

Performance Management in Local Authority Housing Services: An Empirical View



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by

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Report summary

Background

This report was commissioned by the Scottish Housing Best Value Network and Communities Scotland to assess current local authority practice on housing service self-assessment and performance management. It was also intended to collect evidence to underpin the production of good practice guidance in this area. The report is informed by:

- a postal survey of Scottish local authority landlords (27 of 29) carried out in 2002/03
- case studies focusing on six local authorities – four in Scotland and two in England – carried out in 2003/04.

The case study councils were selected mainly with a view to gaining greater insights into policies and practices of authorities identified as highly active in relation to performance management and self-assessment techniques (see Section 1.2). Because the English case study LAs had devolved housing management to Arms Length Management Organisations (ALMOs), the evidence in relation to these councils largely relates to the activities of these organisations.

The Organisational Location of Housing Functions

In contrast with the situation a few years earlier, most local authorities in Scotland located their main housing functions within large multi-service departments – most commonly paired with social work, technical or property-related functions (see Table 2.1 – Section 3). Hence, most ‘chief housing officers’ are now third tier heads of service rather than second tier directors.

Perhaps more importantly, however, 17 of the 27 councils covered by the postal survey were operating housing functions in a ‘unitary’ style in 2002/03 – that is, where the operational responsibility for all six ‘core housing functions’ was held by the chief housing officer. In the other 10 councils significant functions such as repairs ordering or rent arrears collection were under the direct control of non-Housing departments such as Finance or Property. Sheltered housing management was, in seven of the 27 councils, the prime responsibility of Social Work rather than Housing (see Table 2.2 – Section 3).

Key Player Roles in Housing Service Performance Management

Designated Performance Management Teams

Nearly two thirds of Scottish councils have established designated posts or teams with a performance management brief (though in some instances the responsibilities of designated lead officers may extend beyond performance management). Case study evidence suggests that the remit of these teams and the systems they operate sometimes tends to be focused on housing management to the exclusion of homelessness and other non-landlord functions. The creation and/or expansion of these designated teams has tended to be stimulated by an appreciation of the need to prepare for regulatory inspection.

Operational Managers and Front-line Staff

As well as providing most of the statistical material informing routine performance monitoring, operational managers and front line staff in case study LAs normally analysed and discussed recent figures on a regular basis. In some case study councils they also worked together to set locally-specific performance targets consistent with service-wide objectives but tailored to local circumstances. Operational managers and their staff were also often involved in self-assessment and service review through being invited to participate in function-specific working groups established on either a temporary or semi-permanent basis (see Section 3.3).

Elected Members and Tenants Representatives

Developments in local authority performance management systems are generally driven by professionals rather than by elected members. Attempts to facilitate greater member involvement in this area by some case study councils had included the setting up of specialist scrutiny panels (see Section 3.4).

Case study LAs had made considerable strides in involving tenants in the service review side of performance management. This was best exemplified by Derby's Service User Review Group, a tenants forum established to carry out its own independent service assessment alongside the Council's 'official' Best Value reviews of housing functions. More commonly tenant involvement in service reviews takes the form of representation on working parties such as Fife's Voids Service Improvement Team. In West Lothian a system of tenant-led inspections had been successfully established (see Section 3.5).

Performance Management Frameworks

Service planning – a periodically updated set of organisational objectives, priorities and targets – has become a standard keystone of performance management regimes for local authorities and other public bodies. Typically, service planning involves an attempt to reconcile 'top down' and 'bottom up' objectives together with budgetary projections. The aim is to weld together a coherent organisational agenda for the plan period and, through the use of measurable objectives, promote managerial accountability. In all of the case study LAs service plans were seen as a crucial element of the performance management framework. In several instances the production of local office or local team plans was regarded as significant in facilitating tenant and resident involvement alongside local managers and front-line staff (see Section 4.1).

Performance target-setting is common, though far from universal in Scottish local authorities across the main housing functions. And only in respect of void management do the majority of councils set local office as well as service-wide targets. Case study evidence suggests that such local target-setting can be a particularly valuable vehicle for team level discussion (in some instances also involving tenants) around the review and updating of office- or area-specific service plans. In Derby tenants representatives had been invited to name their own 'top 10' PIs and targets which were then taken on board as organisational goals (see Table 4.1, Section 4.1).

