

## WEST DUNBARTONSHIRE COUNCIL

### Report by the Executive Director of Housing, Environmental and Economic Development

Council: 28 April 2010

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**Subject: Report on Housing Inspection - Scottish Housing Regulator**

#### **1. Purpose**

- 1.1** The purpose of this report is to advise Committee of the outcome of the Scottish Housing Regulator's inspection of the Council's Housing Management Service, which took place from October to December 2009 and to present the Regulator's final report, which is contained in appendix 1 for reference.

#### **2. Background**

- 2.1** The Scottish Housing Regulator undertook an inspection of the Council's Housing Services in 2003/2004. The outcome of the inspection was that the Council was awarded a 'D' or 'poor grade' for its Housing Management Service. The Council agreed to produce a voluntary remedial plan to address key areas of concern and advised the Regulator of its progress against the plan on a quarterly basis.
- 2.2** The Regulator carried out an interim inspection in August 2008 under Section 72 of the Housing (Scotland) Act 2001, prior to re-inspection of the service later in 2009. The Regulator's Interim Inspection Report and feedback highlighted that there had been some improvement in service delivery, however, significant weaknesses were found in some areas that still needed to be addressed. In response to the report, the Housing Service embarked on a self-assessment exercise based on the Scottish Housing Regulator's Performance Standards. It used a Challenge Panel approach to validate and challenge the accuracy of the self-assessments. It drew up a Housing Improvement Plan and set up a Housing Performance Improvement Board and Elected Members/ Officer Working Group to monitor progress. A significant amount of work went into improving every aspect of the Housing Service during the period between the interim inspection and the re-inspection.
- 2.3** The full report on the outcome of the interim inspection was reported to Housing, Environment and Economic Development Committee on 3 December 2008 and details of the planned re-inspection were reported to Committee on 4 November 2009.

### **3. Main Issues**

#### Inspection Result

- 3.1** The Regulator has awarded the Council a 'C' grade for its Housing Management Service. This is a positive outcome and reflects the tremendous efforts that have been made by staff at all levels within the organisation and the support given by elected members.

#### Inspection Summary

- 3.2** The report recognised that following the interim inspection in November 2008 the Council had fully focused on improvement and that the leadership had increased the pace of its service improvements. Also, the Council had made good progress with developing a culture of improvement within the housing service, now has a high level of self-awareness of its strengths and weaknesses. It recognised that the Council has prioritised improvement of income maximisation by introducing a number of measures and is showing a trend of improvement. Inspectors acknowledged that the Council was very responsive to their feedback during the re-inspection and that these were key factors in arriving at the re-inspection grade assessment.
- 3.3** The report highlights a number of strengths in key service areas in relation to: improving the time taken to process applications; reducing the number of applicants it suspends; the generally good condition of its neighbourhoods; working well to sustain tenancies; and having a good strategic approach to managing antisocial behaviour.
- 3.4** The report also highlights a number of weaknesses, some of which are significant, in relation to: the management of suspensions; the consistency of the approach to bypassing; communications with complainants on antisocial behaviour cases; and rent lost through rent arrears and empty houses.
- 3.5** Two areas of 'Positive Practice' were identified in the report in relation to the Council's use of Challenge Panels and to its Joint policy and partnership on anti-social behaviour.

#### Inspection Recommendations

- 3.6** The Regulator has made the following key recommendations in the report:
- continue to develop the performance management framework;
  - prioritise tenant participation and improve communication with tenants;
  - further improve the complaints processes;

- implement the new allocations policy as planned;
- continue to improve the management of suspensions and bypassing;
- improve communications on antisocial behaviour cases; and
- continue to work to reduce rent lost through rent arrears and empty houses.

They are broadly in line with improvement areas highlighted within the Council's submission to the Regulator at the beginning of the re-inspection and will form the basis of the next Housing Improvement Plan.

### Publicity

- 3.7** The public has been advised of the report's finding via a joint press statement with the Regulator. Staff have been advised of the report's findings via a special newsletter and a copy of the report has been placed on the intranet so that everyone has a chance to read the findings in full. All tenants groups will receive a copy of the Regulator's report for information, as will Elected Members via this Committee report.

### Improvement Plan

- 3.8** The Council is required to agree an improvement plan with the Regulator within 8 weeks of the publication date of the inspection report, giving a deadline of 1 June 2010. Work has already started on preparing an improvement plan that will address all of the issues highlighted in the inspection report. Some of issues, such as implementing the new allocations policy, are already well under way. Given the timescales involved, the final agreed plan will be submitted to Committee for information after the summer recess; however Members will be consulted on its content through the Members Officers Working Group. Once agreed, implementation of the new plan will be monitored using the existing arrangements through the Housing Performance Improvement Board and the Members Officers Working Group, with progress reports to HEED Committee every four months.

## **4. Personnel Issues**

- 4.1** There are no personnel issues relevant to this report.

## **5. Financial Implications**

- 5.1** There are no financial implications relevant to this report.

## **6. Risk Analysis**

- 6.1** Failure to agree and implement an improvement plan in response to the Regulator's report would attract an adverse reaction and may have wider consequences for the Council in the context of Best Value.

## **7. Equalities Impact**

- 7.1** No significant issues were identified in a screening for potential equality impact of this report.

## **8. Conclusions and Recommendations**

- 8.1** A significant level of review and development work has been carried out over the last year across all aspects of the Housing Service which has strengthened the performance of the service in key areas and established good foundations for further improvement both operationally and strategically. This has resulted in an improved grading assessment by the Scottish Housing Regulator and their recommendations will form a springboard for the next phase of improvement to the Housing Service as part of the Council's agenda for continuous improvement.

- 8.2** It is recommended that Council:

- i) note and acknowledge the outcome of the re-inspection of the Housing Service;
- ii) congratulate staff across all Council departments for their hard work and commitment to improving the Housing Service;
- iii) agree to the arrangement for progressing the improvement plan during the summer recess; and
- iv) refer the report to the Housing, Environment and Economic Development committee for consideration; and
- v) note that further reports on progress in relation to key improvement activity will be submitted to the relevant Committee during the next 24 months.

