

HOUSING INSPECTORATE - SELF-ASSESSMENT PRO-FORMA



Name of organisation:	South Derbyshire
Title of Inspection	Housing Repairs & Maintenance
Date:	12 th April 2005

Section 1 – Setting the Scene

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Demographic and Community Context

South Derbyshire is located between Derby City and Burton on Trent, and borders with North West Leicestershire and East Staffordshire Councils. The historical economic background of the area is one of semi-urban coal mining and rural farming. In the last twenty years the mines have disappeared and the farming is now mixed with highly sought after and expensive rural housing. Although parts of the area struggled in the eighties and early nineties to recover from the mining closures new industries have been attracted and, most notably, the area is home to Toyota UK.

The district covers an area of 340 square kilometres of which 95% is rural, and has a population of nearly 81,600 (2001 Census). There are 50 parishes embracing numerous rural villages and settlements, and the main administrative and commercial centre for the district is Swadlincote, with a population of 32,000. This rural/urban contrast remains one of the challenges to the Council for the equitable delivery of services to its residents.

For almost three decades, South Derbyshire has been the fastest growing district in the county. The population increased by over 12.6% between 1999 and 2001, compared with 2.6% for the country, and most of this growth can be attributed to the major new developments in Swadlincote, on the fringes of Derby and at Hilton. Since 1981 nearly 11,000 additional dwellings have been constructed in the district, which is 31% of the present housing stock.

The population structure in 2001 (as per Census) was similar to the national average but with a marginally higher proportion of people of school age and working age with a corresponding lower number of retirement age. About 21% of the population are in pre-school/school age groups, 65% are of working age and 14% are retired. The average household size at 2.43 was slightly higher than the national average of 2.36. In 2001 nearly 3% of the population was classified as non-white (the national average being 9%), of which approximately half were of Asian origin, and is the highest percentage in Derbyshire outside of the city of Derby. The largest proportion of the BME population resides in one ward on the Derby City boundary where there is a substantial, growing Sikh community. There is no Council housing in that ward.

As at January 2004, South Derbyshire had an unemployment rate of 1.9% compared with 3.5% nationally. However, areas in and around Swadlincote (former coalfield area) still had rates much closer to the national average and these pockets of deprivation remain to be addressed. The index of deprivation indicates that the district is ranked 216 out of 354 (where 1 is the most deprived) with none of its wards in the top 10% most deprived nationally. This however, masks local variations with some of the former coalfield wards such as Newhall, Hartshorne and Swadlincote in the top 25%.

Home ownership, at nearly 80%, is the highest in Derbyshire and well above the regional and national averages. Presently around 1,148 of the total number of properties are considered to be unfit, thus requiring full implementation of the Council's Private Sector Housing Renewal Strategy. The Council retains nearly 10% of the total housing stock in the District, approximately 3,235 homes, most of which were constructed in the 1950's and 1960's, with

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approximately one third being sheltered accommodation. The Council is steadily losing its stock under Right to Buy, with sales currently in the region of 80-90 per year.

Governance, tenant involvement and decision making structures

The District of South Derbyshire has 36 Members representing 17 wards, and whole Council elections are held every four years. At the May 2003 elections, 21 Members of the Labour Party and 15 Members of the Conservative Party were returned. The Council adopted new structures in May 2002 and these are based on a streamlined committee system, the option preferred by the community and other stakeholders. The Council has 3 Policy Committees, Finance & Management, Environmental & Development Services and Housing & Community Services. The Council also has 2 Committees that carry out a number of Regulatory functions, including dealing with planning applications (the Development Control Committee), licensing and other regulatory business, (the Licensing & Appeals Committee). There are 3 Overview and Scrutiny Committees which support the work of the Policy Committees and the Council as a whole. Overview and Scrutiny committees also monitor the decisions of the Policy Committees. They can 'Call-In' a decision that has been made by a Policy Committee but not yet implemented. In order to give local citizens a greater say in Council affairs there are regular Area Meetings in each of the six County Council Electoral Divisions of Etwall, Linton, Melbourne, Newhall, Repton and Swadlincote. These are consultative Committees that can make recommendations to Policy Committees. As part of the new arrangements a Standards Committee was established to oversee the conduct of councillors and parish councillors.

Following consultation the Council launched its Tenant Compact in 2002, which is now currently under review. Being a mix of semi-urban and rural areas there is a mixed approach to tenant participation in the District in that a number of areas are too small to support tenant groups and therefore the participation structure is primarily based on a Tenant's Voice model (area representatives) although several parts of the District are able to support some group activity. This mixed structure is then brought together in a District wide body that has now been existence for 5 years, known as TACT (Tenant Advisory and Consultation Team). TACT has been involved in many activities over the five years, has had equal representation with members on the Option Appraisal working group, currently has equal representation on the Housing Business Plan working group and all reports put before the Housing and Community Services Committee have a TACT section detailing their view alongwith any recommendations. Tenant involvement is a priority for the Service as a whole but we also have a dedicated officer to work exclusively on tenant involvement. The Housing Service produces four tenant newsletters a year. Two of these are dedicated to and aimed at our sizeable proportion of sheltered housing tenants – just under a third of the total. Other parts of our involvement process include an annual series of area tenant meetings each Spring where we take the service into a locality delivering presentations on key areas of service delivery, inviting and seeking feedback and, thereby, continued involvement. At these meetings we also provide repair and general housing 'surgery' desks. This year the emphasis has been getting tenants more involved with Repairs and Improvement issues.

Financial resources, including levels of reserves

For 2005/6 the HRA is projected to turnover £8.64M of which negative subsidy is the largest 'spend' area projected at £3.81M. The MRA for 2005/6 is

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projected at £1.76M. Combining this figure with revenue expenditure on repairs and improvements gives an overall spend of £4.49M in that area. Of that approximately £800k or 18% is spent on responsive and void repair work through the small in-house DLO team. Most of the work is delivered through contractors in a mixed procurement model with a clear emphasis on partnering. The Council exceeds the good practice split on capital/planned work v responsive with proportions at approximately 65:35. In setting the budget in February 2005 for the current year the Policy Committee was informed that Housing Revenue Account balances are projected to remain healthy until 2008/9 after which they will fall below the minimum level of £500,000 and will be negative by March 2011. At April 2005 HRA reserves stand at approx. £1.27M. Under debt free rules the Council is allowed to keep greater proportions of the proceeds of asset sales and recently has committed £1M of this to the HRA. A further recent additional decision means that the HRA will also benefit by a further £400,000 injection this year for environmental work and displaced funding for adaptations work. The Council completed its Option Appraisal process in October 2004 and decided to retain the stock at that time although the position is to be revisited at the August 2005 Housing and Community Service Committee.