In carrying out *service reviews*, a significant minority of Scottish LAs – 10 of our 27 postal survey respondents – had made use of EFQM or Balanced Scorecard approaches as an analytical framework. In most instances, chief housing officers are free to make their own decisions on whether to make use of such models though the corporate centre often sets the Best Value service review process and timetable. In seeking to identify and eliminate 'wasted resources', one case study LA – North Lanarkshire – had made extensive and – it was believed – worthwhile use of Business Process Re-engineering (BPR) (see Section 4.2).

The range of techniques used in *assessing service quality* by case study LAs included file checks (to measure estate management activity in North Lanarkshire), tenant-led post-inspections (to evaluate repairs quality in Derby) and office audit (to check office reception services in Westminster).

Relationships Between Departments and Organisations

Whilst not unknown, Service Level Agreements remain a relatively infrequently used device to regulate the relations between Housing and other LA departments – both those which undertake housing functions (e.g. rent collection) and those providing support services (e.g. personnel, finance and IT). With the partial exception of West Lothian, the prevailing Scottish case study LA approach to relationships between housing and other agencies emphasized the importance of co-ordination, monitoring and negotiation as opposed to a formal contractual style. Relationships were more commonly configured in a contractual way among the English case studies – particularly in Westminster. In Derby, however, extensive use was being made of partnering agreements with building firms (see Section 4.3).

Kitemark Accreditation, Peer Review and Other Independent Evaluation

More than a quarter of Scottish LAs (nine) had achieved – or were working towards – Chartermark accreditation for housing functions in 2002/03 (see Table 5.1, Section 5.1). A slightly lesser number – had achieved or were working towards Investors in People status for housing services. Case study LAs which had achieved such kitemarks generally saw the preparation and assessment process as having generated considerable ‘spinoff benefits’ – either in the form of enhancing staff development frameworks or in instilling a performance ethos among staff. At the same time, the aspiration to gain or retain kitemarks tended not to be seen as an overwhelmingly important organisational priority.

By mid-2003 almost half of Scottish LAs (13) had participated in peer reviews facilitated by the Scottish Housing Best Value Network. Case study evidence suggested that these activities were generally seen as a useful form of assessment in preparation for official inspection and for engaging staff with ‘performance culture’ (see Section 5.2).

Routine Performance Monitoring

Largely reflecting the scope of the statutory PIs, certain key functions – allocations, repairs, homelessness, rent arrears and void management – were routinely monitored by the vast majority of Scottish councils. Others, such as estate management, ASB response and services to gypsy travellers (site management) were less commonly covered by councils’ PI frameworks. Only two housing functions – allocations and void management – were routinely monitored at local office level by more than half of LAs – a finding which suggests that considerable scope for the development of PI monitoring frameworks may remain (see Section 6.1).

Just over half of Scottish LAs produced regular performance monitoring bulletins primarily aimed at managers and staff and – in a few cases – also circulated to other stakeholders such as tenants and elected members. The most effective of these utilised formats showing recent performance set against various benchmarks – e.g. service plan targets, figures for the previous year, national average. Where, as in many cases, such bulletins disaggregate performance to area office level (mainly in respect of allocations and void management) they can stimulate healthy competition between management units, though not all councils actively seek to encourage such an ethos (see Section 6.2).

Assessing Customer Feedback

Other than the use of satisfaction slips to monitor repairs performance, relatively few Scottish LAs are experienced in collecting customer feedback on housing services. Among the case studies, however, there were good examples on the use of service-user surveys focusing on a diverse range of functions and carried out in a variety of ways. There were also examples (in North Lanarkshire and Westminster) of routine ‘customer complaints’ data being analysed so as to inform service development priorities (see Section 7.4).

Embedding Performance Culture

There is evidence that performance culture is quite firmly embedded in some LA housing service providers, with the English ALMOs, in particular, characterised by a drive for service improvement permeating throughout the organisation (see Section 9). A performance ethos was also substantially in evidence in the Scottish case studies – e.g. in terms of the extent to which staff at all levels were aware of organisational service improvement objectives, engaged with PI data and actively contributed to service planning.