**Elaine Melrose**  
**Executive Director of Housing, Environmental and Economic Development**  
**Date: 12 April 2010**

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**Appendices:** The Scottish Housing Regulator, Re-Inspection Report -  
final, West Dunbartonshire Council, March 2010

**Background Papers:** None

**Wards Affected:** All



THE SCOTTISH  
HOUSING  
REGULATOR

## **Re-Inspection Report - final**

**West Dunbartonshire Council  
March 2010**

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## 1. Introduction

### About this re-inspection

- 1.1 This re-inspection was carried out by the Scottish Housing Regulator under section 72 of the Housing (Scotland) Act 2001 on behalf of Scottish Ministers. Our purpose in inspection is to provide an independent external assessment of the effectiveness of housing service delivery and make recommendations to help improvement. Inspections are conducted within a published framework of *Performance Standards*.
- 1.2 We inspected West Dunbartonshire Council in 2003/04. At that time, we awarded the Council a "D" or "Poor" grade for its housing management service. Following our inspection, the Council developed an improvement plan and started to report its progress with this in December 2005. Following feedback from us in early 2007 about slow progress with the implementation of its improvement plan, the Council agreed to produce a voluntary remedial plan to address key areas of concern. The Council has reported progress against the plan on a quarterly basis to us.
- 1.3 In response to Audit Scotland's 2006 report on its audit of best value and community planning in West Dunbartonshire Council, the Accounts Commission required the Council to produce an improvement plan to address 11 immediate and 3 medium term priorities. The Accounts Commission asked Audit Scotland for a formal report on progress at 31 July 2007 and a further report from the Controller of Audit in summer 2009. The report in July 2009 found that the Council had made insufficient progress with key improvement priorities, needed to shift in attitude and focus to achieve best value and recommended the Council should secure external support from elected member and officer peers.
- 1.4 We wanted assurance that the Council was delivering its planned improvements to the housing management service and inspected the Council on an interim basis in November 2008. Our interim inspection set out the areas the Council needed to deliver identifiable improvements in ahead of the re-inspection. Across all of its housing management activities the Council should:
- set targets for improving performance;



- make more effective use of its performance management framework; and
- put in place a more robust service monitoring and quality control framework.

In specific service areas, the Council should:

- focus on, and prioritise, income maximisation, including building on its improved performance in letting empty houses;
- improve its approach to managing applications for housing;
- make its letting decisions more transparent; and
- improve and expand its approaches to involving tenants and service users.

## How we assessed performance

1.5 Our inspectors asked two key questions:

- How well is West Dunbartonshire Council delivering its services?
- Is West Dunbartonshire Council managed for improvement?

1.6 In order to answer these questions inspectors:

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

1.7 We have awarded a grade for the housing management services. The grade and judgements are based on evidence. The grade summarises performance in the following ways:

- Grade A = Excellent
- Grade B = Good
- Grade C = Fair
- Grade D = Poor

1.8 When we provide a summarised assessment and award a grade, we take various factors into account. In addition to progress against our recommendations and the Council's Improvement Plan, these factors are:

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

### **The re-inspection team**

1.9 The re-inspection team was led by Kirsty Anderson (Inspection Manager) and included Mark Gibson and Georgina Kent (Inspectors), Josephine McAloon (Inspection Officer), Clare Newton and Nadya Wagland (Tenant Assessors). Clare and Nadya (Tenant Assessors) carried out a desktop review of the Council's website, attended meetings and carried out estate visits on site. We were on site between 23 November 2009 and 4 December 2009. We would like to thank everyone involved in the re-inspection, particularly the councillors, staff, service users and tenants for their time and co-operation.

### **Responding to this re-inspection**

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

## 2. Inspection grades and overview

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

### Grades

- 2.1 The re-inspection of West Dunbartonshire Council's housing service took place between 23 November 2009 and 4 December 2009. We awarded the following grade:

West Dunbartonshire Council has achieved a **C** grade for housing management. This is a **fair** performance.

### How well is West Dunbartonshire Council delivering its services?

- 2.2 Our assessment is that West Dunbartonshire Council's housing management service has some strengths, but set against these are a number of weaknesses, some of which are significant. Following our interim inspection in November 2008 the Council has fully focused on improvement and the leadership has increased the pace of its service improvements. The Council has made good progress with developing a culture of improvement within the housing service and now has a high level of self-awareness of its strengths and weaknesses. The Council was very responsive to our feedback during this re-inspection. These are key factors in arriving at the re-inspection grade assessment.
- 2.3 The Council has some strengths in housing management:
- it is improving the time it takes to process applications and reducing the number of applicants it suspends;
  - its neighbourhoods are generally in good condition;
  - it works well to sustain tenancies; and
  - it has a good strategic approach to managing antisocial behaviour.
- 2.4 The Council does, however, have a number of weaknesses in the delivery of its housing management service and some are significant:
- its management of suspensions;
  - the consistency of its approach to bypassing;

- its communications with complainants on antisocial behaviour cases; and
- rent lost through rent arrears and empty houses.

### **Is West Dunbartonshire Council managed for improvement?**

- 2.5 In response to our interim inspection in 2008 the Council's housing service increased the pace of improvement and has made good progress in tackling a number of the issues identified in that report. It has increased capacity within the housing service, made efforts to develop a culture of improvement and has a new service plan process. The Council is working to improve its performance management and the opportunities for scrutiny of performance. It has a good framework for equalities but it needs to make greater use of equalities data to develop the housing management service. It has begun to consider efficiencies in the housing service.
- 2.6 We found a number of areas where the Council needs to make further improvements. It does not have a systematic approach to providing performance information to tenants. Although the Council has been working to re-establish its tenant participation framework and has increased the amount of consultation it carries out with tenants there are still weaknesses in its approach. The Council still has an underdeveloped approach to dealing with complaints and this presents it with a challenge to use complaints to develop and improve the service. It has not yet carried out scenario planning in its asset management strategies although it has plans to do so.

### **Key recommendations**

- 2.7 Our re-inspection report covers a wide range of issues. West Dunbartonshire Council must respond effectively to them. These are our most important recommendations:
- continue to develop its performance management framework;
  - prioritise its tenant participation and improve communications with tenants;
  - further improve its complaints processes;
  - implement its new allocations policy as planned;
  - continue to improve its management of suspensions and bypassing;
  - improve its communications on antisocial behaviour cases; and

- continue to work to reduce rent lost through rent arrears and empty houses.

### 3. Context

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

#### About the organisation

- 3.1 West Dunbartonshire Council is situated in west central Scotland, it lies to the Northwest of Glasgow between Loch Lomond and the River Clyde. West Dunbartonshire has a population of 91,070 and covers an area of 68 square miles.
- 3.2 Following the local elections in May 2007, the council has a minority SNP administration. It has 22 elected members consisting of:
- 8 Labour;
  - 9 Scottish National Party;
  - 4 Independent; and
  - 1 Scottish Socialist Party.
- 3.3 The Council delivers its housing service through the Housing and Regeneration division of the Housing, Environment and Economic Department except for the rent and arrears recovery service that the Corporate Services Department delivers.

