

- 136 Managers have made a commitment to undertake a feasibility study of the CCU to look at the scope for further service improvements and a possible expansion of its role.

Tenant Participation

- 137 South Derbyshire has a well defined tenant participation framework. It has a full time Tenant Participation Officer which is commendable for an authority of this size and demonstrates the commitment shown by the Authority to involving its tenants in decision making.
- 138 The current Tenant Compact was revised in April 2002 and it details a history of tenant participation in South Derbyshire which dates back to 1992. It also contains details of the current tenant participation arrangements, standards of conduct for tenants, officers and Members, an equal opportunities statement and the Compact action plan.
- 139 The annual tenant participation budget is £12,560. This budget is used to produce a twice yearly edition of the tenants newsletter called 'Tenants Extra', which is delivered to all tenants. The budget is also used for:
- ◆ tenants training;
 - ◆ attendance at conferences;
 - ◆ hiring of rooms;
 - ◆ expenses such as childcare, travel and subsistence;
 - ◆ grants to Tenants Associations;
 - ◆ publicity, printing and postage;
 - ◆ annual garden competition; and
 - ◆ support for the Tenant Resource Centre.
- 140 The Tenants Advisory and Consultation Team (TACT) operates as the formal link between the eight Area Tenants Groups and the Community Services Committee. Its membership consists of:
- ◆ up to 6 representatives from each Area Tenant Group;
 - ◆ Tenant Participation Officer;
 - ◆ unit manager from the housing division as appropriate;
 - ◆ Housing Services Manager; and
 - ◆ Chair and Vice-chair of Community Services Committee.
- 141 TACT meets every three weeks and its terms of reference are:

- ◆ review draft reports prior to Community Services Committee and provide a response which is fed back to the committee meeting by the Chair of the Committee;
 - ◆ advise and review changes to the housing service;
 - ◆ review and monitor the Tenant Compact and action plan;
 - ◆ identify and discuss any issues which have an impact on all tenants relating to the housing service;
 - ◆ advise and participate in policy formulation;
 - ◆ review and respond to any reports produced by Area Tenants Groups; and
 - ◆ management of the Tenants Resource Centre.
- 142 Members of TACT also represent tenants on working groups set up by the Council to look at specific issues. For example, two members of TACT are on the Task and Finish Group that has been established to develop a vision for the sheltered housing service. Both these tenants live in sheltered housing.
- 143 There are 8 Area Tenant Groups each representing a part of the District. They operate as support mechanisms for individual tenants, Tenant Associations and Tenant Voices. They are South Derbyshire's formal mechanism for local consultation with tenants and they aim to enhance and develop consultation at a local level. They meet at least twice a year.
- 144 Tenant Associations operate as a voice for local tenants and there is currently one active association in South Derbyshire. In addition there are 'Tenants Voices', these are individual tenants in rural areas who act as a sounding board and conduit for receiving and passing information back and forth between the Council and tenants in their street or area.
- 145 In March 2002 South Derbyshire's first tenant resource centre opened in Castle Gresley. Formerly a bed-sit within a sheltered housing scheme, the property is now used by tenants as a:
- ◆ meeting room;
 - ◆ training venue;
 - ◆ library for information on tenant participation and housing services; and
 - ◆ an office.
- 146 The Council leased the property to TACT on a twelve month rent free basis, with the original set up costs being paid from the tenant participation budget. The Council is currently looking for an alternative location for the resource centre now it has decided to close the sheltered scheme where it is currently located.

- 147 TACT has its own website which we found to be informative. The Council's website also provides some useful information on tenant participation and used to include a link to TACT's website, unfortunately during our inspection we found this link had been 'lost'. Following our inspection this link was re-established.
- 148 The Council introduced annual meetings in sheltered housing schemes in 1992. The aim of the meetings was to give tenants a chance to have their say in the running of their scheme and to have access to senior officers and their local Member.
- 149 Following the consultation that was undertaken during the re-organisation of the sheltered housing service it was evident that tenants in sheltered housing wanted to take a more active role in deciding what services and facilities they would like to receive in future. Plans are currently underway to develop a tenant participation strategy for sheltered housing, which will formalise the ideas and suggestions that have come forward from tenants during the latest round of consultation meetings held in November 2002.
- 150 One suggestion from these meetings was that tenants in sheltered schemes would like their own newsletter and the first edition is due to be published in February 2003. It is also proposed to hold monthly scheme meetings in future, (in addition to the annual scheme meeting) where tenants will be able to invite guest speakers to discuss issues such as community safety and welfare benefits and contact has already been made with the Pensions Agency to arrange the first meetings.
- 151 The draft sheltered housing guide was also produced following suggestions made by tenants and a number of tenants have been consulted on its contents. The completed version is due to be sent out to all sheltered housing tenants during January 2003.
- 152 Tenants also requested that the maintenance of the landscaped areas around their schemes should be improved. The Council has responded to this request by improving the specification used to maintain these areas and allocating an additional £14,000 per year to fund the improvements.
- 153 During our inspection we held a focus group with members of TACT, many of whom are sheltered housing tenants. They told us that both consultation and participation had improved since our last inspection. Some of the examples they gave included:
- ◆ TACT members attended consultation meetings held at sheltered housing schemes;
 - ◆ TACT members have given evidence at Scrutiny Committee meetings;
 - ◆ TACT members are involved in the selection and recruitment of new staff;
 - ◆ Joint training sessions held for TACT and Members on issues such as business planning; and
 - ◆ TACT members involved in reviewing the repairs service and the Best Value Review of Strategic Housing Services.

- 154 Since our last inspection we found that the Council has improved the way it involves its tenants in service improvements. Members of TACT emphasised that the attitude of officers and Members had improved since our last inspection and there is now a genuine willingness to involve tenants, with support coming from both political parties.

Diversity

- 155 During our inspection we found that diversity and equality issues have not been given a high priority by this authority. During our discussions with Members and officers we found a general lack of awareness regarding diversity issues. In particular we found that Members tended to view diversity as simply a issue of race and did not seem to make the connection with other issues such as gender and disability.
- 156 The Council does have an equal opportunities policy which was introduced in 1999. However, the Council has not yet adopted the Commission for Racial Equality's (CRE) Standard for Local Government nor does it comply with the Commission's Code of Practice in Rented Housing.
- 157 The amended Race Relations Act 2000 places a duty on local authorities to promote racial equality and to produce a Race Equality Scheme by May 2002. The Government has announced that it intends to extend the 'duty to promote equality' to both gender and disability.
- 158 South Derbyshire does not have a Race Equality Scheme, but the Council plans to introduce a scheme by April 2003 and is receiving support from the County Council and a neighbouring District Council to help introduce the scheme.
- 159 Managers in the housing service do understand the importance of complying with the CRE Code of Practice in Rented Housing and a target has been set to ensure compliance during 2003/04. However, this cannot be achieved until the new computer system has been successfully installed as the data required is not currently available on the existing system.
- 160 The Community Wardens Procedure Manual does promote good practice with regard to diversity and the sheltered housing service is seeking accreditation from the Centre for Sheltered Housing Studies. In order to comply with the Centre's Code of Practice, the service has to be able demonstrate it is achieving the ten standards contained within the Code. One of these standards is 'equality of opportunity and diversity.
- 161 Corporately, £20k of funding has been made available to carry out access audits on all public buildings (including sheltered housing schemes) in order to comply with the requirements of the Disability Discrimination Act (DDA) 1995. The facilities audits currently being undertaken by the Sheltered Housing Team Leader have already started to identify the improvements that are required at some sheltered schemes to ensure they comply with the DDA by 2004.
- 162 During our inspection we found that not all the customer satisfaction surveys currently being undertaken by the Council are measuring satisfaction by ethnicity, gender, age and disability. So the Council is currently unable to demonstrate that it is providing equitable services and in addition, it is unable to identify trends that could be used to inform future service improvements.