Conclusions

Case study evidence suggests that, in terms of housing performance management systems, Scotland’s most proficient authorities compare well with their English counterparts. In many Scottish authorities, however, performance management and self-assessment techniques remain under-developed. Commonly weak areas include the involvement of tenants in service monitoring

and review, the setting of area- or team-specific performance targets, and the collection of customer feedback data.

In more than a third of Scottish councils important elements of 'the housing service' are delivered by staff in non-housing departments (e.g. Finance, Property). In very few instances are such contributions specified in Service Level Agreements and there is rarely a sense of the chief housing officer's potential role of 'service champion' on behalf of tenants and other service users.

Irrespective of organisational structure, there are actions that would fundamentally assist in fostering a performance culture in local authority housing services and these include:

- Investing in information systems with the facility for producing performance reports at a disaggregated level – e.g. specific to area, management units, individual staff.
- promoting easy accessibility of performance information to all staff, tenant representatives and elected members
- facilitating opportunities for discussion of performance issues to which front-line staff are actively encouraged to contribute (e.g. via monthly team training/briefing sessions permitted by temporary office closure)
- routinely incorporating performance monitoring and service review findings into service planning and promoting an awareness of this among all stakeholders
- placing a high priority on staff development and training.

1 Introduction

1.1 Background

The extension of formal regulation to cover local authority housing is arguably the single most significant innovation of the wide-ranging Housing (Scotland) Act 2001. Under the Act, Communities Scotland, as the successor to Scottish Homes, takes on the role of regulating and inspecting local authority housing management and homelessness services. For local authorities, in particular, the new regime represents a change from that previously exercised by the Accounts Commission and its successor Audit Scotland. Communities Scotland's 2002 Single Regulatory Framework (SRF) sets out the new regime for all Scottish social landlords, both local authorities and housing associations.

The central elements of the new regulatory regime are Communities Scotland's Performance Standards and the periodic inspection of housing services to assess compliance. More broadly – as in England – Scottish social landlords are now subject to a system which examines very directly the extent to which they are in tune with the Best Value objective of continuously improving services in relation to:

- sound governance
- well developed systems for involving customers/citizens and staff
- rigorous service review models, incorporating competition and benchmarking
- public performance reporting

Communities Scotland emphasizes the need for social landlords to practice 'self-assessment' and has produced a set of self-assessment questions that landlords can use to measure their compliance with Performance Standards criteria (http://www.inspection.communitiesscotland.gov.uk/print_all.asp)

The advent of regulation and inspection has anyway stimulated substantial interest in self-assessment and performance management among Scottish local authorities since 2001. With this in mind, the Scottish Housing Best Value Network and Communities Scotland decided to commission this study to assess current activities under these headings and to inform the development of good practice advice.

1.2 Methodology

The research reported here involved two main elements:

- a postal survey of local authorities in Scotland
- in-depth work in six case study local authorities in Scotland and England

The postal survey was carried out in 2002/03 and generated responses from 27 of Scotland's 29 local authorities with a continuing landlord role. A freestanding report of the survey was completed in December 2003 (<http://www.shbvn.org/>).

Relevant results from the postal survey are incorporated into this report alongside findings from the six local authority case studies. Data collected through the postal survey also influenced the selection of the four Scottish LA case studies:

- Fife Council
- North Lanarkshire Council

- Perth & Kinross Council
- West Lothian Council

These were chosen to represent councils shown to be among the 'most active' in relation to self-assessment and performance management techniques. For example, North Lanarkshire and West Lothian were the only Scottish councils which had, by 2003, secured Chartermark accreditations across most or all of their housing services, whilst Fife was at this time working towards both Chartermark and Investors in People status (the Council gained Chartermark status for its Home Energy team in January 2003). It is also notable that both North Lanarkshire and West Lothian feature as 'top performers' in the Housing Quality Network's analysis of 2002/03 statutory housing performance indicators (Housing Quality Network, 2004)). Similarly, Perth & Kinross has been a rent collection 'top performer' for several years and recorded the highest rent collection figure of any LA in 2002/03.

Selection was also intended to reflect some diversity in terms of organisational size and circumstances.

Partly influenced by the postal survey findings it was also decided to supplement the Scottish case studies with two case studies involving 'high performing' housing departments in England, Derby and Westminster. These organisations were selected on the advice of the Housing Inspectorate as local authority landlords operating 'state of the art' approaches to performance management.