#### About its current and future tenants

- 3.4 While the population of Scotland looks set to rise over the next ten years, the population of West Dunbartonshire has declined by around 4% since 1996 and the General Registrar for Scotland (GROS) forecasts that a further decline of almost 9% will impact over the next two decades. During the same period the Council projects the proportion of people over 60 years of age will increase by 29% and the proportion of those aged 16 to 29 years will decrease by 25%.
- 3.5 The unemployment rate in West Dunbartonshire is 6.9% and is higher than the Scottish figure of 5%. Income levels are currently less than the figure for the rest of Scotland. One in five people from West Dunbartonshire are classed as income deprived, with 70% of the Council's tenants receiving housing benefit.

- 3.6 West Dunbartonshire is ranked as one of the five local authorities with the largest proportion of their datazones in the 15% most deprived in Scotland.

### About its housing stock

- 3.7 There are around 44,291 properties in West Dunbartonshire. Owner occupation is the dominant tenure at just under 59%. Around 15% rent their homes from either RSLs or the private rented sector. The Council owns and manages over 25% of the housing in the area, a total of 11,436 houses. The Council's housing services are mainly delivered from three housing offices in Clydebank, Dumbarton and Alexandria.
- 3.8 The majority of Council properties are flats and at around 74% of all stock this is considerably higher than the Scottish average of 50%.
- 3.9 The Council's average weekly rent level for 2009/10 is £52.09, lower than the Scottish average of £53.03.

### Key Facts

- 3.10 The table below presents a summary of key information for West Dunbartonshire Council showing trends over the last three financial years.

Key facts	2006-07	2007-08	2008-09
Houses owned	11720	11670	11436
Number of applicants on housing list as at 31 March	8478	9529	10058
HRA Gross Capital Expenditure (incl. Capital Funded from Revenue (CFCR))	£14.8m	£14.3m	£17.8m
Total possible rental income (£)	27.9m	£28.1m	£28.5m
% of Rental income from Housing Benefit (HB)	62.9%	59.3%	59.6%
Average weekly rent	£49.60	£49.85	£52.09
Average rent increase	2.25%	2.25%	4.0%
Houses re-let	1324	961	987

Sources: West Dunbartonshire Council's inspection submission and Scottish Government Statistical information

## 4. How well is West Dunbartonshire Council delivering housing management?

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

### Grade

West Dunbartonshire Council has achieved a **C** grade for housing management. This is a **fair** performance.

- 4.1 Our assessment is that West Dunbartonshire Council's housing management service has some strengths, but set against these are a number of weaknesses, some of which are significant. The Council now has a high level of self-awareness and has increased the pace of its service improvements following our interim inspection in November 2008. The Council was very responsive to our feedback and acted to make improvements to the service during this re-inspection. These are key factors in arriving at the inspection grade.
- 4.2 The Council makes it easy for people to apply for housing and has improved the time it takes to process applications. It has developed a new allocations policy and has agreed plans to introduce this during 2010. The Council's new policy is based on housing need and will address the weaknesses we have identified in its approach to allocations. The Council's neighbourhoods are generally in good condition and it works well to sustain tenancies. It also has a good strategic approach to managing antisocial behaviour.
- 4.3 The Council has some weaknesses that directly affect tenants and service users, some of which it has begun to address. These include:
- its management of suspensions;
  - the consistency of its approach to bypassing;
  - its communications with complainants on antisocial behaviour cases; and
  - management of rent lost through rent arrears and empty houses.

### Tenant satisfaction

- 4.4 The Council uses a range of tailored surveys to gauge tenants' satisfaction with different elements of its service. These include tenants' satisfaction with area



offices and the allocations process. These show that 90% of those who responded were satisfied with the three area offices and 92% of new tenants were satisfied with the allocations process.

- 4.5 The Council advised us that it will conduct a comprehensive satisfaction survey in 2010 and as part of this will examine whether or not minority groups have different satisfaction levels with the housing service.

### **Access to housing**

- 4.6 The Council provides various options to enable people to apply for housing. It makes housing information easy to access for applicants whose first language is not English or who have other communication needs. The Council makes its key documents available in different languages and formats, and provides access to an interpreting service.
- 4.7 The Council has designed a useful guide for housing applicants, which it gives to applicants as part of the application pack. The Council also has an allocations service charter, which it advertises in reception areas and on its website.
- 4.8 The Council has recently improved its target for processing housing applications from 28 days to 14 days. During the re-inspection we found its performance in this area continues to improve. So far this year, the Council has taken an average of nine days to process applications. However, we found a small number of cases where the Council incorrectly calculated the length of time it had taken. The Council's monitoring and reporting in this area has improved since our interim inspection.
- 4.9 Since our interim inspection, the Council has introduced a housing application checklist, to help ensure that it accurately assesses applications. From our case reviews, we found that this was generally working well. However, the Council does not routinely identify and give advice to applicants who may be homeless or threatened with homelessness.
- 4.10 The Council issues applicants with acknowledgement letters that contain details of their points and position on the housing list. This is useful information for the applicant. However, these letters incorrectly inform the applicant that they will

not receive offers of housing whilst the Council processes their application. The letters also fail to inform applicants about their right to appeal the Council's decision. When we pointed this out to the Council, it immediately changed the letter.

- 4.11 At the time of our re-inspection, the Council was developing a web-based housing options guide which it made available on its website in March 2010.
- 4.12 The Council's list is open to anyone aged 16 or over. At 31 December 2009, it had 7,207 applicants on its housing list, including 2,110 new applicants. Since April 2009, the Council has actively managed its housing list through a rolling review of applications on their anniversary date. We found that the Council's rolling review process was working well and that it cancelled applications in line with its guidance. However, we found that it did not always file or save its cancellation letters.
- 4.13 The Council is working with several local partner RSLs to develop a Common Housing Register (CHR) to provide greater choice and improve access for applicants. However the Council's development of the CHR has been poor, it has made limited progress in the last two years and does not yet have a firm date for the establishment of a CHR. Since our interim inspection the Council agreed a common allocations policy with its partners.
- 4.14 At the time of our inspection, the Council had suspended 182 applicants, or 2.5%, from receiving offers. This is a significant reduction from the 11.4% of applicants who were suspended at the time of our interim inspection. The Council has introduced appropriate guidance on suspensions and has trained its staff on how to use this. However, we found a number of weaknesses in the Council's practice in managing suspensions. In a number of cases, we found the Council:
- had not informed the applicant of the suspension or how it could be removed;
  - is not always sensitive to an applicant's circumstances;
  - did not always record that it has extended the suspension or send a letter to inform the applicant; and

- did not actively manage the suspension to determine if new information was available.
- 4.15 Since our interim inspection, the Council has improved its reporting of information it collects on the ethnicity of both applicants and new tenants. However, it still does not know the ethnic origin of over half of its applicants or its recently housed tenants. This makes it difficult for the Council to demonstrate that it is providing equal access to its housing for all applicants.
- 4.16 In summary, West Dunbartonshire Council is fair at promoting access to its housing. It has improved its performance in some areas since our interim inspection, particularly in relation to the time it takes to process housing applications and in reducing the number of applicants it suspends. However, it still has weaknesses in how it manages suspensions and monitors ethnicity.