- 163 We did find however, that the tenant satisfaction survey issued in November 2002 did include the required information and that monitoring is also undertaken of the membership of Tenants Panels. Managers in the Housing Service have responded positively by agreeing to incorporate these categories into all future satisfaction surveys and we would recommend that this is replicated throughout the Council.

Partnership Working

- 164 During our last inspection we found that there was no effective partnership working between the housing service, social services, the health service and the voluntary sector. Effective partnership working is a critical success factor for services such as sheltered housing and for the implementation of Supporting People.
- 165 During our inspection we held a number of meetings with agencies who work in partnership with South Derbyshire District Council and it was clear from our discussions that since our last inspection the Council has been proactively developing its partnership working. We were given a number of positive examples which related directly to the sheltered housing service.
- 166 Community Wardens have been involved in undertaking Neighbourhood Risk Assessments on their schemes for the South Derbyshire Crime and Disorder Partnership. This has resulted in ten schemes being prioritised for security improvements with £4,000 of extra funding secured so far. We were told:

There has been a complete change in culture within the housing department which has led to improved working with the Crime and Disorder Partnership.

- 167 Community Wardens have been involved in promoting South Derbyshire's first 'liberation day' which is due to take place in June 2003. Liberation day is an event that has been successfully run in Derby for the past three years, incorporating entertainment, presentations by the police, social services, local companies and other agencies. The purpose of the day is to provide enjoyment and information for older people.
- 168 A hospital admission and discharge protocol has been agreed between the Council and the local hospital in Burton-upon-Trent and it is due to be introduced during January 2003.
- 169 Detailed discussions have been held between the Council, Derbyshire Social Services and the Primary Care Trust (PCT) to convert four flats at the Granville Court sheltered scheme from respite units into an intermediate care facility. These flats which were rented by Social Services have been left empty and unused for over two years. The PCT has secured funding to cover a contribution towards the rent, physiotherapy services, medical cover and district nurse services. Social Services had made a bid for £17,000 to provide night cover, however during our inspection we were informed that this bid had been unsuccessful.

- 170 Following our inspection we were advised that as part of the LIFT¹³ project, discussions are now underway to use Granville Court as part of an extended care assessment, intermediate care and social care resource and treatment centre for older people. This project is being led by the local PCT and involves South Derbyshire as a partner organisation.
- 171 Despite the difficulties detailed above, we found an improved working relationship between staff in the housing service and local social services staff particularly when working together on specific cases.
- 172 Social Services have a day care facility at Smallthorn Place and the mental health group use the communal lounge at the Fisher Close scheme. Social Services have been involved in the consultation at the two schemes which are due to close and have nominated a liaison officer to work with housing staff to assist in the rehousing of tenants who have particular care needs. Discussions are also currently underway about relocating the day care facility from Smallthorn Place to another scheme.
- 173 There are quarterly meetings between housing staff, operational staff from Social Services, staff from the PCT and the Council for Voluntary Services (CVS) to discuss ongoing projects and to promote further partnership working.
- 174 We found that the voluntary sector has become increasingly involved in discussions about service improvements, for example CVS have been used to help organise social activities at the Unity Close scheme and are to be members of the task and finish group that will be developing a vision for the sheltered housing service. They have also been involved in the participatory appraisal for the LIFT scheme.
- 175 A partnership involving the Council, Social Services and the PCT has also been successful in its application to join one of the Department of Health's Learning and Improvement Networks which is looking at housing and extra care facilities.
- 176 During our inspection we received a number of positive comments about the improvements in partnership working that agencies have experienced since our last inspection these included:

South Derbyshire are a joy to work with.

'They are very understanding of the constraints under which other organisations work, but they are determined to get things moving.'

- 177 Whilst all the agencies were positive about the improvements that had been made, they did express concerns that South Derbyshire has still not got a Local Strategic Partnership (LSP) in place, in addition they were concerned that voluntary sector liaison had not yet been formalised and currently depended upon individual officers within the Council. They also had concerns about the present structure of the housing service and it was their view that the service currently lacks the capacity to be more proactive on partnership working.

¹³ Local Improvement Finance Trust

- 178 We spoke to senior managers about these concerns and they confirmed that the target is to have an operational LSP in place by June 2003. They also confirmed that work is underway on developing a local compact to formalise working arrangements with the local voluntary sector.
- 179 Managers also told us that a further re-organisation of the Housing Service is planned to take place in the early part of 2003 when a clear separation of operational housing services and strategic housing functions will be introduced, providing more capacity for partnership working.

Supporting People

- 180 Supporting People is the name given to the new, integrated, national policy and funding package for housing related support services that is currently being implemented and will 'go live' on 1 April 2003. The overall aim is to improve the quality and availability of housing related support to vulnerable people and to ensure that services are delivered in a timely and appropriate manner.
- 181 The Supporting People grant will be administered through 150 lead local authorities and in this case Derbyshire County Council will be responsible for administering the grant on behalf of all the District Councils, including South Derbyshire.
- 182 South Derbyshire has contributed to the shadow Supporting People Strategy, which has clear links to its own Housing Strategy.
- 183 Officers and Members we spoke to at South Derbyshire had concerns that some parts of the implementation programme appeared to be behind schedule.
- 184 We discussed these concerns with managers at the County Council who advised us that the Commissioning Body has now been established and its first meeting was due to take place on 13 December 2002. The representation on this body will be 1 officer and 1 member from each District Council and the County Council, 1 representative from the Probation Service and 1 representative from each of the two PCT's.
- 185 The County Council has now agreed to a charging policy and each District Council will make its own decision on charging for services based on guidance issued by the ODPM¹⁴.
- 186 Based on this guidance South Derbyshire has decided that it will be charging £8.60 per week for the sheltered housing service from 1 April 2003. All existing tenants will not have to pay this charge as they will receive transitional protection. However, all new tenants moving into sheltered housing after 1 April are liable to pay the charge, but they may be able to access assistance, either via entitlement to housing benefit, or via a means test undertaken by the County Council. A leaflet detailing these changes is due to be sent out to all sheltered housing tenants within the next few weeks.