Both of Derby and Westminster have delegated housing management to Arms Length Management Organisations (ALMOs), Derby Homes and CityWest Homes, respectively. Whilst 'parent' local authorities retain some influence over ALMOs, the relationship is in some ways similar to that of client and contractor. In Westminster there is an additional dimension involving area-based contractor organisations accountable to CityWest Homes acting on the Council's behalf. Such structures differ from those familiar to local authorities in Scotland, though the relationship between CityWest Homes and the area-based housing management contractors is in some ways similar to that between a local authority housing headquarters office and district housing offices. In any event, many of the techniques and approaches used in Derby and Westminster are potentially highly relevant to housing service delivery in the Scottish context.

All six case study visits involved a number of interviews with key players in each of the selected local authorities. These included senior managers, dedicated performance management staff, front-line officers and elected members (though the range of interviewees was narrower in the English case studies). Interviews were structured according to a common 'topic guide' with the intention of conducting a standard approach to promote comparability across the case study landlords. Documentary material (such as performance management framework diagrams, service plans, performance bulletins and the like) was also collected to illustrate points made by interviewees. Thematically structured reports were produced for each case study and these form the main source of material for this report.

1.3 Structure of Report

In Section 2 we outline the policy context for the study in relation to Best Value and the regulatory inspection regime, and review some of the good practice literature around housing performance management. Next, in Section 3, we look at the position of housing functions in local authority organisational structures in Scotland and at the role of non-housing departments in providing housing services.

Sections 4-8 are then structured to match with the postal survey questionnaire and case study topic guides (see above). First, in Section 4, we identify the various parties involved in shaping and contributing to housing departments' performance management systems and look at their respective roles in the case study LAs. Section 5 then forms the heart of the report, discussing the frameworks and vehicles used to structure and facilitate performance management. Kitemark systems are bracketed together with external peer review in that both involve independent

evaluation by outside bodies. The discussion of staff motivation, management and development looks at the ways that routine appraisal systems are, in some LAs, an integral element of the performance management framework.

Section 6 looks at housing departments' experiences of kitemark accreditation systems such as Chartermark and Investors in People, bracketing this together with the role of peer review and other evaluation independent of the landlord itself. In Section 7, we move on to examine the operation of routine performance monitoring systems, the types of data collected and the ways this is used. Whilst such systems often incorporate some customer feedback measures, data of this sort can be seen as part of a different agenda and is hence discussed separately in Section 7. Linking with the staff management discussion in Section 5, Section 9 details the ways that housing departments have sought to foster and institutionalise performance culture.

2 The Organisational Location of Housing Functions

2.1 Departments Principally Responsible for Housing Functions

This section draws on the postal survey carried out in 2002/03. Only eight authorities at this time retained a stand-alone housing department – i.e. a single organisational unit responsible for most housing functions (see Table 2.1). In 1997/98 exactly half (16) of all authorities had departments solely devoted to the housing function (Taylor and Douglas, 1998). This comparison confirms that the era of freestanding 'comprehensive housing services' is, for most councils, a thing of the past.

By 2002/03 two thirds (19) of the 27 responding authorities located their main housing functions within larger departments, with the most common pairing (8) involving Social Work services. The proportion of authorities with combined Social Work and Housing departments doubled from 15 per cent to 30 per cent over the five years to 2002/03 (see Table 2.1). At the same time, there are signs that the popularity of this pairing is on the wane, with at least two councils have recently separated housing and social work functions.

Table 2.1 – Name of department with most responsibility for housing functions

	1997/8 Survey		2002/03 Study	
	Number	%	Number	%
Housing/Housing Services	19	58	8	30
Housing & Technical	1	3	2	7
Housing & Social Work	5	15	8	30
Housing & Property	1	3	3	11
Housing & Finance	2	6	0	0
Community Services	3	9	2	7
Environmental Services	1	3	1	4
Other (see below)	0	0	3	11
Total	32	100	27	100

Source: Postal survey

Consistent with the finding that most LAs had incorporated 'core housing functions' within larger departments, the majority of senior managers ('chief housing officers') within these structures (70 per cent) were third tier heads of service. Only 30 per cent were at second tier level of director i.e. reporting direct to the council's Chief Executive. In the remainder of this section the term 'Housing Department' refers to the organisational unit under the managerial control of the chief housing officer (usually titled Director or Head of Housing).