## Lettings

- 4.17 During the period April to December in 2009/10, the Council made 749 lets. This is broadly in line with the 1,073 lets it made throughout 2008/09.
- 4.18 The Council has reviewed its allocations policy and approved a new policy, it plans to introduce this in April 2010. The current allocation policy awards priority to non-need factors, such as living in flat points; under-occupation points; and waiting time points. In a significant number of our case reviews we found that the Council used these non-need factors to determine which applicant it selected. The current policy also restricts the number of areas an applicant can choose. The Council's planned new policy will address these weaknesses.
- 4.19 In our interim inspection we were critical of the Council for not having clear targets for the proportion of allocations it makes to each category of applicant. In response, the Council introduced letting targets for each group: 50% for homeless applicants; 27% for housing list applicants; 13% for transfers; and 10% for re-provisioning/regeneration. At the time of our inspection, the Council's pattern of lets was broadly in line with these targets. The Council regularly reports its performance in this area to its Housing, Environment and Economic Department Committee.

- 4.20 Following our interim inspection, the Council introduced an offer checklist for all its lets to housing list and transfer applicants. This is a good approach to help ensure that these lets are transparent. Although it uses the offer checklist we did find a number of cases where the Council bypassed applicants for not providing information. The Council introduced a manual audit of bypassing and delivered further training for its staff on this shortly before our re-inspection but it was too early for us to assess how well these were working.
- 4.21 The Council currently deals with homeless applicants outwith its allocations policy. It prioritises them and considers them first for all its lets. Whilst more than half of the Council's lets are to homeless applicants, the way in which it lets its properties to homeless people is not transparent and it has no method of quality control. These weaknesses mean that the Council cannot demonstrate that its approach is fair and that it is not bypassing applicants within this category. In response to our feedback during the inspection, the Council introduced a specific offer checklist for lets to homeless people, to improve its quality control of the process.
- 4.22 The Council has formal section 5 and nomination agreements with 13 of the 15 RSLs operating in the area and informal arrangements with the remaining two. Of the 56 nominations it made in the first half of this year, only 20 resulted in lets. The Council recognises that the low level of successful nominations is a weakness and that its nominations process does not work as well as its section 5 referral process. It plans to improve its performance in this area by discussing nominations in its regular meetings with RSLs.
- 4.23 In summary, the Council has made some improvements since our interim inspection and will introduce a new allocations policy to address the weaknesses of the current policy. However, it still needs to improve the transparency of its lettings process for homeless people and its approach to bypassing applicants.

### **Tenancies and neighbourhood management**

- 4.24 The provision of good information and access to support are important ways in which a landlord can help to manage and sustain tenancies. The Council

provides a comprehensive range of information to its tenants through its tenants' handbook, tenant newsletter, a range of new leaflets and through its website. Our Tenant Assessors found the tenants' handbook to be informative, helpful and easy to read.

- 4.25 West Dunbartonshire Council supports new and vulnerable tenants to sustain their tenancies and prevents homelessness in a number of ways. It uses a comprehensive tenancy sign-up process to give good quality information to new tenants. The Council aims to visit new tenants within four weeks of their tenancy starting to discuss a range of tenancy issues including its approach to rent arrears. It is currently reviewing its approach to new tenants visits to ensure they meet the needs of the tenant. The Council makes appropriate referrals to a wide number of internal partners to support tenants and plans to develop its system for monitoring its referrals.
- 4.26 The Council has a good approach to supporting new and vulnerable tenants to sustain their tenancies and prevent homelessness. It monitors tenancy sustainment through its Homeless Prevention and Tenancy Sustainment Working Group. The Council has a housing support team to provide vulnerable tenants with support to remain in their home. It has increased its focus on early and sustained contact with tenants in order to prevent rent arrears developing. Other initiatives it uses to help tenancy sustainment include:
- Fab Pad;
  - Life Skills Training Team;
  - Eviction Prevention Team; and
  - Young People and Money project.
- 4.27 The Council has used the short Scottish Secure Tenancy (SSST) on a number of occasions to sustain tenancies. The Council's use of SSSTs is consistent with the circumstances permitted in legislation. It granted 39 SSSTs with a support package to tenants found to be intentionally homeless after it had obtained a court order to recover possession for rent arrears. We saw that the Council's approach to managing SSSTs is good with evidence of support plans; regular reviews; and tenancies being converted to a secure tenancy.

- 4.28 In 2008/09, 9.8% of the Council's tenancies were terminated. This is a slight increase on the previous year and slightly higher than the national figure of 8.8%. The Council records and monitors tenancy sustainment and the reasons for terminations and has now begun to collect and analyse more detailed information on why people give up their tenancies. In 2008/09, 80% of new tenants were still in their homes 12 months after the tenancy started and this figure rose to 81% for the period up to December 2009.
- 4.29 The Council has clear and comprehensive procedures for staff to follow when dealing with abandoned properties and it had complied with these in all the cases we reviewed. In 2008/09, 121, or 1% of its tenants, abandoned their tenancies.
- 4.30 In 2008/09, the Council issued 553 Notice of Proceedings for Possession (NOPs), of which 471 were for rent arrears, 76 were for antisocial behaviour and 6 were for other reasons. By November 2009 the Council has issued 516 NOPs, of which 484 were for rent arrears, 26 for antisocial behaviour and 6 for other reasons. The Council told us the increase in number reflects its firmer approach to arrears management. The Council evicted one of its tenants in 2008/09 and this increased to two in 2009/10, although this is a decrease on 2007/08 when it evicted 28. The Council told us the decrease was due to it providing intensive support to tenants facing court action. The Council recognises the high cost and impact of evictions.
- 4.31 The Antisocial Behaviour etc. (Scotland) Act 2004, places a duty upon Local Authorities and Chief Constables to prepare a joint antisocial behaviour strategy. West Dunbartonshire Council's strategy, published in 2005, is available on its website. It sets out the Council's multi-agency approach to responding to incidents of antisocial behaviour (ASB) in its area. The Council is developing a new strategy and is currently undertaking a review of its Antisocial Behaviour Services. It will produce a new structure and service provision to fit with the new national Antisocial Behaviour Framework that promotes positive outcomes in terms of prevention, integration, engagement and communication. It carried out a review of the warden service to identify resident's views and priorities for improvement.