The Council and Housing Service Structure

The Council has 349 employees and its structure is one of a small senior management team of strategic directors (4 including the Chief Executive) and a second tier management team of 9 Heads of Service. The whole Council achieved Investor in People status in 2003. The Council has made good progress in implementing the e-government agenda and is projected to exceed target and have 92% of services available under BVPI 157 by April 2005. This achievement coincides with the relaunch of the council's website in April/May this year.

The Director of Community Services is responsible for all frontline services (with the exception of Planning). Within that Directorate the Head of Housing leads a service with 85 employees on establishment but being a small Council, particularly without a separate technical service, is responsible for more than just HRA and traditional housing functions. Indeed benchmarked with other authorities of a similar size and nature we are a low cost housing service. Over the last year the Housing Service has emerged from a period of instability in that prior to the appointment of the current Head of Service in July 03 the post had been vacant for two years. Combined with a number of other key vacancies this left the service without appropriate leadership and direction. Within the Repairs and Improvement section of the service a restructuring took place in 2004 and currently there are only two outstanding appointments to be made. The Housing Service delivers its major and responsive repair and improvement work through the Repairs and Improvement Section which incorporates quantity surveying and project management functions, through a combination of partnered, negotiated and tendered contracts, to emergency and other minor works delivered through the in-house repair ordering and small DLO team. All major works are delivered by external partners including electrical and gas servicing work.

In 2004 the traditional client and contractor functions within the repair ordering and delivery functions were brought together with the aim of simplifying functions and providing cover and better value for money in what is a small team.

The Housing Service is open about both its successes and failings being the only service that reports regularly (quarterly) on performance through Committee and TACT. In the period from November 2004 to April 2005 all of the Housing software systems were renewed and upgraded to Orchard enabling our service to develop more readily in the future. This major computer project was delivered on time and on budget despite limitations on resources.

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The Service can also demonstrate learning having improved its Decent Homes planning and completed its Option Appraisal process since the last Comprehensive Performance Assessment in early 2004.

The last element of the Service to be subject to Audit Commission inspection was Sheltered Housing and that area has since made such significant strides forward in terms of reorganisation, the establishment of vision and setting of standards so much so that it is now being referred to and recommended as good practice by the local Government office.

Decent Homes

Meeting the Decent Homes standard is a Corporate priority of the Council. In February 2003 Members agreed to the introduction of a new improvement programme to ensure that at least one third of the non-decent stock met the Decent Homes Standard by 2004, then 50% by 2006, with the remainder of the stock reaching the standard by 2010. In fact the Council is projecting that the Decent Homes standard will be met in 2008/9, well ahead of the Government's target.

Customer profile and satisfaction

A full customer survey undertaken during March 2004, of which there was a 45% return rate, showed a general picture of a very stable tenant group, three quarters of whom have lived in their current homes for more than a decade. The results also presented an impression of a sizeable solitary, older and often frail group of people who are strongly reliant upon statutory financial support and who hold understandable but overstated worries about crime and disorder. These findings contributed to our development work on progressing and promoting new and innovative technologies, known as Telecare, to enable this particular client group to remain in their homes for as long as possible.

Nearly 52% of respondents to the survey were over 65 years of age, a statistic that reflects the prevalence of sheltered housing within the housing stock, and consequently there is some disproportionate representation of the experience and expectations of retired persons in the findings. Data indicates approximately 37% of all tenants are over the age of 65 years, whilst in South Derbyshire as a whole retired persons comprise 14.5% of the total population (2001 Census). Nearly 54% of respondents live alone and eight out of ten of these are over 60 years old. Almost 66% of respondents declared some recurrent illness and reduced mobility, and 12% of households surveyed contain a wheelchair user. Eighty-three percent of respondents were 'satisfied' with the repair service provided by the council with a notable 45.5% stating they were 'very satisfied'. The highest levels of dissatisfaction with repairs seem to fall in the areas of appointment keeping (11% rated poor or worse) and speed of response (12% rated poor or worse). Repair staff are perceived extremely well by the public in their daily interactions with them, with 93.5% of respondents expressing satisfaction.

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Section 2 – Service Areas

Access and Customer Care

Strengths

The Corporate Plan has a strong community focus and we are currently finalising the South Derbyshire Local Strategic Partnership Community Strategy with our stakeholders and service users. We have recognised our achievements and failings in the past few years and identified areas for improvement within the Corporate Plan 2004-7. The South Derbyshire Citizens' Panel is in place and is utilised for specific consultation.

Individual tenants, tenant groups and TACT (district wide Tenant Advisory and Consultation Team) have been fully involved in the development of housing related policies in particular the Housing Strategy, the Optional Appraisal work, the Homeless Strategy and, with reference to this inspection, the Repair Policy. This latter draft policy was covered in detail in our Tenant newsletter, was the subject of a presentation to a series of 8 area tenant meetings and was discussed in detail by TACT. Only after all that consultation was the policy formally adopted in 2004. The policy includes detail of repair priorities and standards.

An established Customer Charter sets standards across the whole service and Customer Care is fundamental to what we do with dedicated specific customer care refresher training being undertaken by all Housing staff in the last four months. The Housing Service seeks to take a pro-active approach to new methods of service delivery and in 2004 piloted specific housing surgeries for young people in the local Connexions office. Similarly 'village' housing surgeries have also been operated in the more rural parts of the District.

In March 2004 the Council carried out its three year survey of all tenants and on a return rate of 45% there was an overall satisfaction rate of 86% and 93.5% satisfied with the daily interaction with repairs staff. Other customer care initiatives include name/service badges for all housing staff and readily identifiable uniforms for DLO staff. On a corporate level the Council is in 2005 to introduce a new Customer Relationship Management (CRM) system and to revamp the whole of the ground floor reception area to provide a more accessible and welcoming environment. Although 92% of services can be accessed via that route the current website cannot meet the requirements in full of our customers and therefore on a Corporate level it is being totally renewed and upgraded in the next few weeks. The Housing Service has volunteered to be the first service to take on the service specific development work involved in that process.