Twenty authorities (74 per cent of respondents) had experienced a significant change in the division of responsibility for housing functions since local government reorganisation in 1996. The changes mainly reflect a transfer of certain aspects of the service from, or to another department as a result of a council-wide restructuring. Very few changes appear to be as a result of housing-led service reviews.

Using the dates provided by respondents, and comparing our results with Taylor and Douglas's 1998 study, it is clear that there has been significant change in the organisational location of housing services over this period. By 1998 twenty authorities had already experienced some level of change since (1996) reorganisation, with similar numbers of chief housing officers gaining and losing housing functions. The movement of Housing Benefit was the most commonly reported move, either into or out of the housing service at this stage.

Eleven authorities reported that significant structural changes haven taken place since 1998. The activities most commonly involved have been Housing Benefits and repairs services. Table 2.2 provides further evidence of the apparent trend towards housing services being provided from within larger departments.

Table 2.2 – Reasons for post-1998 changes in the division of responsibility for housing services

Reason/type for change	No of LAs
Part or whole of the housing service moved out to different department(s)	8
Merger of two or more departments	5
Merger of two or more divisions/services from the same or different departments to form larger housing service	6
Name change only	1

Source: Postal Survey

2.2 Division of Responsibilities in Provision of Housing Services

In the postal survey authorities were asked to detail divisions in the responsibility of housing-related functions to show the extent to which such functions were split across departmental or divisional boundaries or outsourced to other agencies. Table 2.2 shows the division of responsibilities between Housing and other council departments in relation to six 'core housing functions'. 'Housing' in the body of this table denotes cases where the function is largely or wholly the responsibility of the 'housing department' (i.e. staff under the direct control of the head or director of housing). 'Other' denotes council departments such as Social Work, Technical Services and Finance. On this basis, 17 of the 27 responding councils were, in 2002/03, working with 'unitary' (U) housing structures, whilst in 10 councils responsibility for core housing services was 'fragmented' (F) across one or more departments other than housing.

In a small number of councils two or more of the six 'core services' were undertaken by departments other than housing (see Table 2.2). In the most striking case, Fife, this reflects the Council's highly decentralised structure where a range of services is delivered by the Local Office Network, formally constituted as a Department in its own right. The Housing Department, therefore, was configured as 'the principal client service for delivering the housing function'.

In general, 'unitary' housing structures tended to be operated by councils with a relatively small housing stock, many of them covering largely rural areas. It is, however, clear that there is no strong relationship between stock size or area type, on the one hand, and housing structure on the other. In the main, organisational divisions of responsibility for housing services result from local and/or local historical factors.

Table 2.2 – Organisational Responsibilities for 'Core Housing Functions' Within LAs

LA	Organis- ation type	Allocations	Repairs ordering	Estate manage- ment	Home- lessness assessme nt	Rent arrears manage- ment	Void manage- ment
Aberdeen	F	Housing	Other	Housing	Housing	Housing	Housing
Aberdeenshire	U	Housing	Housing	Housing	Housing	Housing	Housing
Angus	U	Housing	Housing	Housing	Housing	Housing	Housing
Argyll & Bute	U	Housing	Housing	Housing	Housing	Housing	Housing
Clackmannanshir e	U	Housing	Housing	Housing	Housing	Housing	Housing
Dundee	U	Housing	Housing	Housing	Housing	Housing	Housing
East Ayrshire	U	Housing	Housing	Housing	Housing	Housing	Housing
East Dunbartonshire	U	Housing	Housing	Housing	Housing	Housing	Housing
East Lothian	F	Housing	Other	Housing	Housing	Other	Housing
East Renfrewshire	F	Housing	Housing	Housing	Housing	Other	Housing
Edinburgh	U	Housing	Housing	Housing	Housing	Housing	Housing
Falkirk	F	Housing	Other	Other	Housing	Other	Other
Fife	F	Housing	Other	Other	Housing	Other	Other
Highland	F	Housing	Housing	Housing	Housing	Other	Housing
Inverclyde	U	Housing	Housing	Housing	Housing	Housing	Housing
Midlothian	U	Housing	Other	Housing	Housing	Housing	Housing
Moray	U	Housing	Housing	Housing	Housing	Housing	Housing
North Ayrshire	U	Housing	Housing	Housing	Housing	Housing	Housing
North Lanarkshire	F	Housing	Housing	Housing	Housing	Other	Housing
Perth & Kinross	U	Housing	Housing	Housing	Housing	Housing	Housing
Renfrewshire	F	Housing	Housing	Housing	Housing	Other	Housing
South Ayrshire	U	Housing	Housing	Housing	Housing	Housing	Housing
South Lanarkshire	U	Housing	Housing	Housing	Housing	Housing	Housing
Stirling	F	Housing	Other	Housing	Housing	Housing	Housing
West Dunbartonshire	U	Housing	Housing	Housing	Housing	Housing	Housing
West Lothian	F	Housing	Housing	Other	Housing	Housing	Housing
Western Isles	U	Housing	Housing	Housing	Housing	Housing	Housing