¹⁴ Office of the Deputy Prime Minister

- 187 We had concerns that when we spoke to locally based social services staff there seemed to be a general lack of awareness about the implications of Supporting People for their clients. Managers at the County Council accepted that more needed to be done to get their locally based staff 'up to speed' on Supporting People as they will be part of the local Supporting People Teams. A new training officer has just been appointed who will help with this.
- 188 Managers at the County Council were positive about their working relationship with officers at South Derbyshire, a typical comment was:

South Derbyshire are good to work with, they attend meetings and they comment on documents

- 189 The County's Supporting People Manager was part of South Derbyshire's Housing Strategy Working Group and it has been agreed to continue using this group as a local strategic planning group for Supporting People. The Supporting People Manager has also been invited to join the task and finish group looking at the vision for sheltered housing.
- 190 It has been estimated that 90 per cent of all Supporting People accommodation in Derbyshire is sheltered housing. So as part of its remit the task and vision group will be considering the level of existing provision and the future need for sheltered housing.

Performance Management

- 191 The Council has introduced a performance management system linked to the Corporate Plan and to the Best Value Performance Plan. The most recent District Audit management letter acknowledges the progress made with the development of a performance management framework.
- 192 The Corporate Plan contains a number of key tasks, these are then incorporated into annual divisional service plans. The Corporate Plan is monitored quarterly and individual service plans are monitored every six months by the relevant committee.
- 193 Following our first inspection, the Council produced a Sheltered Housing Improvement Plan, which details the improvements required to the sheltered housing service. This is monitored and reviewed every 4 to 6 weeks by the Head of Community Services and every quarter by the Community Scrutiny Committee.
- 194 The Sheltered Housing Improvement Plan is highlighted as a ongoing departmental key task within the Housing Division's Service Plan for 2003/04.
- 195 CMT meet weekly and the Chief Executive holds weekly meetings with the Deputy Chief Executive and fortnightly meetings with other service managers. The Chief Executive also has weekly meetings with the Leader and Deputy Leader of the Council.
- 196 The Head of Community Services has individual monthly meetings with her divisional managers. Housing Management Team meets monthly and monitors key PI's. A briefing detailing last month's performance is then produced which is shared with all housing staff, Members and TACT members. Community

- Wardens have monthly team meetings and the CCU have a team meeting every three weeks.
- 197 A number of local PI's have been introduced for the sheltered housing service as detailed later in this report. The housing service is in the process of joining the Housing Quality Network's sheltered housing benchmarking group and Housemark¹⁵. South Derbyshire is also a member of the Derbyshire Sheltered Housing Group.
- 198 The Housing Service has introduced team and individual staff targets and all members of staff have an annual Performance Development Review interview with their manager. Following this interview a training and development plan is produced, detailing the individuals training needs for the following twelve months.
- 199 Most housing staff have regular 'one to ones' with their line manager, at which individual targets and performance is discussed, however, we did find a lack of consistency in the frequency of these meetings. For example, they are held bi-monthly for Community Wardens and every quarter for staff in the CCU.
- 200 The council plans to hold divisional meetings for all housing staff every quarter, this will enable all housing staff to meet together on a regular basis, with the first meeting planned for January 2003. The Council is also planning to introduce a weekly corporate briefing that will be sent to all staff as part of its preparations for the Investors in People award.
- 201 A Management Development Programme has been developed for all managers in the housing division, which has been used successfully to improve the skills of a number of newly appointed managers and team leaders within the housing service.
- 202 District Audit has found during their Performance Indicator Audit that the data collected by the Council in order to calculate its performance on completing urgent and non-urgent repaired is inaccurate. Therefore the District Auditor has reported a reservation on Best Value Performance Indicators (BVPI's) 72 and 73 and has suggested an amendment to BVPI 68. The Council showed us the plans that are in place to ensure that data for PI's are correctly collected in future.
- 203 Despite this, we found that overall there has been a significant improvement in this area since our last inspection.

How does the performance compare?

- 204 In order to judge the quality of a service, it is important to compare the performance of that service against other suppliers across a range of sectors. The aim is not exact comparison, but an exploration of how similar services (or elements of services) perform in order to identify significant differences, the reasons for them, and the extent to which improvements are required.

¹⁵ The Chartered Institute of Housing Benchmarking Service

- 205 There are no national performance indicators for either sheltered housing or the CCU. In order to overcome this, the Council has introduced this year a number of local performance indicators as detailed in the table below.

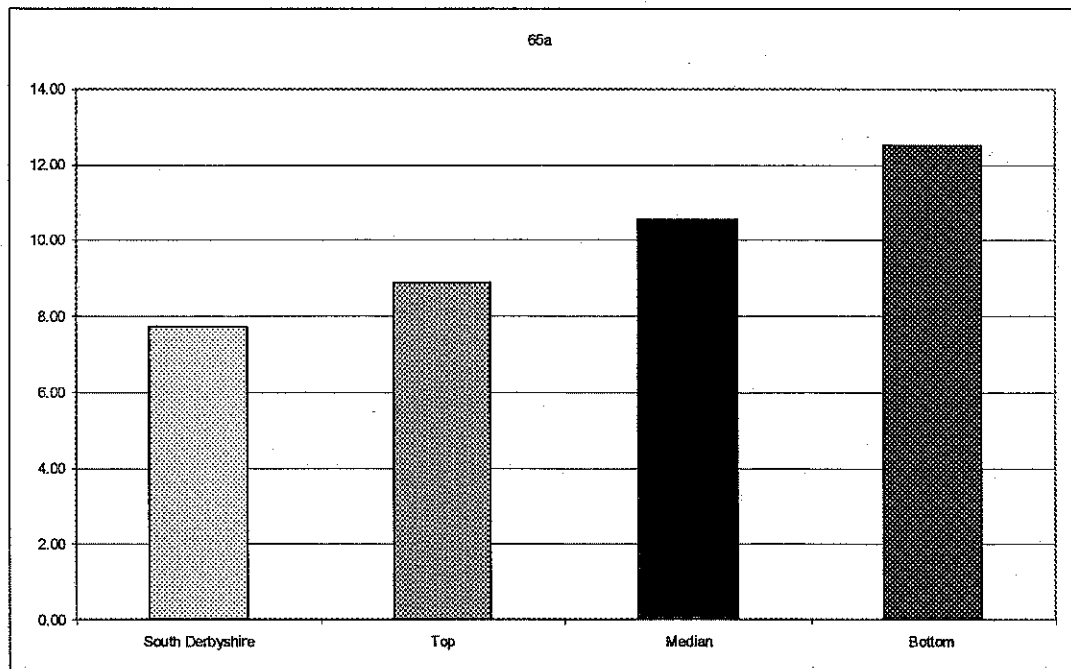
Local Performance Indicators for Sheltered Housing and Central Control Unit