As part of the restructuring in the Repairs and Improvement section in 2004 the traditional client and contractor admin' functions were merged to form one dedicated team. The team were relocated to a new office provision alongside the DLO operation and were united under one dedicated management and Council. In benefits of this move are already being felt in customer service in that repairs are now being arranged via one interaction between customer and Council. In effect we now have a dedicated repairs centre dealing with all responsive repair business and all telephone customer interface on repairs. This merging has also coincided with the introduction of new IT software across the whole housing service which enables us, amongst many other things, to give repair appointments for the first time. Once the dedicated repair admin' team have gone off duty the Housing Service's sheltered housing control room (CareLine) picks up all emergency calls for the whole council including housing repairs.

There are a number of other physical access improvements that the Council has undertaken in recent months and years including in 2004/5 £100k resources being identified to improve disabled persons' access to public buildings.

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Access and Customer Care
Strengths continued

There is a well developed structure of tenant participation within the District focussed on the role of the TACT team as detailed in section 1 of this assessment. Over the five years of its existence the strength of the team in terms of the number of informed active participants has varied but it is pleasing to see that there is currently a renewed interest from tenants to getting involved. The TACT team had equal representation to elected members on the 2004 Option Appraisal Steering group and we are seeking to mirror the success of that process in the current Housing Business Plan working group where equal representation levels exist. TACT have a formal input into all reports to the Housing policy committee.

The Housing Service produces four tenant newsletters a year, two of which are directed specifically our sheltered housing tenants.

New tenants of the Council receive a 'Welcome pack' of information and also get a follow up visit nine months into the tenancy to identify any problems or outstanding issues. The Service utilises the Corporate Complaints Procedure

Access and Customer Care
Areas for development

At the time of writing, in consultation with TACT, we are reviewing our Tenant Compact. Additionally we started a review of all our customer literature in 2004 and have new leaflets for the core areas of sheltered housing, allocations and repairs. We have a programme of updating additional leaflets throughout this current year.

We have recognised a weakness in the lack of provision of appointments for repairs and with the aid of our new computer software, introduced in February 2005, are able to pilot repair appointments for the first time currently. Our commitment to make this work is supported by our proposal to introduce a compensation scheme for missed appointments.

The physical limitations of our Housing reception have been recognised and we are fully supportive of the Corporate initiative in 2005 to unify the reception areas in the Civic Offices into one new purpose built generic area.

As an identified priority of TACT we are also keen to introduce a freephone repair service.

Section 2 – Service Areas**Maximum of twenty A4 pages****Diversity
Strengths**

The Council has appointed a lead Member for Social Inclusion to take forward the Equality and Diversity agenda and act as Champion for social inclusion. The Council has in place a number of Equality and Diversity policies including those relating to Harassment, Race Equality, and Disability Discrimination. They have been developed utilising census and other research information and are all available on the Council's website. The Council's commitment on these issues is further highlighted by the fact that diversity training was made compulsory for all staff in 2004.

To supplement Corporate initiatives the Housing Service also has a Human Rights and Anti-Discrimination Action Plan which seeks to ensure that the Service continues to move forward with the Equality and Diversity agenda. Actions include compliance with the CRE code of practice for rented housing and a number of key commitments to equality. As mentioned in section 1 a district wide satisfaction survey was carried out in March 2004. This revealed a satisfaction rating amongst BME groups of 87.45% with the overall Housing Service which is marginally higher than the 'control population' at 86%. In 2001 nearly 3% of the population was classified as non-white (the national average being 9%), of which approximately half were of Asian origin, and is the highest percentage in Derbyshire outside of the city of Derby. The largest proportion of the BME population resides in one ward on the Derby City boundary where there is a substantial, growing Sikh community. There is no Council housing in that ward.

To develop a clear understanding of our local BME community a specific BME Housing needs survey was also carried out in 2004 which revealed in economic terms a relatively affluent grouping with limited concerns about social housing provision.

The Housing Service monitors and reports quarterly through Committee on anti-social behaviour issues which includes a categorisation of racial harassment. This is further supported by specific commitments made in our Anti-Social Behaviour policy on prioritising racial harassment.

The Housing Service's application for housing form includes sections that enable us to monitor allocations by ethnic origin including those from a Gypsy and Traveller tradition. The Council operates two Gypsy traveller sites one being a long stay and the other being a short stay site. The Housing Service manages the long stay site and has on-site presence through a site warden who originates from within the same tradition. There are currently plans, subject of a funding bid to government, to upgrade and extend both sites.

The Housing Service is a subscriber to the 'Language Line' service which enables 'immediate' translation services to be provided through a telephone link either across the reception desk or over the telephone. The Council has an additional partnership with Derbyshire Association for the Blind which provides for Braille translation of literature.

The Council is committed to eliminating discrimination on the grounds of disability aided by its Disability Discrimination statement, policy and procedures. The Council currently spends £500k on aids and adaptations for those with disability issues. In order to provide consistency of service across public and private sector housing the services were unified in 2003 and are now managed by the Council's Environmental Health Service. The service is oversubscribed but there are fast track and means testing procedures in place to ensure that those most in need are prioritised for assistance.

The Council is currently in the process of implementing £100k worth of improvements to the disabled access of public buildings with a commitment to deliver more in future years.

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Diversity

Strengths continued

The Housing Service has adopted, following extensive consultation, a vision and set of physical standards for its sheltered housing stock and in 2005 will commit approximately £920k capital income to these works. Already within existing budgets work has started in implementing the standards e.g. all kitchen upgrades in sheltered accommodation include the installation of lever taps.

Diversity

Development areas

We recognise that we should interrogate more thoroughly currently available information gained through surveying and research in order to better inform and develop policies and procedures further relating to BME groups.

Whilst we have prioritised equality and diversity issues amongst our own staff we have plans to build in commitments from our partners particularly those delivering repair and improvement services on our behalf.

We are confident of achieving compliance with the CRE Code of practice for rented housing by the end of April 2005 and in the revision of our Tenant Compact, currently underway, are applying particular attention to developing and improving the opportunity of BME groups to get involved in our service delivery.

Our plans include achievement of compliance with the ODPM practice on tackling racial harassment to meet the operational standards in the CRE Strategy for Gypsies and Travellers and to further develop training for Housing staff on these issues and more broadly on the implications of the Human Rights act.

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Capital and Major Works

Strengths

The Council has a long track record (since the 1980s) of five yearly cyclical planned maintenance. Alongwith other expenditure this has ensured that the fabric of the properties has been maintained in good condition. This is a significant factor in enabling us to hit the decent homes standard by 2008/9 in advance of the Government's 2010 target.

Having undertaken a 25% internal and 100% external stock condition survey in 2002 the Council has good quality information about the properties. The survey is recorded on dedicated software (Lifespan) and is updated with contractual information from component renewals and planned maintenance work. We also have a process in place whereby any major works done through the responsive budget are also updated into the database.