Note: 'Housing' denotes situations where the Housing Department is wholly responsible for the delivery of that function and other Departments play no significant role. 'Other' denotes situations where Departments other than Housing are significantly or exclusively responsible for the delivery of that function. Source: Postal Survey

Table 2.3 covers a slightly wider range of housing functions than 2.2 – those considered likely to be provided by every local authority retaining a landlord function. The functions are ranked according to the proportion of councils where the service is run largely or wholly by the Housing Department.

Certain activities – in particular, aids and adaptations and rent collection are quite commonly run by non-Housing Departments. The aids and adaptations function involves occupational therapy (OT) staff responsible for assessing housing needs of people with disabilities. In almost half of responding authorities these officers are employed within Social Work rather than Housing Departments. This reflects a continuation of the situation prior to 1996 Local Government Reorganisation when regional council Social Work Departments carried out OT assessments. Rent income collection is the primary responsibility of Finance Departments in 11 councils. In five of these instances, however, rent arrears collection remains a Housing Department function. Another fairly common arrangement is where sheltered housing is managed by Social Work rather than Housing. In five councils, repairs ordering and works specification in relation to

improvement programmes is – at least in part – carried out by departments such as Technical or Property Services rather than by Housing.

Table 2.3 Division of Responsibility for Housing Functions

Function	Housing Dept only	Other LA dept partially or wholly responsible	Outsourced partially or wholly	Total
	<i>No of LAs</i>	<i>No of LAs</i>	<i>No of LAs</i>	<i>No of LAs</i>
Allocations	26	1	0	27
Homelessness assessment	26	1	0	27
Tenancy support	25	2	0	27
Void management	25	2	0	27
Estate management	24	3	0	27
Tenant participation	23	1	3	27
ASB response	22	3	2	27
Repairs ordering	22	5	0	27
Improvement programmes	22	5	0	27
Rent arrears	21	6	0	27
Sheltered housing management	20	7	0	27
Rent collection	16	11	0	27
Aids and adaptations	14	13	0	27

Source: Postal Survey

Whilst some councils use private contractors to carry out response repairs and/or planned maintenance, these types of arrangements are not shown in Table 2.3. The table does, however, identify a small number of councils which outsource tenant participation work and/or anti-social behaviour response.

3 Key Player Roles in Housing Service Performance Management

3.1 Purpose and Scope

This section looks at local authorities' organisational approach to housing performance management and the light shed on this by the respective roles of various key players. It should be noted that the postal survey questionnaire avoided citation of the term 'performance management' partly because of the concern that this would be interpreted inconsistently.

3.2 Dedicated Performance Management Staff

At the time of the Scottish local authority survey in 2002/03, sixteen of the 25 councils responding on this issue had established dedicated posts or teams with a performance management remit (see Table 3.1). By and large, these tended to be the larger, more urban councils, though they included four authorities managing less than 10,000 homes. Most performance management lead officer posts were graded at middle management or senior officer level (PO1 or above – i.e. with a 2002/03 salary of at least £24,000).