- 4.32 The Council has a joint policy on antisocial behaviour with nine RSLs operating in its area to ensure consistency of service and approach to all residents of West Dunbartonshire. It also developed a joint procedure with those RSLs and agreed targets to produce a better performance management framework. In January 2009, it established a monthly operational information-sharing forum with the police and the nine RSLs to tackle disorder across the communities. The RSLs told us they are satisfied with the Council's approach to partnership working in the management of ASB.
- 4.33 The Council has a good working relationship with the Police and its partners. It focuses on intervention and diversion, works with other agencies and has a dedicated diversionary activities officer. The Council is involved in the Whitecrook Public Reassurance Exercise, a multi-agency initiative, to implement problem solving techniques to tackle youth disorder and focus on diversionary activities. This is a good approach. It is also involved with Glasgow City Council in a joint initiative to tackle cross boundary gang fighting. Police have informed partners that there has been a 50% reduction in youth disorder in the area compared to the same period last year.
- 4.34 In 2008/09, the Council received 586 complaints of antisocial behaviour or neighbour nuisance. The Council uses a number of methods to tackle these, including mediation, and last year it referred 107 cases to the neighbour mediation service. The Council's preferred approach is Antisocial Behaviour Orders (ASBO) and in 2008/09, it obtained five ASBOs. The Council is developing procedures to manage SSSTs when an ASBO is in place. It also makes good use of a range of other techniques to manage antisocial behaviour.
- 4.35 The Council categorises neighbour complaints and gives associated response timescales to ensure there is a consistent approach to tackling antisocial behaviour across West Dunbartonshire. Tenants and RTOs we spoke to said they were dissatisfied with the way the Council handled some antisocial complaints. We saw that the Council responds to ASB complaints quickly and that it meets the timescales for actions in the majority of cases. However, we found that the Council does not always keep complainants informed as cases

progress, advise complainants of the outcomes of their case or offer support to victims. The Council has identified that it needs an ICT system that will support its work in this area and is aware that it needs to improve its communication and develop meaningful customer feedback.

- 4.36 The majority of the Council's estates are in good condition and well managed. Its caretaking services play a key role in ensuring estates are clean and in good condition. Our Tenant Assessors commented favourably on the standard of the Council's estates they visited. The Council has a good range of approaches to maintaining its estates and has piloted new initiatives including close cleaning in response to tenants' and residents' feedback.
- 4.37 The Council has a policy for the management of its estates. The frequency of inspections is determined through its estate audit process and is based on the environmental and social issues affecting each house. The Council regularly inspects the condition of its estates although there is no consistent approach to how the estate audit is carried out. The Council recognises there are limitations within its ICT system to monitor progress on estate inspections and maintain complete audit trails.
- 4.38 The Council is developing local action and estate management plans in conjunction with local tenants and residents. It continues to review and re-shape its priorities to support its area action planning. Responses to the planning process have been low and to stimulate greater resident involvement the Council is developing a Communications Strategy. This will set out how it will involve tenants and residents in its consultation and participation processes.
- 4.39 In summary, the Council provides a comprehensive range of information and works well to identify and respond to the support needs of vulnerable tenants to sustain tenancies. Its estates are generally in good condition and it is developing a partnership approach with local communities. The Council has a good multi-agency approach for dealing with antisocial behaviour although it needs to improve its communications with complainants and ensure it offers support to victims.



## Income maximisation

4.40 The Council provides a wide range of ways for tenants to pay their rent, including using its website and automated telephone line. It issues a rent statement to its tenants every three months to ensure that they have clear and accurate information relating to their rent account.

4.41 The table below summarises the Council's reported performance in collecting rent.

	2006/07		2007/08		2008/09	
	Council	National	Council	National	Council	National
Current tenant arrears as % of net rent due	12.7%	6.7%	11.9%	6.0%	10.6%	6.1%
% of current tenants in serious arrears	5.8%	4.4%	5.4%	4.2%	4.5%	4.4%
Total former tenant arrears (£)	£1,067,750	n/a	£1,269,320	n/a	£1,303,913	n/a
Rent arrears written off (£)	£197,996	n/a	£47,189	n/a	£312,227	n/a

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

4.42 The Council's published performance in collecting its tenants' rent is poor although it has shown a consistent improvement over the last three years. In 2007/08, it was the second poorest performing Scottish local authority. In 2008/09 its performance improved slightly and it has moved up to be the third poorest performing local authority in Scotland. The Council has set a target of 9% for current arrears for 2009/10. At December 2009, its performance had improved to 10%. It is aware that this remains an area of significant weakness.

4.43 In 2007/08, the proportion of Council tenants in serious arrears was 5.4%, compared to the national figure of 4.2%. West Dunbartonshire was ranked the sixth worst performing local authority in Scotland. Its performance in 2008/09 improved to 4.5%, just above the national figure of 4.4% and improved its ranking to 14<sup>th</sup> position out of 26 Councils. At the time of our inspection, it was reporting improved performance of 4.4%.

- 4.44 The Council continues to have a high and increasing level of former tenant arrears. The Council's policy is to confirm final balances to outgoing tenants however we found it does not always do this. It has recently developed a procedure for the collection of former tenants' rent arrears, agreed a debt write off policy and after its restructuring will include a dedicated post within the arrears team to help it to improve its management of these.
- 4.45 The Council has changed its rent arrears management system to the Corporate Arrears Recovery system (CARs). This will enable it to: overcome existing ICT problems; deliver a consistent approach to debt recovery; and maintain accurate records on tenants' debt. It achieved the transfer of tenant arrears to the new system on target in February 2010. The Council is reviewing its procedures for rent arrears management during 2010 to ensure these fit with the Council's new Corporate Debt Policy.
- 4.46 The Council has focused on preventing new tenants getting into arrears by making improvements in the sign up process to prevent arrears at the start of the tenancy and encourages tenants to pay one week in advance. It targets vulnerable tenants and has developed a monitoring procedure to highlight at an early stage when new tenancies fall into arrears.
- 4.47 The Council recently carried out a review of its arrears service. It now has a service level agreement between Housing Services and the Corporate Services Department and is restructuring the revenues and benefits section. It has introduced targets for staff together with a more robust monitoring and quality control framework. The Council now uses a range of measures that reflect current good practice to tackle its poor performance, including:
- fast track procedure with the Housing Benefit Section;
  - interim housing benefit calculations available on line for officers;
  - referral procedures in place for Tenancy Support and welfare rights advice;
  - specific free phone number for arrears enquires; and
  - targeted campaigns and publicity to help promote a payment culture.