The Service has an investment plan, which has been approved by TACT and Committee, detailing works to be delivered upto 2010 at street and address level. This covers the replacement of major components i.e. windows/doors, heating, bathrooms and kitchens.

All of the planned maintenance, component renewal, gas servicing and electrical maintenance work is undertaken by external contractors through a mixed procurement model with an emphasis on partnering. Our planned maintenance, window, bathroom and kitchen renewals are delivered through partnered contracts established in the early part of 2004 in line with Egan principles. Annual rate increases are determined on the basis of quantitative and qualitative targets being met. Tenants have an input into this process being asked to complete satisfaction surveys for all work undertaken. Our gas servicing work was competitively tendered under European rules in 2003 following poor performance and subsequent demise of our previous contractor. Following a competitive tender award in 2001 electrical work is currently delivered through a negotiated contract and discussions are underway to move us to a full partnered contract from next year.

To give added robustness to our procurement process a Housing Service supplement to the Corporate Procurement Strategy was recently agreed following consultation with TACT.

All contracts, no matter the procurement route, are the subject of monthly meetings.

We give tenants choice on number of component renewals in terms of style and colour of bathrooms and kitchens

Tenant feedback through the satisfaction surveying work has led us to improve significantly the specification of components particularly kitchens. Such upgrades are mirrored in any installations carried out through the responsive work ensuring consistency of specifications and thereby minimised future maintenance costs.

Of the expenditure undertaken on repairs and maintenance 82% is committed externally though our partners. The overall strategy of investment is laid out in our Asset Management Strategy which has just undergone its second revision having been originally introduced in 2002. This latest revision has been approved by TACT and Committee.

Spending only 35% of our commitments on responsive and void work we exceed the best practice split of 60:40 on planned/responsive expenditure.

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Capital and Major Works

Strengths continued

In partnership with the Crime and Disorder Partnership team the Housing Service undertook an analysis of its property improvement work from a home security perspective in the early part of 2005. This will impact on the investment plan particularly in terms of vulnerable areas and door and windows from this year onwards.

As mentioned in the Diversity section the Council has agreed a Vision and set of physical standards that it will apply to all sheltered accommodation. The total cost of delivering the standards has been estimated at approximately £2.2m and the Council has indicated its commitment to deliver these works with £920,000 from capital resources being identified for investment commencing in 2005.

The Housing Service led on the development of the Council's policy and procedures relating to asbestos. This area of work was the subject of a Health and Safety Executive inspection in 2004 and no areas of weakness were identified.

As part of the Option Appraisal work in 2004 the Council developed standards beyond that given in Decent Homes and called them Silver and Gold i.e. we have opened a dialogue relating to the aspirations of tenants to achieve further improvements to their homes. To achieve the highest standard in full for every tenant would cost an additional £33M. In the light of the current decision to retain the Housing stock we now need to refine and revisit that debate later this year to start to build a clear picture of tenant priorities particularly once the decent homes standard has been met in 2008/9.

Capital and Major Works

Development areas

The Housing Service wishes to deliver further tenant involvement in major work and for the first time this year is seeking to establish an informal group structure of tenants who are in receipt of work giving ongoing feedback as contracts progress. Invitations to join this process in the current financial year have already gone out.

Equally we would like to involve tenants more on procurement issues and our new Housing Procurement Strategy outlines a process for that to happen.

Of the Council's 3,235 properties, as at April 2005, 346 (10.5%) have been the subject of a Type 2 asbestos survey. In the first half of 2005 we will continue to progress surveying in line with our strategy to sample 3 properties of each of the identified property types and by the end of the calendar year will have a full register of material locations and recommendations for action including removal, labelling and information, etc.

Although all properties have loft insulation we have identified that there is more we could do in relation to energy efficiency works and a strategy has been developed to maximise energy grant resources, in conjunction with the EAGA partnership, and to look particularly at extending the wall insulation work around the District's stock.

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Capital and Major Works

Development areas continued

In 2005 the Housing Service is also keen to examine whether it can achieve greater value for money in procurement through collaborative buying arrangements in line with the Byatt report recommendations. This has already been the subject of initial discussion with two medium sized nearby RSLs.

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Responsive Work

Strengths

There are good satisfaction levels in responsive repairs at 83% and the in-house responsive team are particularly well regarded on courtesy and quality (93.5%). All work issued generates a tenant notification letter which incorporates a satisfaction questionnaire. Response rates are good for these postal surveys.

In 2004 we took a new draft Repair Policy through presentations at a series of 8 area tenant meetings, in detail at a meeting of TACT and back to Committee for ratification. This policy lays out the principles that through our repair service and standards we are striving to attain. Several parts of the policy were amended in, and as a result of, the consultation process. The policy has now been backed up by a new repairs leaflet which is about to be issued to all Council homes in the District.

The policy also covers the issue of rechargeable repairs and we have relaunched that part of our work from the commencement of the new financial year.

In recognising that the responsive side of our business needed improvement we restructured the Repairs and Improvement section in 2004. A key area identified was the need to rationalise repair ordering and issuing so that staff performing these functions would be brought together into one team and be able to provide cover for one another. Uniting the traditional client and contractor roles enabled us to combine that part of the service under one management post. In February 2005 we 'went live' on new software in both the repair ordering and DLO systems and this is enabling us to pilot repair appointments currently for the first time.

In order to further improve service to customers by completing a greater proportion of repairs through one visit by one tradesman we have recently reached agreement in principle with the DLO workforce union on a structure for implementing multi-skilling. Such a process will also achieve economies through greater productivity and is in line with our 'right first time' ambition. As mentioned in the Capital works information we have agreed standard specifications across all work, no matter the funding or ordering source, and thereby will achieve rationalisation and economies of scale in future responsive maintenance work.

Recognising that the responsive repair service needed improvement we are also about to carry out a competitiveness study of the operation and have already concluded that the service should be subjected to external market competition next financial year. This is to be backed up by a Committee resolution committing us to tendering in the autumn of 2006. Currently the rates charged by the DLO have been set by benchmarking at below those charged locally by potential alternative providers.

The sustainability of the current DLO operation is also a concern in that although the workforce is very stable and has good relations with our customers a number are nearing retirement. With this in mind, and a commitment to assist in local employment and youth development issues, the Council recently approved the appointment of two apprentices for the DLO to add to the very small team of ten tradesmen and one labourer.