Table 3.1 Local Authorities with Dedicated Housing Performance Management Staff, 2002/03

Authority	Grade of most senior dedicated staff member	Stock size (as at 31.03.03)
Aberdeen City	APV	25,841
Angus	APV	9,043
East Ayrshire	PO1	16,453
East Renfrewshire	PO8	3,804
East Lothian	PO11-14	9,040
Edinburgh, City of	PO15	27,455
Falkirk	PO8	19,453
Fife	-	38,188
Highland	-	16,945
North Ayrshire	PO2	15,928
North Lanarkshire	PO11	43,745
Perth & Kinross	PO11-13	9,142
Renfrewshire	PO3	18,228
South Lanarkshire	-	31,872
West Dunbartonshire	-	13,179
West Lothian	PO14	14,939

Source: Postal Survey

In all the case study authorities dedicated teams played a leading role in performance management, though West Lothian's approach was distinct in that the overall Performance Manager – though directly accountable to the Service Head – worked alongside rather than at the head of the relevant team. Typically, the central role of such teams involved the collection, analysis and dissemination of routine performance monitoring data (see Section 5). Allied roles tended to include management planning (e.g. contributing to service plans), IT systems development, communications (e.g. production of newsletters for tenants and/or staff) and the development of tenant participation strategy. In some cases the role of the dedicated team spanned both routine performance monitoring, data collection and analysis, on the one hand, and periodic service review, on the other, though this was not universal. Westminster's CityWest Homes, for example, had established a specialist service development arm responsible for service reviews and policy development.

In the Scottish case studies the remit of performance management teams tended to be seen as linked with housing management functions. Their agenda therefore tended to exclude research and policy development activities connected with housing strategy formulation (seen as a 'housing development' function) and in some cases homelessness (apparently not always fully incorporated within performance management frameworks).

The integration of IT specialists within performance management teams (as, for example, in West Lothian) is potentially significant given that social landlords' IT systems are typically designed to meet operational requirements and given that, whilst they may be technically sophisticated, such systems are often found to be rigid and inflexible in terms of their analytical and reporting capabilities. Having an IT specialist capability within a performance management team might help to ensure that reporting facilities are built into specifications for IT commissioning as well as in facilitating the production of customised management information reports.

All of the Scottish case study authorities operated specialist 'Quality Assurance', 'Quality Management' or 'Service Development' teams whose functions encompassed some or all of those outlined above (previously referred to under the generic heading 'performance management'). Preparations for SRF introduction have tended to see such teams expanding their remit and/or staffing.

Dedicated staff must, of course, be accounted for within central overheads. However, their specialist role facilitates the development of expertise in analytical and presentational techniques generally acknowledged by case study LA operational managers to be crucial in supporting continuous improvement across the organisation.

Maximising the benefits derived from such central teams depends in part on their enjoying the respect of operational colleagues – rather than being seen by service managers and front-line staff as playing an 'ivory tower' role. A means of promoting positive linkages between service development and operational staff as operated in Westminster was the designation of specific Customer Services staff members to individual housing management providers (analogous to area managers). CS staff met with their designated providers on a monthly basis as well as making more frequent contacts involving visiting estates, meeting with residents and carrying out quality audits. It was estimated that 20 per cent of their role was performed on site rather than at headquarters.

Westminster's approach also emphasized the development of functional – as well as geographical – expertise, with different specialist team staff members concentrating on specific areas such as major repairs, rent arrears and tenant management.

The existence of dedicated performance management staff may be justifiable in that it facilitates the development of a professional approach to the key functions involved. At the same time, however, there was a recognition in the case study LAs that performance management is inherently a shared responsibility right across the organisation.

3.3 Operational Managers and Front-line Staff

The provision of statistical data for collation and analysis by centrally-based colleagues typically forms the central role of operational managers and front-line staff in performance management systems. In some of the authorities, recent years had seen a growing emphasis on the accountability of area and/or team managers for performance trends specific to their area of responsibility. In Fife, North Lanarkshire and West Lothian, for example, area managers attended monthly meetings with headquarters staff and/or senior colleagues at which PI trends were the main subject of discussion (see also Section 9).