Local Indicator	Estimate 2002/03
% of sheltered housing tenants receiving 5 visits every 10 days	100%
% of sheltered housing schemes fire alarms tested once a week	50%
% of calls to Central Control Unit answered within 30 seconds	96%
% of calls to Central Control Unit answered within 60 seconds	98%

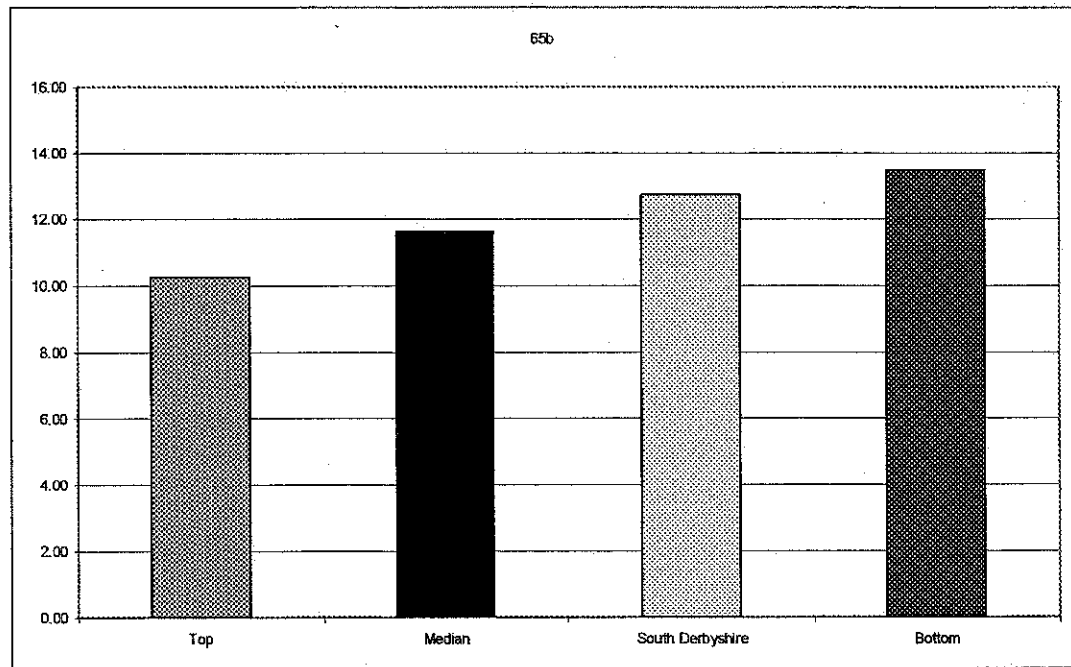
- 206 These indicators show a good level of performance with regard to visiting sheltered housing tenants on a regular basis and answering calls made to the CCU. These figures reflect the feedback we received from tenants during our inspection. All tenants we spoke to had received at least 5 visits every 10 days and most tenants who had used their call alarm system to contact the Central Control said their call was answered either quickly or very quickly.
- 207 Performance on testing fire alarms is also improving, with figures for October 2002 showing that 100 per cent of fire alarms were tested during October.
- 208 In order to be able to benchmark its performance with other providers of sheltered housing, the Council is joining both Housemark¹⁶ and the Housing Quality Network's sheltered housing benchmark group.
- 209 We used the national Best Value Performance Indicators (BVPI's) to compare South Derbyshire's performance with other District Council's. These indicators relate to all tenants and not just those in sheltered housing, however, in South Derbyshire's case over a third of all its tenants live in sheltered housing, with this proportion rising on an annual basis as the effects of the right to buy reduces its stock of family accommodation.
- 210 South Derbyshire compares well in terms of its weekly management costs, with this performance indicator (PI) showing that its management costs are low when compared to other District Councils. However, its weekly repair costs are higher and are above the median for District Councils as the charts below illustrate.
- 211 These are contextual indicators as low costs maybe an indicator of efficiency where a council can demonstrate good comparative performance, but may conversely suggest the service is underfunded where comparative performance is poor.

