budget-setting exercise (including budget papers)
- Maintenance budgets and spend against targets for last two years and future spending plans
- Papers and minutes of the last two meetings of Council Cabinet that is responsible for housing issues

Performance – Additional reports/items

- Guidelines for Policy Review Committee Involvement in Best Value Reviews
- Best Value review of Homelessness, Allocations and Void Management 1999/2000
- Reports on Review of Service Standards
- Report on Internal Audit of Homelessness 2004
- PMP Assessment Report on the Housing Service by Audit Scotland 2000
- PMP1 Housing Improvement Plan and Progress Report

- East Renfrewshire Housing Best Value Achievement Report for 2002
- Progress Report on Corporate Strategy Year 1
- Service Standards Annual Overview Report 2004
- Statutory Performance Indicators Performance Report 2004
- CRM System Reports
- Management Reports – Property Services
- Management Reports – Tenancy Services
- Management Reports – Finance
- Benchmarking Data – 2002/2003, 2003/2004, Q1 2004/2005
- Final Report 2003/2004

Organisational and Service Profile Information

- “All Together” East Renfrewshire’s Community Plan
- “Making a difference in East Renfrewshire” East Renfrewshire Council’s corporate strategy 2003
- East Renfrewshire Local Housing Strategy (LHS) 2004
- LHS Needs Assessment 2004
- East Renfrewshire Council’s Political Management Structure
- Housing Advisory Group – council report establishing the group, group’s constitution and working arrangements
- Decentralisation Review Report
- Council Report on the future of the Department of Housing and Commercial Operations
- Departmental Structure Charts

Performance Management and Planning Framework

- Performance Overview Report
- Policy and Financial Plan 2004-07
- Policy and Financial Plan Guidelines
- Performance Profile Reports and Guidelines
- Guidelines for Strategic Best Value Reviews
- Internal Audit Plan
- Service Standards Booklet
- Editions of ER Council Magazine
- IDEA Peer Review Report 2000
- IDEA Progress Report
- KPMG Interim Best Value Audit Report

Resource Management

- Service Level Agreements
- Budget preparation guidelines
- Council’s Financial Regulations and Contract Standing Orders
- Corporate Risk Management Strategy
- Corporate Employee Training and Development Strategy

- Training Plan 2004/05
- Staff newsletters
- Employee code of conduct

Housing Stock Profile

- Stock1 Return to the Scottish Executive
- Housing Stock Report 2002/03

Housing Service Profile

- Description of Staff duties in Housing Service

Context Information

- Transitional Regeneration Plan for East Renfrewshire 2004/05
- East Renfrewshire Socio Economic Profile and Deprivation Analysis May 2004
- East Renfrewshire Joint Community Care Plan
- “Understanding the Housing Needs of the Black and Minority Ethnic Communities in East Renfrewshire” Report for the council by ODS Consultants
- Report on Mapping of Fuel Poverty in East Renfrewshire 2004 by Alembic Research
- Researching the Housing Needs of Older People in East Renfrewshire 2003

Housing Management Additional Evidence

- Young Tenants Pack
- Tenants Newsletters
- DTZ Report on Social Housing Needs Requirement Jan 2004
- Tenant Participation - Report on Staff Training Seminar
- Partnership in Practice Agreement
- Minutes of allocation team meetings
- Common Housing Register Development Plan
- Report to Housing Advisory Group on the Progress of Common Housing Register
- Minutes of meeting on Common Housing Register
- Report to Cabinet on Designation of Housing for the Elderly for Allocation Purposes, 25th November 2005
- Sheltered Housing Inspection Report June 2004
- Report form weekly void meeting of 17 November 2004
- Report to Cabinet on Rent Setting 2005/06, 2 December 2004
- Notes of meeting of Rent Setting Working Group
- Report to Policy Review Committee, Areas for future investigation – scopes and timetables, 30 November 2004
- Notes of Anti-Social Investigation Team Service Review Day, 28 October 2004
- Notes from Newton Mearns Walkabout, 5 October 2004

- Minutes of Tenancy Services Staff Meeting, 25th October 2004,
- Presentation notes of the peer review of estate management, 23 March 2001

Property Management Additional Evidence

- Stock condition database - screenshots

Homelessness Additional Evidence

- Housing Options Guide
- Joint Futures Training Seminar Pack

Appendix 2

Examples of Positive Practice

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

Housing management

Housing prospect interviews

The use of prospect interviews to clarify housing applicants details and preferences and provide information to assist in maximising the chances of re-housing. These interviews are a good way of helping applicants to maximise their chances of housing, they are offered to all applicants to discuss:

- maximisation of points;
- areas of choice and house type availability;
- evidence that the applicant requires to submit to assist their application; and
- an explanation of the selection and refusal policy.