- 4.48 Although the Council's management of arrears is improving it still has some weaknesses that continue to affect its performance. The Council:
- makes limited attempts to communicate with tenants in person;
  - fails to intervene quickly and is not proactive about collecting missed payment arrangements;
  - has gaps in its information about its management of individual cases; and
  - issues standard letters that do not have a customer focus as they concentrate on enforcement and do not encourage tenants to make contact with the Council.

The Council acknowledged the areas for improvement and will consider these as part of the planned review of its Corporate Debt Policy.

- 4.49 The table below summarises the Council's reported performance in letting houses that have become empty.

	2006/07		2007/08		2008/09	
	Council	National	Council	National	Council	National
Turnover (no. of new vacancies as % of total dwellings)	5.0%	3.0%	5.5%	2.8%	6.2%	2.8%
Total no. of relets	1324	30,022	961	26,881	987	24,737
Average time (days) to relet houses that are not low demand	56	51	43	44	39	41
% of total annual rental due lost due to voids	5.2%	2.0%	4.7%	1.6%	3.4%	1.4%

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

- 4.50 In 2007/08, the Council lost 4.7% of its total rental income because of empty houses, which is significantly higher than the national figure of 1.6%. In 2008/09, the Council reduced this to 3.4% but this is still higher than the national figure of 1.4% and it remains the poorest performing Scottish local authority. The Council has continued to improve its performance and at December 2009, it was reporting 2.8%.

- 4.51 Since 2006/07, the Council has improved its performance in the time it takes to let empty houses that were not low demand. It reported it took an average of 56 days in 2006/07 and this reduced to an average of 39 days in 2008/09 which is better than the national figure of 41 days.
- 4.52 The Council developed an empty homes action plan to help it improve its performance in letting empty houses. It is continuing to use the initiatives in the action plan, including:
- setting targets for annual rent lost due to empty homes and for each stage of the relet process;
  - establishing an Empty Homes Strategic Framework that enables it to identify and remove surplus housing stock from the lettings pool;
  - agreeing an empty house management procedure; and
  - developing a welcome leaflet and welcome pack for new tenants.
- 4.53 The Council continues to embed a more co-ordinated approach between the departments controlling the letting of its empty houses to help it to reduce the time taken to complete repairs in empty houses. It began a pilot that introduced a new approach to working with the Repairs division including a shorter target for them to carry out work on empty houses. It plans to monitor this on a monthly basis and review the target next year. The Council has also reviewed the relet standard in empty houses after consulting with its RTOs and it makes this available to prospective tenants at the accompanied viewing.
- 4.54 We found the Council has an underdeveloped monitoring system for managing the relet process at an operational level. Although the Council introduced a policy to assist it to manage empty houses during the inspection it was too early for us to assess the impact of the policy.
- 4.55 In summary, the Council's performance in income maximisation has improved but remains poor. It remains one of the poorest performing Scottish Councils and continues to lose significant revenue. However, since our last inspection, the Council has prioritised its improvement of income maximisation and has introduced a number of measures. Its performance is showing a trend of improvement.

## 5. Is the housing service at West Dunbartonshire Council managed for improvement?

### Leadership and strategic planning

- 5.1 The Council agreed its Single Outcome Agreement in June 2008 with the Scottish Government and worked to refine this with its community planning partners to produce the 2009/11 Single Outcome Agreement. The Council has broadly aligned its strategic objectives between the Community Plan (2007/2017), its Corporate Plan (2009/2013) and the Single Outcome Agreement.
- 5.2 The Best Value progress report of July 2009 highlighted that the Council had made limited progress with the recommendations arising from the previous best value audit and follow-up reports. It said there had been limited progress in continuing to develop member/officer relationships, establishing arrangements to demonstrate the competitiveness of services and improving community engagement. The report was critical of the pace of change at the Council. Our interim inspection report also criticised the pace of change at the Council and said the Council would have to develop capacity if it was committed to improving its performance by the time of the re-inspection.
- 5.3 Within the housing service we found the leadership had increased the pace of change in the last year and the Council is now fully focussed on improvement. The Council is now aware of its strengths and weaknesses and is using this knowledge to inform its improvement programme. The Council responded to our previous criticism about capacity to improve and tackled this in a number of ways including: appointing temporary and permanent staff; using external consultants; and extensive use of peer reviews and support from other local authorities. The Council also has proposals for a training programme for its staff for the next few months and will consult with its staff on the content of a longer-term training programme. The Council has made good progress with developing a culture of improvement within the housing service and senior managers now ensure they are more visible and accessible. The Council delivered a briefing on the new service plan to all staff in housing services and gave them an opportunity to discuss it with senior staff.

- 5.4 The Council recognises it needs to work in partnership to deliver its objectives and we found a positive attitude to this among the elected members and the managers in the housing service. Most of the external partners we spoke to acknowledged that the Council had improved its approach to partnership working in the past year but most pointed out that this needed to be embedded into the Council's partnership structures.
- 5.5 The Council has a number of strategies in place around making best use of its assets. Critically it now has a good understanding of its stock and the future needs and demand for stock. The Council has a better basis for making the key strategic decision on stock management, achieving the Scottish Housing Quality Standard (SHQS) and on its proposals for partial stock transfer. It brought in external resources to help it develop its plans, has recently appointed a senior staff member to implement these and is tendering for a consultant to lead on its proposed stock transfer. The Council is aware there are a number of risks associated with its asset management proposals particularly around costs, timescales and the stock transfer and that these will need careful management. The Council has not yet carried out scenario planning to test its options but it has plans to do so.