¹⁶ The Chartered Institute of Housing Benchmarking Service

BVPI65a – Average weekly management costs 2001/02 V All Districts

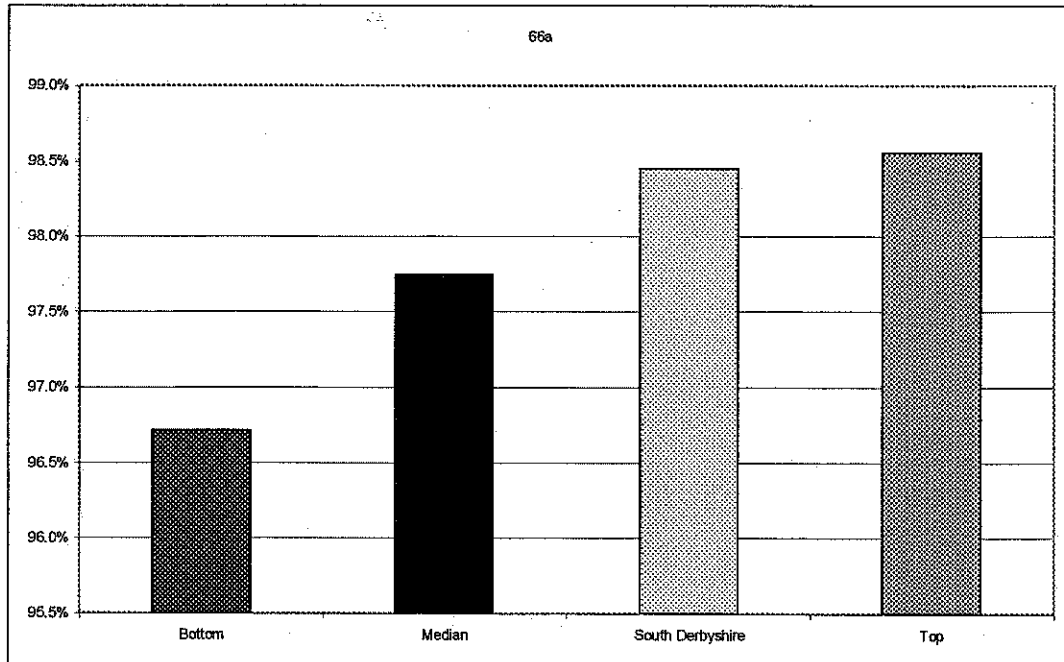


BVPI65b Average weekly repair costs 2001/02 v All Districts



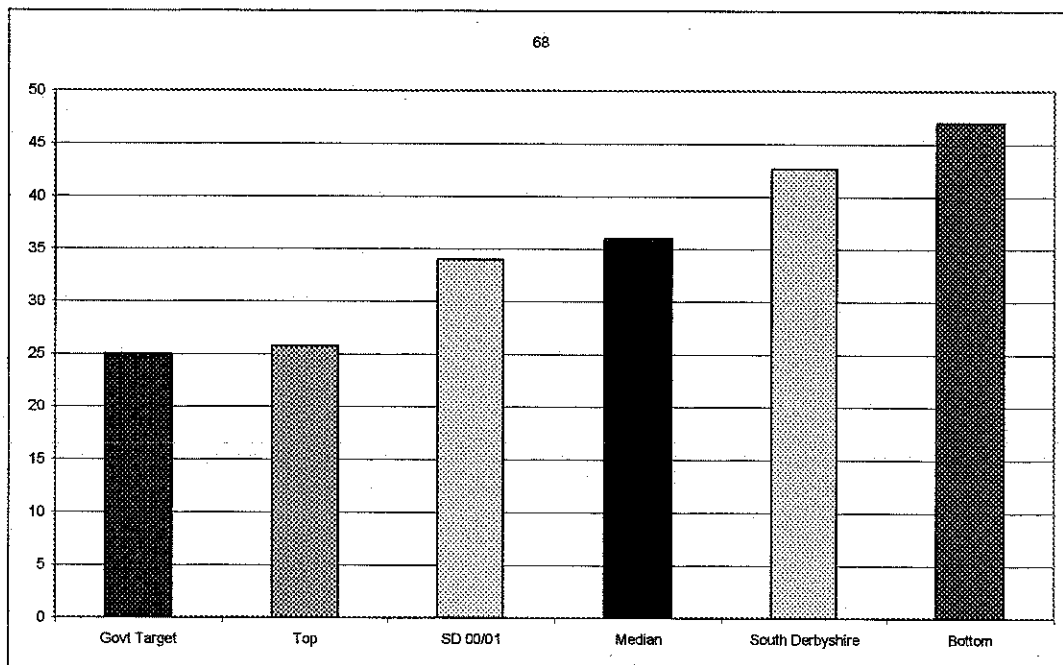
212 South Derbyshire's performance on collecting its rental income is good with its performance for the last two years placing it just outside the top quartile.

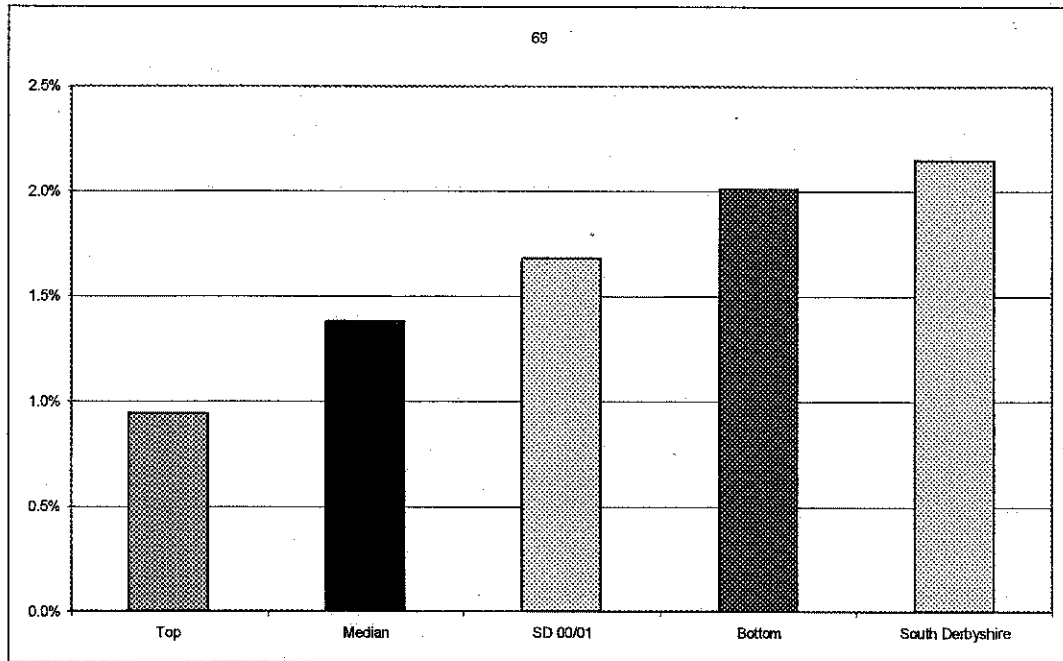
BVPI66a Rent collected 2001/02 v All Districts



213 South Derbyshire's performance on reletting its empty properties and reducing rent loss has deteriorated over the last two years as illustrated in the charts below. Its current performance is poor when compared to other District Councils and falls far short of the Government's target for District Councils to relet their empty properties within 25 days by 2005.

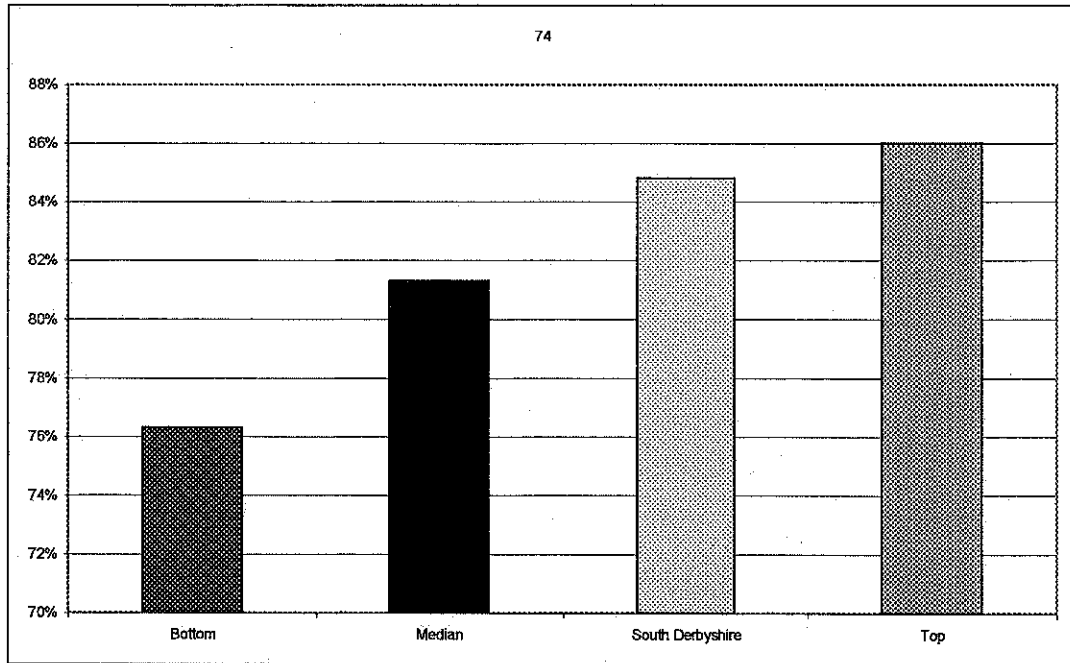
BVPI68 Average relet times Voids 2001/02 v All Districts