BME Housing Outreach Service

Responding to a need identified through research into the housing needs of the BME community in its area East Renfrewshire Council established a local housing outreach worker for the black and minority ethnic community. This service, funded jointly by the Council and Communities Scotland, has been operating successfully since November 2004. The service coordinator works with the Council and other social landlords and with communities to;

- raise awareness of current housing services and consult on
- improvements to housing policy and practice;
- provide a housing information and advice service, focussing on the
- needs of the "visible" BME population in particular ;
- provide advice and assistance to BME households facing homelessness
- identify unmet BME housing needs to be addressed; and
- encourage and support visible BME households to take up tenancies.

Property maintenance

Promoting home safety

The Council has helped to improve safety in its houses by installing 578 cold alarms in the homes of tenants receiving new central heating installations.

The Council has also taken the decision to install condensing boilers as standard either when a boiler reaches the end of its life or as part of the central heating programme, reducing costs and saving energy.

Homelessness

Publicising the service

East Renfrewshire Council actively manage and check on the availability of publicity in a range of locations.

One officer has been given the responsibility to carry out a physical check on all the locations that publicity has been provided every 6 months and where necessary replace and replenish the leaflets, posters or business cards as required. This officer has a list of identified contacts for each location and monitors the dates checks are made and records the use and successful take-up of information at each location. This will assist the authority monitor how well information is received and which locations are used most frequently.

Responding to service user feedback

How the Council seeks service users views – through a range of formats and that the information is used and officers receive feedback. They also do take note of the response rate and have made changes to how they seek feedback where the response rate has been low.

Glossary

Benchmarking	A process used by organisations to systematically compare service processes and performance to identify best practice.
Capital Programme	Major repair schemes funded mostly from borrowing.
Common housing registers	A register of all applicants for social housing used by two or more landlords within an area.
Convention of Scottish Local Authorities (COSLA)	The membership body for local authorities in Scotland.
Direct Labour Organisation (DLO)	Internal organisation which carries out work on behalf of housing departments
Focus groups	A group of people brought together to have a structured discussion on a specific subject or set of subjects, facilitated by an independent person.
HomePoint	<p>A department of Communities Scotland 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.
HOMES	A national scheme to assist tenants of both local authorities and registered social landlords to move between local authority areas.
Housing list	A list of applicants for housing which 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.
HRA	Housing Revenue Account

Life cycle costing	A method of calculating the cost and timing of the repairs to, and replacement of, major building components.
Partnering	A structured contract management approach to improve efficiency and reduce confrontation between the RSL and its consultants and contractors. Partnering requires formalised objectives, agreed problem solving methods and an active search for continued measurable improvements.
Peer group	A group of organisations facing similar tasks and challenges with which comparisons can be made.
Performance indicator	A measure of how a local authority is achieving its objectives. Performance Indicators can be compared with a pre-set standard (a benchmark) or with other organisations.
Planned maintenance	The planned renewal or maintenance of key property components.
Pre inspections	Inspections undertaken to ascertain the nature of the repair required
Procurement	The way an organisation obtains services or materials from other organisations or agents.
Public Services Ombudsman	The independent body appointed to investigate individual complaints against local authorities and other public bodies.
Qualifying Repair	Repairs which 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 Communities Scotland.
Relets	Lets made to the second or subsequent tenant. Distinguished from new lets that are made when the property is first built or modernised.
Responsive repairs	Day to day repairs carried out on a reactive basis, distinguishable from planned, capital or cyclical maintenance.

Right to buy	Many Scottish secure tenants have the right to buy their property at a discounted price subject to length of tenancy.
Right to Repair	Statutory scheme which sets out timescales for some repairs and actions which can be taken if timescales exceeded.
Schedule of Rates	List of costs for repair items ,usually organised by trade
Scottish Federation of Housing Associations (SFHA)	The membership body for RSLs in Scotland.
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	Under Section 5 of the Housing (Scotland) Act 2001 a local authority can request a registered social landlord which has accommodation in its area to provide accommodation to homeless people. This request is known as a Section 5 referral.
Service level agreement (SLA)	An agreement between departments within an organisation or between partner organisations that defines the type and level of service they will provide.
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, Realistic and Time Bound.
Statutory Performance Indicator (SPI)	Indicators of local authorities' performance that are published by the Accounts Commission for Scotland.

Sustainability	Improving the economic, social and environmental circumstances of the wider communities to create and maintaining communities where people positively want to live.
Tenancy agreement	Legal document or contract between landlord and tenant setting out the rights and responsibilities of each.
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.