The Council provides a full 24 hour emergency repair service with telephone calls being handled out of normal office hours by the sheltered housing control room (CareLine).

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Responsive Work

Strengths continued

As stated above although only 18% of total repair and improvement work is delivered through the DLO responsive team even some of that work is then sub-contracted where greater economies can be achieved most notably in the areas of cleaning and drainage work.

Responsive Work

Development areas

The Council has recognised that it needs to modernise and improve its responsive repair performance. For a number of years there has been minimal investment in the in-house team and standards had not been set for a number of activities. This is now being addressed. Although our performance on completing emergency repairs within timescale is satisfactory (90% for the last financial year) this has been at the expense of other work. Our analysis shows that we are doing too much work on one day priorities and this is inevitably impacting on our ability to deliver on 20 day routine work.

As stated above we have recognised that we need to offer a full repair by appointment service and this is currently being developed to be supported by a tenant compensation scheme for missed appointments. In addition to offer further flexibility in service delivery we are seeking to offer early evening and/or Saturday morning appointments as an alternative to the standard five day week service delivery.

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Void Repair work

Strengths

A year ago (end of year 2003/4) the number of voids stood at 62. A year later this figure has been reduced to 30. This dramatic improvement has been achieved through an improvement in process and through rationalising the stock by moving some difficult to let sheltered housing flats, particularly first floor flats, into the general purpose category. This improvement on letting long term voids has had and continues to have an equally dramatic effect on our void turnaround performance although it is pleasing to report a significant fall in this figure over each month to the point where at the end of March 2005 it stood at 31 days. Removing long-term voids from that figure reduces the turnaround of 'management voids' to 27 days. Our local target is 22days. In addition we have a 'difficult to let' action plan which tackles those properties which are unpopular for a variety of reasons but with additional attention may be able to be let.

The service has recently rewritten its voids procedure and has had a fit to let standard for three years. Both documents were considered in detail by TACT before launch and indeed the latter document was originally produced by a joint working group of members, TACT members and officers. We are currently liaising with TACT on them undertaking some on-site reality checks for us on the voids process.

We have recently reviewed the cleaning standard of the fit to let standard and as a result re-tendered the sub-contractor cleaning role with the result that we are now using two different contractors and the quality of work has improved significantly.

In terms of safety each void gets an electrical and gas safety check by the appropriately qualified contractor.

Each new tenant is given an introduction pack which contains relevant information about the Council, the Service and their new home. To support the voids process the allocations policy was reviewed in 2004 and a new information booklet and application form introduced.

The voids process has targets set for each part of the process linked into stages within the new allocations software. Adherence to these will see our void performance continue to improve.

The Council has long adopted a process of accompanied viewings for new lets to both give immediate feedback on any general issues or concerns the applicant may have but also as a further reassurance that any repairs yet to be done are scheduled. The accompanied viewings are carried by Housing Management rather than Repairs staff and to continue to drive up performance on empty properties we have introduced a quality monitoring form which is completed by the management officer and then fed back into the voids meeting along with any reasons for refusal of property. This meeting occurs at the same time each week between key officers in the DLO, electrical works contractor, repair ordering and management staff to agree ready to let dates subject to the targets set for void turnaround in the repair policy and voids procedure documents.

An additional quality check is undertaken in the nine month new tenancy visit that we carry out.

Void Repair work

Development areas

Although we have come along way on void performance over the last year we want to go further with the overall target of reducing the number of voids to less than 20. Key to achieving this will not only be implementation of the voids procedure in full but continued declassification of sheltered accommodation

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Void Repair work

Development areas continued

that is unable to meet the Vision and Standards set for those properties. Although we have declassified 126 properties in the last year a further report to Committee is projected for October 2005 to enable us to undertake the final phase of this work.

In terms of direct service provision we have planned a number of initiatives to improve our performance. These include TACT assisting us with some on-site reality checks, our intention to revamp our tenant introduction pack and to undertake some direct customer satisfaction surveys through a 10% check on voids six weeks into new lettings. We are also committed to considering the implementation of a choice based letting system through TACT and the Committee process this financial year.

Section 2 – Service Areas**Maximum of twenty A4 pages****Services****Strengths**

Of the Council's current 3235 properties 2,796 have a gas connection.

The Council reviewed its gas servicing procedures in full early in 2004 and this coincided with the appointment of a new contractor from May 2004 tendered under European legislation. Our previous contractor had ceased to operate from April 2004 and the quality of their work had been identified as weak in 2003 hence the preparation for tendering commencing in the autumn of that year.

The contractor's performance is measured in terms of adherence to programme, quality of work through on-site checks and customer satisfaction. On the latter point the contractor leaves satisfaction surveys with all recipients of work.

The review of gas servicing procedures entailed an overhaul of the database and we now operate a cross-referencing system between the contractor and ourselves to ensure its robustness as well as formal regular checks by senior managers. For the small number of properties where servicing is overdue there is an audit trail in place of when action has been taken commencing with the first request for access 11 months from the last date of the last service. The gas servicing procedures then includes full detail of each step in the process of gaining access upto and including our Emergency Access Procedure.

The new contractor provides a 24 hour 365 day emergency cover service which seeks to ensure that no tenant is ever without hot water and/or heating for more than 2 hours. The contract also gives flexible hours for servicing work to include early evenings and Saturday work.

To ensure that the contractor is performing to a good standard on servicing and repairs the Council ensure that regular monitoring of the work is conducted through our dedicated Mechanical and Electrical Project Officer and Improvement Manager.

In terms of electrical work, all of which is contracted to a specialist provider, each void property receives a safety inspection before any void works are undertaken. This then feeds into our programme of inspecting all properties in the next 5 years. Negotiations will be taking place during 2005 with the electrical contractor to put the testing regime on a more formal footing and to consider the future of the current negotiated contract and whether it should move to a fully partnered arrangement. These negotiations our frameworked by our recently introduced Electrical Testing Policy and Procedures. This financial year the Council has also contracted to undertake a servicing schedule of those properties with solid fuel appliances in the light of HEATAS requirements. This is scheduled for completion by September 2005.

Services**Development areas**

We have identified our weaker areas in relation to services and are already addressing the primary ones in that we are about to place our electrical testing regime on a new footing and we are undertaking a new solid fuel appliances contract.

Section 2 – Service Areas

Maximum of twenty A4 pages

Aids and adaptations

Strengths

In order to where possible match adapted public sector property to disabled applicants the Council's new housing application form seeks details of applicants' disabilities and medical condition. This is then used to inform the property allocation process.