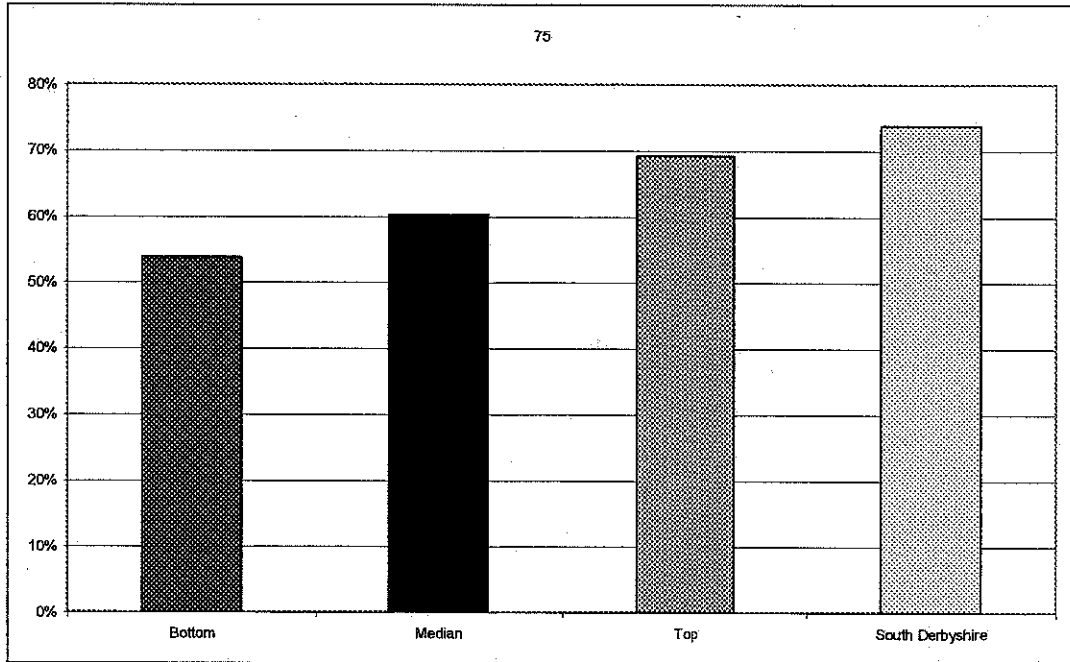
BVPI69 % of rent loss due to voids 2001/02 v All Districts

214 A survey was undertaken during 2000/01 which measured tenants satisfaction with the overall housing service. 85 per cent of tenants were satisfied, this is top quartile performance. The survey also asked about satisfaction with the opportunities to participate in decision making, 74 per cent of tenants were satisfied, again this is also top quartile performance. A further survey to update these findings was being undertaken during our inspection.

BVPI74 Tenant satisfaction with overall service 2001/02 v All Districts



BVPI75 Tenant satisfaction with opportunities for participation 2001/02 v All Districts



215 Unfortunately, we were unable to use the PI's relating to the repairs and maintenance service to compare South Derbyshire's performance with other District Councils as the District Auditor has identified that the prescribed periods for completing repairs used by the Council were not in accordance with those stipulated by the Government, so the data collected was not judged to be

accurate. The Council has responded to the District Auditors findings by making changes to the IT system to ensure that in future these indicators are correctly calculated.

- 216 In conclusion we found a mixed picture of performance with the Council achieving top quartile performance for tenant satisfaction, weekly management costs and collecting its rental income. However performance on reletting empty properties is poorer and has deteriorated over the last two years.

Summary

- 217 Overall we judge that the sheltered housing service is a fair, one star service. During our inspection we found that the Council has worked hard to improve this service since our last inspection and this has led to significant improvements in service delivery. The service has been completely re-organised and all tenants now receive the same level of service delivered by caring and committed staff. Customer satisfaction with the service is high.
- 218 However, there is still no overall vision in place for the sheltered housing service and progress with introducing some service improvements has been slower than we anticipated.

What are the prospects for improvement to the Service?

- 219 Inspectors have judged the service's prospects for improvement based on its proven capacity to improve using the four Building Blocks for effective improvement identified in 'Changing Gear':
- ◆ ownership of problems and willingness to change;
 - ◆ sustained focus on what matters;
 - ◆ capacity and systems to deliver performance and improvement; and
 - ◆ integration of continuous improvement into day to day management.

Building Block 1 – Ownership of problems and the willingness to change

- 220 The Council has been able to demonstrate that it is prepared to tackle poor services and take difficult decisions in order to improve its services to customers.
- 221 The outcome of the first inspection was seen as a turning point for many Members and officers who realised that the service they were providing was out of date and was no longer meeting the needs of their sheltered housing tenants. Senior Members told us:

'The inspection kick started the authority to examine all council services'

'It has been a road to Damascus for many people'

'It's been a catharsis'

- 222 Unfortunately not all Members and officers were fully aware of the scale of change that was needed in order to deliver service improvements. The inspection team returned nine months after the original inspection to give the Council an interim report on the progress achieved so far. This report showed that progress had been slow and had not delivered the step change that was required. We advised the Council that unless improvements were delivered rapidly and in a sustainable manner then the service would continue to deteriorate further.
- 223 This interim report acted as a catalyst for major improvements. The sheltered housing service was completely re-organised which meant taking difficult decisions such as reducing the number of Wardens, which led to some staff taking voluntary redundancy or early retirement, and all Residential Wardens had to move out of their accommodation. Not surprisingly staff morale was low and sickness levels increased as a result.
- 224 The Council then appointed outside consultants to undertake a complete diagnostic of the Housing Service, which highlighted the strengths and weaknesses of the service, this was completed in April 2002. Following this, the Council introduced a 'Change and Improvement Programme', a senior Member told us:

We are no longer sweeping things under the carpet

- 225 The aim of the programme is to:
- ◆ provide a better service for all customers;
 - ◆ help staff to fulfil the requirements of their job; and
 - ◆ create a more positive, changing environment for all.
- 226 There are eight areas included in the Change and Improvement Programme, these are:
- ◆ improved management and better information on what we do and how we do it;
 - ◆ developing a clear vision for social housing in the district;
 - ◆ keeping the housing stock in good condition;
 - ◆ rent collection and rent control;
 - ◆ human resources;
 - ◆ listening to our customers;
 - ◆ allocations and demand; and
 - ◆ sheltered housing.
- 227 All staff have been involved in this programme and receive regular updates on the progress achieved so far, together with target dates for future planned improvements.