### **Performance management, planning and reporting**

- 5.6 At our interim inspection we found the Council had recently introduced a new performance management framework using the Covalent risk and performance management system with performance managed at a corporate and service level. We saw that the Council had begun to train staff to use the system but that it had still to refine its reporting process and that the system did not include benchmarking information. In the housing management service we found the performance management system was a significant weakness with no routine target setting or benchmarking. The Best Value progress report of July 2009 noted that the Council had made some progress in revising its performance management framework. The report says this now demonstrates some strengths at a corporate level, although there is a need to improve the consistency of departmental and service planning.

- 5.7 During this re-inspection we found the Council has been working to improve its performance management and to fully utilise the Covalent system. The Council has provided training in Covalent for its elected members and managers. A performance management framework is in place for the Council and for the housing service. In the housing service the Council established the Housing Performance Improvement Board to strengthen the scrutiny of performance. The Board involves senior staff from key posts from across the Council. The Council has raised the profile of performance management through this Board and the Member Officer Working Group. The Council recently developed the format for the top-level performance reports within housing. It plans to develop this further to include more measures to help it manage performance. These performance reports cover the key service areas, include an explanatory narrative, easy to follow traffic lights system, show trends and will include benchmarking. This is a positive development. Elected members feel they now have improved performance information and that the Member Officer Group in addition to the Housing, Environment and Economic Department Committee allows them greater opportunities to monitor performance and scrutinise improvement within the service.
- 5.8 The Council has yet to roll out the Personal Development Plan system and link this to performance targets for staff although it plans to introduce this by March 2010. We found some staff we spoke to understood their targets however the Council does not have a co-ordinated approach to communicating performance information to front line staff. To date the Council has only trained senior staff on Covalent although it plans to roll this out in the medium term. The Council does publish its performance information on its website but our tenant assessors found the reports difficult to read. The Council is considering how best to communicate this information to tenants. The Council does not have a strategy for communicating performance information to its tenants, but it does report some information on performance and progress in the tenants' newsletter Housing Matters.

## Customer focus and influence

- 5.9 In our 2003/04 inspection we made a number of recommendations on customer focus and influence and measured the Council's progress during our interim inspection in 2008. In 2008 we found the Council had made poor progress against the recommendations and aspects of this part of the service had deteriorated. During this re-inspection we found the Council had taken some steps to improve its customer focus, but a number of significant weaknesses remain including its work with tenants and management of complaints.
- 5.10 The Council agreed its current service standards in 2005 and it publicises these through its website, leaflets and posters and at the point of contact. The Council does not monitor its performance against the majority of its service standards although it does monitor and report on telephone response times. The Council acknowledges it needs to review its current service standards and told us it aims to fully monitor and publicly report on service standards within two years.
- 5.11 The Council has undertaken an accessibility audit of all its offices, identified where it needed to make alterations and has begun improve accessibility where it can. It uses Language Line for people whose first language is not English and we saw that it publicised this in its offices.
- 5.12 The Housing (Scotland) Act 2001 requires the Council to publish a tenant participation strategy. The Act also requires landlords to inform and consult tenants about changes to its services and take tenants' views into account when making decisions that will affect them.
- 5.13 During our interim inspection in 2008 we found the Council was less committed to tenant participation than during our 2003/04 inspection. The Council had not reviewed its tenant participation strategy, no longer had a dedicated tenant participation team and did not mainstream tenant participation throughout its service. Since our interim inspection the Council has developed and improved its approach to tenant participation. It updated its tenant participation strategy and produced an action plan from this with tenants. As part of this the Council plans to measure the extent of tenant participation in its area. It now has regular



meetings with the forum of tenants groups. It has used the Tenants Information Service (TIS) since April 2008 to support tenants and help it to develop tenant participation. The Council recently agreed to continue to use TIS for 2010/11. To increase its capacity it recently appointed a tenant participation officer to work with tenants and residents groups in its area.

5.14 The Council has consulted with tenants' groups on the key policy and procedural changes for the service in the last few months. For one of the more complex consultations on the Council's rent remodelling proposals it took a different approach. In addition to its existing engagement approaches it used an independent firm to talk to 400 tenants to give details of the issue and get tenants' feedback on the proposals. The Council told us it plans to talk to the tenants' forum early in 2010 about how they would like to receive financial information. This is positive as tenants raised this as a subject they wanted better information on. The Council plans to increase capacity and awareness among its housing staff by organising training on tenant participation within two years for all staff.

5.15 The Council has been working in recent months to re-establish its tenant participation structures and is aware it needs to rebuild trust with the tenants' organisations. It has been doing this while it needed to make a number of significant changes to the service including a new allocations policy and rent remodelling. Tenants and RTOs acknowledged that the Council's approach has improved over the last year and that they have been consulted on the key issues for the housing service. However, tenants' groups that we spoke to told us that the Council is not managing the process of engaging with tenants well. They told us:

- they could not always see evidence that their response to consultations had been taken into account;
- the Council allowed inadequate time for some consultations;
- the Council did not issue papers sufficiently far in advance to allow tenants to review the contents and to allow them to prepare;
- the Council did not give sufficient notice for some meetings; and
- the Council did not allow time for the tenant representatives to consult with their associations.

- 5.16 The Council is conducting a number of consultations with the aim of improving its service and plans to use its performance management system Covalent to co-ordinate actions and monitor its progress. Following on from all consultations the officer responsible for the consultation produces a report on the actions to be taken to ensure the Council takes appropriate action following consultation.
- 5.17 In our interim inspection we said that the Council still did not have a systematic approach to dealing with housing complaints. In this re-inspection we found the Council has made limited progress. The Council operates a number of systems or databases to record complaints and since July 2009 has also been recording informal complaints. However its procedures are not clear, staff are unsure of the difference between a complaint and an inquiry and are at times not sure what system to use. From the complaints we looked at we saw that the Council accepts all forms of contact and it generally responds within the target timescales. We found some weaknesses in the complaints process. The Council:
- does not always detail appeals information in responses;
  - does not use its ethnic monitoring information;
  - has incomplete records; and
  - does not correctly record some complaints that should be corporate complaints.

The Council monitors complaints and reports on this to the housing management team however the lack of integration in the systems and the weaknesses in recording limits the usefulness of the reports. The Council's current information on complaints presents it with a challenge to use complaints to develop and improve the service.

### **Equalities and diversity**

- 5.18 The Council has recently moved to a single equality scheme and is about to publish this on the website. The Council has extended the training for staff on Equalities Impact Assessment and it has included most managers and section heads. The Council has used Equalities Impact Assessment for all major new policies in the last year including the new allocations policy, the tenant participation strategy, homelessness strategy and the Strategic Housing

Investment Plan (SHIP). The Council has an Equality and Diversity working group to facilitate awareness of the Council's equalities priorities at a departmental level.