Following a previous best value review, it was recognised that the Disabled Adaptation Services could be improved. The Council unified its private and public sector adaptation service under one team in April 2003. This has improved consistency across the two sectors in terms of the standard of assessment, specification and allocation of resources, for example applicants from both sectors are now subject to a test of resources. In the current financial year £500k will be committed to aids and adaptation work funded from the Council's single capital pot and the HRA account.

A key partner in the disabled adaptation service is Derbyshire County Council, through their Social Services and Architect Departments. Social Services Occupational Therapists and Community Care Workers undertake assessment of the disabled persons needs using the 'Fair Access to Care' framework. This affords some filtering and prioritisation of applicants prior to referral to the District Council. A 'fast track' accelerated service is provided for acute and terminally ill cases.

The DCC currently provide architectural services for the private sector whilst public sector schemes are drawn up in house. The District and County Council have developed a joint working procedure on adaptations, which commits to service delivery in terms of timescales, within specific stages of the process and quality. Multi agency progress meetings are held monthly to discuss case progress and a multi agency steering group meets bi monthly to ensure consistency of approach across the County.

All work undertaken is subject to customer satisfaction surveys (of public sector clients 93% thought the service was good/excellent, private sector clients 95% were satisfied with the service overall). Links have recently been established with a local Disabled Focus Group offering the opportunity to consult disabled people on the adaptation process and any future changes proposed.

The Council's Sheltered Housing Service is being increasingly well regarded within the region and the Audit Commission have referred other Councils to South Derbyshire on the basis of the progress we have made in this area. Recently we have developed a resource centre to help develop further the innovative work we are carrying out in relation to Telecare services (additional technologies to support independent living for longer) and are taking a lead on this within the County and wider region.

Section 2 – Service Areas

Maximum of twenty A4 pages

Aids and adaptations

Development areas

We have recognised that the adaptation service is still not entirely consistent across both sectors and the time taken to complete adaptations from first referral needs to be improved, particularly in the private sector. In the latter case, much of the delays experienced result inevitably from multi agency involvement. The Council is currently investigating other options, for example to provide a local or in house architect services for all services users. This should facilitate an entirely consistent service across both sectors and bring timescales within or near ODPM good practice recommendations.

A further area we would wish to develop is a thorough database of public sector adapted property and seek to align this with the allocations process through more targeted lettings.

Although there was an article on the aids and adaptations service in our most recent tenants' newsletter we recognise that our customer literature for aids and adaptations could be improved and a draft information leaflet is about to go to print.

Section 2 – Service Areas
Maximum of twenty A4 pages
Value for money
Strengths

The Housing Service has a mixed procurement approach with an emphasis on partnering. The investments made are in line with the Asset Management Strategy and under the Housing and Corporate Procurement guidance. Financially, 82% all housing repair and improvement work is delivered through external partners. There are key partnership contracts in place in terms of major component renewals which comply with Egan best practice and achieve economies through closer working, sharing of information and 'open book' accounting. Electrical work is currently delivered through a negotiated contract extension and we are in negotiations to move to a partnered arrangement. Gas servicing and repair works are delivered through a fully tendered contract scheduled to run until 2007.

The mixed model demonstrates in line with the Procurement strategy a flexibility of approach and understanding of the cost and quality relationship. Even on the negotiated contract the system of invoicing has been rationalised reducing significantly the paperwork exchange between the two organisations. The Service has placed emphasis in the 2004/5 year on utilising all the resources it had available to it in terms of allocated budgets to maximise investment and thereby avoid deterioration of the stock.

The Service has a clear understanding of where its resources in future years are to be invested as determined by the investment plan that takes us to 2010. The plan is centred upon achieving the Decent Homes standard and was consulted upon and agreed by both TACT and the policy committee. The Council outperforms good practice on the split between planned and responsive work with a ratio of around 65:35 rather than 60:40. It has introduced standard specifications between responsive and planned work on major components thereby minimising future maintenance costs. There is a dedicated Housing accountant position within the Finance Department team who monitors spend in conjunction with the in-service managers. The accountant and key spend managers meet on a monthly basis to review progress, redirect resources or change priorities as necessary.

Value for money
Development areas

Although only 18% of total work is delivered through the in-house DLO and their prices are benchmarked below the market place we are conscious of the need to formally test the price and quality of that aspect of service delivery given that it has not been exposed to the market place since 1999. There is a Council commitment to go to tender on this aspect of service delivery next financial year.

We also recognise that although managers have spend information on a monthly basis more could be done in terms of more up to date on line information. The Council is progressing such improvements through implementation of its new financial management system.

We have also recognised that more can be done in terms of maximising income and have consequently relaunched the rechargeable repair policy and have an action plan to maximise energy grants into the Service.

We are also developing proposals to join or be a joint leader on establishing a buying consortium through collaboration with other social housing providers.

Section 3 – Prospects for Improvement

Maximum of four A4 pages

What is the evidence of service improvements?

The Housing Service has limited experience of other external inspection by the Audit Commission. Its Sheltered Housing Service was the subject of inspection in 2001 and reinspection in 2002. In 2003 (final report May 2004) the Council underwent a Comprehensive Performance Assessment (CPA) of which the Housing Service was part and the Decent Homes diagnostic a central focus. However in addition, following the initial poor Sheltered Housing inspection, the Service did expose itself to a thorough review of its structures, process, culture and performance undertaken by consultants in 2002. This major piece of work led to a Change and Improvement Programme being implemented and subsequently delivered across the Service.

The learning process that occurred during this process was significant and the service was modified to accommodate a sizeable change in both culture and working practices. The outcomes have been that the Council, its staff and our customers have become engaged in a far more cohesive arrangement that allows end users to drive decisions.

As indicated the first inspection of Sheltered Housing resulted in a poor rating. It would be fair to say this was something of a shock to the Council as a whole which had to some extent left the Service 'to get on with things'. Before the reinspection in 2002 the Service took some major decisions to deliver improvements which included closing down sheltered housing schemes, restructuring the service, changing some job roles and making others redundant and refocusing on service delivery. The Service clearly took on board the need for major change and delivered on that. At the reinspection the Service was rated as fair with promising prospects. Since then, as part of our consultation mechanism, it has formalised a Vision and a set of physical Service Standards which it is systematically delivering through a rolling programme. This year the Council has recognised the need to continue investment in this vision and standards which has led to a £920,000 boost to existing budgets to deliver a range of ambitious targets.