- 228 The Consultants are currently being used to give ongoing support to the Housing Management Team in specific areas such as the review of repairs and maintenance and the production of the Housing Strategy.
- 229 During our inspection we also found that the levels of sickness absence have reduced in the housing service from 6.77 per cent to 4.77 per cent in the last twelve months.
- 230 The Council has decided following extensive consultation, to close two sheltered housing schemes which had poor facilities and were becoming increasingly difficult to let. This decision was made with cross party support and demonstrated that there is a political consensus within South Derbyshire to improve the Housing Service.
- 231 During this inspection we have seen a real enthusiasm and commitment from both Members and staff to continue with the service improvements that have been delivered so far.
- 232 This shared commitment has resulted in a culture change within the Housing Service. New staff have brought with them a 'can do' attitude and this has helped to improve the morale of existing staff. This change has been noticed by both Members, tenants and outside agencies. One Member told us:

Officers are now clear about their remit and clear that it is their job to help people

Building Block 2 – A sustained focus on what matters

- 233 During this inspection we have seen evidence that both Members and officers accept that there is still scope to significantly improve the sheltered housing service, regardless of the improvements made so far.
- 234 As previously mentioned, we were disappointed to find that there is still no overall vision for the sheltered housing service, despite this being highlighted as a weakness in our previous report.
- 235 However, the Council has set up a 'task and finish' group to agree a clear vision of what constitutes the sheltered housing service and how this impacts on the current sheltered housing stock. It is intended that this vision will consider the role of the service in the context of care in the community and promoting independence and will consider the housing needs of older people in partnership with key agencies.
- 236 Once a clear vision has been determined there is an acceptance that the Council may need to consider further rationalisation of the sheltered housing stock if an over provision of supply is identified.
- 237 We have been impressed with the change of attitude displayed by both Members and officers. Previously the Council looked to 'quick fixes' as a way of improving services. It is now evident that improvements are being planned more strategically and are only being implemented if they can be sustained in the longer term. A senior Member told us:

We're not chucking money at sheltered housing to make it look good. It's about bringing properties up to a quality standard. We aim to have a first class service.

- 238 Since our last inspection the Council has improved the way it involves its tenants in discussions on service improvements. As we have previously detailed in this report there is a well defined tenant participation framework in place and tenants we spoke to described how their involvement in service developments has increased over the last eighteen months.
- 239 TACT members have attended joint training sessions and fact finding visits with Members and all committee reports are sent to TACT for their comments prior to the committee meeting. The Council has established a number of working groups looking at key areas for improvement and TACT members are included on these groups.
- 240 We also saw examples where sheltered housing tenants have been consulted with in a meaningful way on improvements planned for their scheme. The development of a sheltered housing participation strategy should further improve the involvement of residents in future service developments.
- 241 During the last year the Council has developed the role of its scrutiny committees. During our inspection we saw evidence of how the Community Scrutiny Committee actively challenged the proposals for service improvements to the sheltered housing service.
- 242 It was apparent to us that Members of this committee were not prepared to simply accept officers' recommendations on service improvements. They called members of TACT to give evidence at committee meetings and undertook a series of visits to sheltered schemes to look at the facilities in the schemes and to talk to scheme residents.
- 243 Prior to our recent inspection the Scrutiny Committee also carried out a 'reality check' on the implementation of the Sheltered Housing Improvement Plan by visiting a number of sheltered housing schemes. Following these reality checks the Scrutiny Committee was able to confirm that the focus for and the priority given to the planned improvements was correct.
- 244 We were disappointed to find that diversity and equality issues had not been given a high priority in South Derbyshire and we have detailed our concerns in the diversity section of this report.
- 245 Despite managers telling us:

This is the next priority for the organisation.

- 246 We found a general lack of awareness and urgency about diversity issues, particularly amongst Members.

Building Block 3 – The capacity and systems to deliver performance and improvement

- 247 We have described previously in this report the performance management systems that have been introduced since our last inspection.
- 248 The Sheltered Housing Improvement Plan which was developed following our first inspection is monitored and reviewed by the Head of Community Services

every 4 to 6 weeks. It is also formally monitored by the Community Scrutiny Committee every quarter.

- 249 The Improvement Plan includes the improvement action required, the lead officer responsible for the improvement, the target date and the current status of the action. It also lists the customer outcomes for each planned improvement.
- 250 A number of actions contained in the plan have been completed after their target date and several actions remain uncompleted. Progress on the improvement plan has been affected by the long term absence of the Housing Services Manager as staff have been called upon to cover his duties, which has reduced their capacity to deliver planned improvements on time.
- 251 However, we acknowledge that improvement actions have been focused on those improvements that have had an immediate impact on sheltered housing tenants and customers of the CCU and as a result customers have seen a noticeable improvement in service delivery.
- 252 A further re-organisation of the Housing Service is planned to take place in the early part of 2003 when a clear separation of operational housing services and strategic housing functions will be introduced.
- 253 The Council recognises that the replacement of the existing computer system is critical to delivering further improvements in the Housing Service. This has been reinforced by the District Auditor's findings of inaccurate data collection in relation to two key PIs. The Council has recently agreed to spend an estimated £250,000 on replacing the existing system, £97,000 of which will come from HRA reserves.
- 254 Overall, the Council is now in a much more stable financial position than during the financial crisis of 1999/00. Council reserves now stand at over £2 million and Members have recently agreed to spend £1 million on improving a range of council services including £100,000 per annum to be spent on further improvements to sheltered housing schemes.
- 255 Members have also agreed that any capital receipts received from the sale of Basses Crescent and Smallthorn Place should be 'ring fenced' and spent on the remaining sheltered housing stock.
- 256 Improvements in partnership working have also led to extra resources being made available to spend on service improvements. The security improvements undertaken at sheltered schemes by the South Derbyshire Crime and Disorder Partnership are an example of this. The implementation of a Local Strategic Partnership by June 2003 will further enhance the Council's role within the local community.

Building Block 4 – The integration of continuous improvement into day to day management

- 257 During our first inspection it was clear that the best value review of sheltered housing had been undertaken by a small group of managers within the housing service and had not involved the staff who provided the service nor the customers who received the service.

- 258 The development of the Change and Improvement Programme has resulted in a fundamental change in the way that improvements are planned and delivered in the Housing Service.
- 259 All staff within the Housing Service have played an important part in the service improvements that have been achieved so far. The approach will continue to be 'task based' with staff having the opportunity to review real areas of work and make suggestions on what improvements should be made.
- 260 The sheltered housing service is to seek accreditation from the Centre for Sheltered Housing Studies. This involves collecting a portfolio of evidence to demonstrate how the organisation is achieving the ten standards contained within the code of practice and then being assessed. This code of practice is nationally recognised. The ten standards are:
- ◆ equality of opportunity and diversity;
 - ◆ rights and responsibilities;
 - ◆ confidentiality;
 - ◆ independence and empowerment;
 - ◆ service delivery, review and continuous improvement;
 - ◆ professional role and responsibilities;
 - ◆ collaboration and community development;
 - ◆ trained and supported staff;
 - ◆ policy and legislation; and
 - ◆ physical environment.
- 261 The CCU is also considering joining ASAP¹⁷, who have produced standards and targets for the provision of call alarm services.
- 262 In order to be able to benchmark its performance with other providers of sheltered housing, the Council is joining both Housemark and the Housing Quality Network's sheltered housing benchmark group. It is already a member of the Derbyshire Sheltered Housing Group.