- 5.19 It is positive that the Council has carried out Equalities Impact Assessment on key policies and that it has conducted extensive consultation with specific groups on the allocations policy. However we found limited other examples of it using equalities data to develop the service. The Council plans to introduce a monitoring scorecard for the Council's key objectives in this area and the housing measures will be allocations, homelessness and adapted stock. It also plans to develop the impact assessment to include it in its Covalent performance management system.

### **Efficiency and value for money**

- 5.20 The Best Value audit report in 2009 said the Council had made some progress in its approach to financial planning but that the framework had only recently been developed. Following the 2009/10 budget setting process the Council proposed a robust financial framework to provide the basis for long term financial planning, including strategic policy decisions. It is too early to report on progress with this. The Council's report on its best value improvement plan recognises that its approaches to competitiveness and options appraisal are still an early stage.
- 5.21 In the housing management service we found the Council had made some progress. It is starting to consider efficiencies and is focusing on the operational parts of the service. It has developed processes to increase its efficiency in its management of arrears and empty houses. The Council now links financial planning to its Business Plan and its new service plan process helps it to plan its activities. The Council has more robust asset management information and is now able to make strategic decisions on this with a fuller understanding of the financial implications, although the Council is aware it has yet to carry out full scenario planning on the financial risks.

## 6. Next Steps

6.1 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, asset management and repairs service or homelessness service to submit an improvement plan to us within eight weeks of the publication of this report.

6.2 West Dunbartonshire Council's improvement plan should show how it intends to respond to our findings in housing management. The plan will be agreed with us. We follow up improvement plans at regular intervals.

6.3 If you would like to see the West Dunbartonshire Council's improvement plans you should contact the Council by:

**Telephone:** 01389 737 000

**Email:** [heed@west-dunbarton.gov.uk](mailto:heed@west-dunbarton.gov.uk)

**Website:** [www.west-dunbarton.gov.uk](http://www.west-dunbarton.gov.uk)

## Sources of evidence

### Groups and third parties consulted

- Tenants' and Residents groups
- Scottish Government – Housing and Regeneration Team
- Scottish Public Service Ombudsman
- Local Registered Social Landlords

### Interviews/Meetings

- Elected Members
- Chief Executive
- Executive Director of Housing, Environmental and Economic Development
- Head of Housing and Regeneration
- Corporate Performance Manager
- Internal Auditor
- Staff from Housing Services

### Reality checks

- Observation of information and advice to service users
- Shadowing of allocations
- Shadowing of tenancy sign up interview
- Shadowing of an accompanied viewing
- Review of short SST's
- Review of housing list applications and allocations
- Review of information for applicants and tenants
- Review of complaints
- Review of antisocial behaviour cases
- Review of arrears cases
- Review of legal actions against tenants
- Estate visits

### Key documents reviewed

- West Dunbartonshire Council's Inspection Submission
- Housing management performance reports
- Relevant policy and procedures
- Minutes of meetings and associated reports
- Tenants' newsletters and other publicity material
- Council's website
- Outcome reports for housing management
- Protocols with other agencies
- Local Housing Strategy
- Scottish Housing Quality Standard Delivery Plan
- Single Outcome Agreement
- Community Plan
- Corporate Plan
- Service Plan
- Corporate Procurement Strategy
- Remedial Plan and quarterly reports

### Examples of Positive Practice

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

#### Challenge panel

- West Dunbartonshire Council established a challenge panel to help it to strengthen its approach to self assessment and develop its improvement plans. The Council used the challenge panel to test its self assessment of each area of service against Performance Standards. The Head of Housing and Regeneration chaired the panel and brought in external expertise including consultants and the Head of Service from another Council.

#### Joint policy and partnership on antisocial behaviour

- West Dunbartonshire Council has developed a joint policy on antisocial behaviour in partnership with nine local Registered Social Landlords. The Council and its partners aim to ensure a consistent approach and level of service to all tenants and residents of West Dunbartonshire. It also developed a joint procedure with those RSLs and agreed targets to produce a rigorous performance management framework. The Council established a monthly operational information-sharing forum with the police and the nine RSLs to tackle disorder across the communities.

## Glossary

<b>CFCR</b>	Capital funded from current revenue
<b>Common housing register (CHR)</b>	A register of all applicants for social housing used by two or more landlords within an area.
<b>HomePoint</b>	<p>A team within the Scottish Government that supports providers of housing information and advice services.</p> <p>HomePoint has broken down advice activities into three types:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Type I active information, sign-posting and explanation.</li><li>• Type II casework.</li><li>• Type III advocacy, representation and mediation.</li></ul>
<b>Housing list</b>	A list of applicants for housing that is used by the local authority to allocate its housing stock.
<b>Housing Revenue Account (HRA)</b>	The budget a local authority has from rental income for managing and maintaining its houses and housing services.
<b>ICT system</b>	Information and communication system.
<b>Notice of Proceedings (NOP)</b>	The formal notice provided to tenants informing them that their landlord is taking legal proceedings to seek a court order for recovery of possession of a property.
<b>Registered social landlord (RSL)</b>	A landlord providing social rented housing that is registered and regulated by the Scottish Housing Regulator.
<b>Registered Tenant Organisation (RTO)</b>	A tenant-representative group meeting certain conditions set down in the Housing (Scotland) Act 2001 and registered with a social landlord.
<b>Scottish Housing Quality Standard (SHQS)</b>	A minimum quality standard for all of Scotland's social homes. Landlords should achieve the standard by 2015.
<b>Scottish secure tenancy (SST)</b>	The Housing (Scotland) Act 2001 establishes the Scottish Secure Tenancy as the tenancy for all tenants of social landlords in Scotland.
<b>Short Scottish secure tenancy (SSST)</b>	Section 34 and schedule 6 of the Housing (Scotland) Act 2001 establish the basic conditions when a short Scottish secure tenancy can apply to some tenants of social landlords in Scotland in place of a full SST.

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



## About the Scottish Housing Regulator

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

We operate independently and impartially, while remaining accountable to Scottish Ministers for the standard of our work and for inspecting and reporting within the overall context of Scottish Ministers' strategic objectives for the social housing sector and tackling homelessness. A code of practice sets out what Ministers expect from us in delegating their regulatory powers to us.

Our independence is further safeguarded by a Regulation Board that supports the Chief Executive to manage and direct the organisation.

Our purpose is to:

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

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

[www.scottishhousingregulator.gov.uk](http://www.scottishhousingregulator.gov.uk)

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