The Sheltered Housing Service is now well regarded within the region being recommended by the Audit Commission to other Councils in need of major change and even a new local RSL and their consultants have sought us out for good practice in terms of improvements they need to deliver in-house. The Sheltered Housing Wardens manual we set up has been recognised by the Chartered Institute of Housing as an example of good practice. By the time of the Stock Investment and Asset Management inspection we will have submitted our proposals for accreditation by both the Centre for Sheltered Housing Studies and the Association of Social Alarm Providers.

The CPA assessment of Decent Homes recognised a number of strengths in the Council's approach including good quality stock condition data and an investment plan that will deliver the standard ahead of the Government's target deadline. At the time of the CPA on-site inspection the Council was just about to commence the tenant consultation phase of the Option Appraisal work and the assessment was that prior to that work the Council's investment plans had not been developed in conjunction with customers. As part of the Option Appraisal work the Council discussed investment issues with tenants in the series of 17 initial area meetings. Then as a second phase of the Options work three dedicated tenant seminars discussed investment plans and the options available under each type of management organisation in detail. Additional higher standards were developed in conjunction with tenants and were named the Silver and Gold standards. These issues were also covered in one of the specific tenant newsletters we published in the Options process. The Service also supported TACT in appointing an Independent Tenant Adviser in the options process and they too looked in detail at the financial and investment choices available under each option.

Section 3 – Prospects for Improvement**Maximum of four A4 pages****What is the evidence of service improvements?**

Although a criticism of the CPA report was the slow rate of progress on implementing the Options Appraisal in full the Service was without a Head until July 2003. Following his appointment a strategy was developed and readied in the autumn and was implemented in the Spring of 2004. The only thing that stopped it being delivered before then was that it was felt that a series of 20 public events would be best carried out in lighter evenings and warmer weekends rather than in the winter months, especially given the elderly age profile of our tenants.

A further issue identified in the CPA assessment was that policies and procedures relating to asbestos hadn't been developed. There was a legislative deadline relating to non-domestic stock on asbestos in May 2004 that was achieved and indeed the Health and Safety Executive inspected our policy and procedures on-site in the late summer of 2004 and no major weaknesses were identified.

The CPA report identified that neither the HRA Business Plan nor the Housing Strategy had a 'fit for purpose' rating although neither had been submitted under that assessment criteria. Since then the new Housing Strategy has been submitted and the Council has been told informally that it will meet the 'fit for purpose' assessment and the HRA Business Plan is currently in the process of being written now that the Option Appraisal and retention decisions have been made. The target date we are working to for submission of the Business Plan, which will place our business through benchmarking in a regional and national context, is July 2005.

Other significant issues in the CPA process have also been addressed including the successful introduction throughout the service of new IT on-time and on-budget and the service is the only one in the Council reporting regularly in detail on its performance through its service user group, TACT, and the Policy Committee.

In all the changes and improvements delivered there is a central focus of the benefit to the end user, our customers. Our commitment to customers has been highlighted in the last three months by making refresher bespoke customer care training compulsory for all staff; managers, wardens, joiners, housing officers, etc. In addition we work closely with TACT on all service development and seek their input on all significant changes of policy and practice. Our satisfaction ratings are good and where weaknesses are highlighted we have taken action to address them. A number of our PIs are good and a number are getting better and where they are not we have planned programmes to change that position. Our commitment to performance improvement for the benefit of customers is not only highlighted by the quarterly public report but in-service we also have a targets document that all staff have a personal copy of which gives targets for all sections in the Service. These targets are derived from the Service and Corporate plans and are also discussed in detail at individual staff personal development reviews i.e. there is a performance structure in place within the service. This was further complemented in 2004 when a specific post of Performance Manager was created in the Service to assist the operational managers to continue delivery of further improvements. As well as learning from Inspections and its own analysis the Service seeks accreditation from external bodies for specific service areas where appropriate and has joined one benchmarking club and has plans to participate in another.

Section 3 – Prospects for Improvement

Maximum of four A4 pages

How good are current improvement plans?

Like all good service providers, we recognise that plans and their delivery need to evolve and change to accommodate rising standards and continuous improvements. Our procurement processes have been modelled around best practice in order to accommodate the highest standards of Best Value. The recent formation of a contractual relationship for the delivery of Gas Servicing is a demonstration of this effectiveness where we have seen a step change in the performance of gas servicing and access to properties that has delivered better value and compliance to statutory targets. The Council is now upper quartile in this aspect of service delivery.

Our Asset Management Plan has also delivered significant benefits in both value and customer satisfaction where the use of a broad range of contractors has formed a significant part of a Repairs and Improvement Programme that is designed to meet the Decent Homes Standards two years ahead of timescale by 2008/9. The plan has demonstrated that 'Partnering' with properly selected contractors who have a proven track record of delivery can deliver long term sustainable benefits and that engaging in regular constructive dialogue does lead to innovation and savings.

Our ambitions to extend these processes and support them through further plans on energy efficiency and incorporating 'lifetime homes' design, support our aims of maintaining top quality housing stock and providing a customer focussed service.

We also recognise that there are areas of weakness that we still need to address. There is a significant need to modernise the way in which our Responsive General Building Repairs Service is being delivered. After a number of years of not exposing the service to external competition the Council has taken the decision to tender the service in the next financial year evidencing our commitment to take difficult decisions.

We are particularly proud of our use of local business to support community well being.

As highlighted throughout this self assessment the Service has a number of new plans and policies which it is in the process of implementing. These are evidence of its recognition of the need to constantly review and improve. The Service has particularly recognised the need to improve on the responsive and void part of its operation and has a new void process and a DLO action plan which will help to deliver further improvements in that area.

Now that the option appraisal process is complete and the retention decision made, work is underway on a new HRA Business Plan which will further direct our service delivery and improvement planning, in addition to the Service plan and targets documents, over the forthcoming years.

The Council is undertaking a full Best Value review of its Repairs and Improvement Service and from that we have developed an action plan to deliver further improvements in this area over forthcoming months. In relation to other 'generic' parts of the Audit Commission Inspection the Service has a specific action plan dedicated to equality and diversity issues and in conjunction with customers is currently reviewing the Tenant Compact.

All plans have time specific time targets and outputs that are focussed on service delivery improvements.

Ambitions

The structure of developing the more high level plans particularly on the Option Appraisal work, and currently on the HRA Business Plan, is one of a joint

Section 3 – Prospects for Improvement

Maximum of four A4 pages

equal partnership between tenant and member reps. The Best Value review process we are undertaking in relation to Repairs and Improvements has a structure that engages tenants, a members' steering group and officers from around the Council including the Deputy Chief Executive. In addition we've held one all members' seminar earlier this year and are holding a second in May. We take a collaborative approach to planning and make our plans fit the local context whilst still striving for best practice and upper quartile performance.