Summary

- 263 Overall we judge this service to have promising prospects for further service improvements. During our inspection we found a shared understanding between officers and Members of the issues to be addressed and a shared commitment and enthusiasm for delivering service improvements.

¹⁷ The Association of Social and Community Alarm Providers

- 264 The Council has been able to demonstrate that it is prepared to tackle poor services and take difficult decisions in order to improve services for customers. There has been a culture change within the housing service and new staff have brought with them a 'can do' attitude, which has helped to improve the morale of existing staff.
- 265 However, we do have concerns that there is still no overall vision for the sheltered housing service and that the Council has not given diversity and equality issues a high enough priority.
- 266 A number of actions contained within the Sheltered Housing Improvement Plan have been completed after their target date and several actions remain uncompleted and many of the planned service improvements cannot be fully implemented until a new computer system is in place.

Appendices

What the inspectors did

The purpose of a best value inspection is to make two judgements. The first is, how good is the service being inspected? The second is, what are the prospects for improvement? We carried out a range of activities to enable us to reach our judgements.

Documents reviewed

Before going on site and during our visit, we reviewed various documents that the Council provided for us. These included:

- ◆ Corporate Plan 2002-2003;
- ◆ District Profile;
- ◆ Housing Division Service Plan 2002-2003;
- ◆ Housing Strategy – Annual Update 2002;
- ◆ Housing Revenue Account Business Plan 2002;
- ◆ Tenant Compact 2002;
- ◆ Best Value Performance Plan 2002;
- ◆ Draft Procurement Strategy 2003;
- ◆ Equal Opportunities Policy 1999;
- ◆ Stock Condition Survey 2002;
- ◆ Budget Book 2002-2003;
- ◆ Draft Housing Repairs and Maintenance Strategy;
- ◆ Draft Implementing E-Government Strategy;
- ◆ Housing Asset Management Strategy;
- ◆ Housing Services Customer Care Charter;
- ◆ Derbyshire's Care and Housing Charter 2002;
- ◆ Derbyshire's Supporting People Shadow Strategy 2002-2004;
- ◆ Community Wardens Procedure Guide 2002;
- ◆ Draft Sheltered Housing Guide; and

- ◆ Draft Hospital Admission and Discharge Protocol.

Reality checks undertaken

When we went on site, we carried out a number of different checks building on the work described above in order to get a full picture of how good the Service is. These on-site reality checks were designed to gather evidence about what it is like to use the Service and see how well it works. We also followed up on issues relating to the management of the review and the improvements flowing from it. Our reality checks included:

- ◆ Focus Group with sheltered housing tenants;
- ◆ Focus Group with Community Wardens and Central Control Operators;
- ◆ Focus Group with members of TACT;
- ◆ Tour of sheltered housing schemes;
- ◆ Accompanied Community Wardens on their visits to tenants homes;
- ◆ Interviews with stakeholders;
- ◆ Observation of calls taken in Central Control; and
- ◆ Conducted telephone survey of sheltered housing tenants.

List of people interviewed

We met a range of people involved with the Housing Service.

Councillor Barrie Whyman	Leader of the Council
Councillor Bob Southern	Chair of Community Services Committee
Councillor Heather Wheeler	Conservative Group Leader
Councillor Ken Harrington	Chair of Community Scrutiny Committee
Councillor Stephen Taylor	Member of Community Service Committee and ward member for Woodville
Frank McArdle	Chief Executive
Sandra Whiles	Head of Community Services
Ian Reid	Deputy Chief Executive
Sally Knight	Policy and Best Value Manager
Dawn Dawson	Advice, Liaison and Sheltered Housing Manager

Tony Ward	Sheltered Housing Team Leader
Sarah Biwott	Central Control Unit Team Leader
Stuart Batchelor	Community and Leisure Development Manager
Eileen Banton	Crime Reduction Officer, Derbyshire Police
Min Clarkson	Housing Advice and Liaison Team Leader
Paul Johnson	Planned Maintenance and Improvement Officer
Mark Winter	Building Maintenance Inspector for Sheltered Housing
Lee Carter	Assistant Quantity Surveyor
Angie Winnals	Community Warden
Jenny Wrathall	Community Warden
Karen McMurragh	Community Warden
Judith Goodall	Community Warden
Shelley Whiddett	Community Warden
Barbara Taylor	Community Warden
Sue Hubbard	Community Warden
Angela Coleman	Relief Community Warden
Angela Davies	Community Warden
Christine Logan	Community Warden
Karen Sharpe	Community Warden
Ellen Mortimer	Relief Community Warden
Stephen Topham	Central Control Officer
Sally Dawson	Central Control Officer
Marie Middleton	Central Control Officer
Patricia Abbott	Relief Central Control Officer

Nina Ennis	Chief Executive, Derbyshire Dales & South Derbyshire Primary Care Trust
Julie Voller	Supporting People Manager, Derbyshire County Council
Jo Smith	Director, Council for Voluntary Services
Sally Curtis	Area Manager, Older Peoples Services, (South Derbyshire & South Dales), Social Services, Derbyshire County Council

Positive Practice

'The Commission will identify and promote good practice. Every inspection will look for examples of good practice and innovation, and for creative ways to overcome barriers and resistance to change or make better use of resources.' (Seeing is Believing).

Positive practice is something which makes a service more effective and, ultimately, more able to deliver what the customer wants. This appendix summarises areas of positive practice found during the re-inspection of the Sheltered Housing Service in South Derbyshire in December 2002.

Item 1

- ◆ Scheme audits are currently being undertaken to provide an up to date assessment of the facilities in each sheltered housing scheme and to find out what work is required to bring these facilities up to an acceptable standard. The information from these audits is being fed into the new ten year improvement programme for the whole council stock and will ensure that when planned improvements are undertaken in a particular area, the communal facilities at sheltered schemes in that area will be included in the programme of works.

Item 2

- ◆ For each visit undertaken by a Community Warden, a contact sheet is completed, which provides a record of all visits undertaken.

Item 3

- ◆ A detailed Guidance and Procedure Manual for Community Wardens has been introduced. The purpose of the manual is to provide all new and existing Community Wardens with a comprehensive set of procedures and guidelines to enable them to consistently deliver a high quality service to their tenants. The manual is more than just a procedure guide as it contains examples of good practice and helpful tips. The Council hopes that the manual will help to enhance the Community Wardens professionalism and assist them in becoming 'reflective practitioners'.