In introducing a new Repair Policy last year the Service presented it at a series of 8 area tenants meetings as well as going through the established practice of consultation with TACT. As a result of this process we received considerable feedback and in several instances key changes were adopted i.e. an example of actively engaging customers in the development of our ambitions.

The Option Appraisal process entailed a thorough review of the Council's investment plans and the choices that the service users have in relation to future investment. The process also covered in detail the choices available under the other management options, particularly in our case the choice of transfer to a Housing Association as the ALMO and PFI routes would not deliver similar levels of benefits. In undertaking this work the Council not only held 20 separate information and discussion events (the ITA and TACT held others) it also undertook a 20% survey at both the start and end of the process to ensure that tenants were making an informed decision. The second survey recorded penetration levels in terms of tenant awareness of the issues at 90%. This is further evidence of making sure that our plans are delivering in the local context. The Government Office recently 'signed off' our Option Appraisal process. Inevitably as a small Council with a low staff base we do not have the opportunity to develop into new areas as quickly as we would sometimes like. However a restructuring of the Repairs and Improvement section in 2004 addressed issues of capacity and established clear leadership reporting lines i.e. there is a post holder to lead the unit along with two other senior management posts. We further recognised that despite a number of initiatives driving performance we needed a specific post to co-ordinate activity in this area as well as help frontline managers deliver particular projects.

In relation to performance we have a number of mechanisms in place such as the quarterly analysis through Committee, the internal staff targets document, etc. We have also recognised that reinforcing performance improvement in the culture of the service is a process led by Managers and team leaders. In partnership with the in-house Human Resources section we have a draft programme already agreed based on 6 key modules to develop the capacity of the existing Housing Management Team and one of those modules is performance management. The Management Development Programme is again a first for this Council in that it will be a compulsory series of training seminars for all in the Housing Management team with a view to driving up quality and skills for the benefit of the service as a whole and ultimately the service users.

The Service and Council has recognised that the financial information provided to key spend housing managers could be more robust and recently commissioned an external review of that process and is now in the process of implementing resultant actions. Evidence that the Council will deliver on issues is highlighted by the successful implementation of across the board new IT software renewing all housing systems. This project was delivered on time and on budget across a six month timeframe. Equally, on finance, the Council has adopted a procurement model that fits the local context in terms of the national framework of good practice and the local availability of contractors i.e. we have an emphasis on partnering but will use more traditional routes if assessed through the Procurement Strategy that better value and quality is to be derived from using traditional methods.

HOUSING INSPECTORATE - SELF-ASSESSMENT PRO-FORMA



Section 4 – Action Plan		Maximum of two A4 pages	
In relation to Repairs and Improvement the Council has a number of actions planned with attached target timescales. The main ones below reflect both identified improvement areas and tenant priorities.			
Action plan ref	Ambition	Progress – Comments 4 C's analysis	Target date
1.1	To improve tenant involvement in revision of Tenant Compact to make more influential	New revised Tenant Compact in consultation with tenants giving specific commitments on involvement in Repairs and Improvement	1.09.05
1.2	To improve performance in customer care by monitoring telephone answering using 'mystery shopper'	Quarterly improvements in time for telephone answering and TACT feedback from mystery shopper survey	1.10.05
1.3	Introduce compensation scheme (£10) to compensate tenants for our missed appointments.	Full scheme by end of 2005. Appointments are priority for tenants as per consultation.	1.12.05
1.4	Normal office hours offer limit repair service and therefore develop more flexible response service	By being able to do some appointments in the early evening we would cause less inconvenience to those tenants who are working.	31.12.5
2.4	Tenant participation policies to be revised, to discover and empower the best means of encouraging involvement by traditionally 'difficult to reach' groups.	More effective participation particularly by BME and other minority groups will help more closely match service delivery to customer requirements	1.04.06
2.5	Aspire to meet the operational standards in the CRE Strategy for Gypsies and Travellers 2004-7	Policies and procedures in place to meet the need of Gypsies and Travellers	1.04.06
3.1	Implement Asbestos survey and analysis regime to include database	Safety advice for tenants and removal of material if necessary.	by 1.10.05
3.2	Involve tenants more actively in the establishment of priorities and standards	Tenant participation and ownership of materials used. Change in specification in accordance with tenants desires	1.12.05
4.1	Introduce repairs carried out in full on first visit through multi-skilling of workforce	More repairs carried out in full on first and only visit by tradesmen giving less inconvenience to tenants	31.12.5
4.2	Include asbestos management information in tenant literature	Article will stress safety implications without causing undue alarm	1.1.1.05

HOUSING INSPECTORATE - SELF-ASSESSMENT PRO-FORMA

Section 4 – Action Plan		Maximum of two A4 pages	
Action plan ref	Ambition	Progress – Comments 4 C's analysis	Target date
5.1	Incorporate handbook for appliances e.g. Parkray fire, boiler in to Tenanis Handbook	Better information for new tenants and ensures safety of tenants	1.09.05
5.2	Undertake on-site reality checks on quality of voids with Members/TACT	Ensure consistency of standard and thereby service.	1.09.05
5.3	Introduce new tenant visits to include feedback on void satisfaction. (10% sample)	Voids presented well will be less likely to be refused leading to higher income and more money available for service delivery	1.09.05
6.1	Enable access for SDDC officers to have access to Gas Care's 'Job Tracker'	This will allow customer queries to be answered at first contact. Also comparison of databases means that double check on records ensuring safety	1.09.05
6.2	Review emergency access procedures to enable access limiting the need to obtain court injunctions – including style of letters, use of wardens on SH properties, keeping records of reoccurring difficult access properties	Safer homes	1.09.05
6.3	Develop the role of the electrical testing contract to include a check of the hardwired smoke-alarms in place in all council stock	Safer homes	1.11.05
8.1	Streamline authorisation of ad hoc repairs etc – to be directed through QS and Improvement/Repairs manager - to ensure council's financial regulations are being strictly adhered to	Orders being placed through a number of routes and thereby difficult to keep track of committed expenditure	1.09.05
8.3	Introduce benchmarking with other authorities and housing associations to establish comparison of performance	Ensures value for money by being at or below market average.	1.09.05
8.4	Investigate the possibility of collective buying of materials with similar organisation to provide economy of scale.	Ensures value for money and maximises use of available resources.	1.09.05