In West Lothian day-long monthly meetings involving the Service Head, Performance Manager along with operational managers were held for this purpose. Performance trends as highlighted by the routine monthly performance bulletin formed the main agenda for these meetings. This system was quite formalised in that the absence of a coherent explanation for 'inadequate' performance could trigger the Service Head to issue a 'performance notice' requiring the relevant manager to provide a detailed report explaining the source of the problem and how it was being

addressed for consideration at the next monthly meeting. In practice, however, this mechanism was invoked relatively infrequently.

In three of the Scottish case studies – North Lanarkshire, Perth & Kinross and West Lothian – great significance was attributed to the designation of half a day per month (two hours in West Lothian) when local offices were closed to facilitate team meetings to monitor local performance trends and, if necessary, agree remedial action. Such meetings were seen as highly valuable as a way of institutionalising the routine discussion of performance issues at all levels of the hierarchy and, in this way, embed training and teamworking as routine activities (see also Section 9).

In West Lothian these local office meetings focused on, among other things, recent trends at patch – or individual housing officer – level. Officers were expected to highlight unmet targets and possible contributory factors with fellow team members being encouraged to put forward their own analyses and potential solutions. Such a system is, of course, highly dependent on the ability to disaggregate operational data to patch level. In West Lothian, patch performance on key PIs can be traced back as far as 1998.

North Lanarkshire's 'office closed' sessions were mainly designed to facilitate briefings or seminars focusing on key issues for the department as a whole, or targeted on functions where specific failings had been identified in that particular office.

In most of the case studies local managers were given a degree of flexibility to set local performance targets and were expected to contribute to strategic planning by developing area-specific service plans. These issues are further discussed in Section 4.1.

In Fife, operational managers and front-line staff contributed to the performance management and service improvement through participation in Service Improvement Teams (SITs). Drawing together staff from various key departments, SITs covering voids, arrears and response repairs were established in 2000 with a brief to develop function-specific action plans and to monitor and review the impact of these plans. Greater efforts had recently been made to increase front-line staff involvement in developing SIT action plans and to disaggregate performance trends below office level so that front-line managers could be helped to recognise areas needing greater attention.

Similarly, West Lothian had developed the practice of setting up Quality Improvement Teams (QITs) bringing together front-line staff with operational managers and designated performance staff. As with Fife's SITs, the QITs were service-specific working groups with a brief to analyse current performance shortcomings and recommend innovations.

An interesting reflection from North Lanarkshire was the front line staff view that the recent introduction of specialist teams (in place of the previous generic working model) made performance management information seem more relevant. Consequently, this was more thoroughly reviewed; staff had improved their understanding of – and commitment to – achieving agreed targets.

3.4 Elected Members and Board Members

Case study evidence reinforces the view that developments in performance management systems are generally driven by professionals rather than by elected members and that the latter tend to play rather a passive role in this area. Except where prompted, housing staff case study interviewees rarely mentioned member involvement in any aspect of the regime.

Attempts to facilitate greater member engagement with performance matters are reflected in the establishment of 'specialist' forums whose remit includes such issues. In North Lanarkshire, for example, one of the two council-wide scrutiny panels set up in 2001/02 had been charged with oversight of 'operational performance'. A recent meeting of the panel had received a presentation on the housing service's response to a Shelter Scotland report on evictions and, as a result, a member/officer group was established to review rent collection and homelessness policy in line with Shelter's recommendations.

Scrutiny panels had also been recently established in both Fife and Perth & Kinross – again on the basis that the review of detailed statistical monitoring could not be properly addressed within the constraints of standard committee agendas. Reflecting the Council's generally decentralised structure, Fife had opted for scrutiny groups to shadow each of its three Area Services Committees.

In Westminster, when the CityWest Homes ALMO was initially established it had been envisaged that the two area boards would play the predominant role in scrutinising performance data. In the light of experience, however, it had been decided to set up a performance and audit sub-committee of the main board to carry out this function. This reflected a recognition of the 'minority interest' status of performance management and the need for an oversight body composed of members with an expressed interest in this field. The resulting membership had included a former housing director, a finance director, two independents with 'strong audit experience' and a resident who had 'actively volunteered' for the role.

There were signs among some of the Scottish case study LAs that Elected Member interest in performance matters was being stimulated by the prospect of housing inspection. In part, this reflected officers' efforts to 'bring members up to speed' with developments in this area. In Fife, for example, officers were planning to:

- hold briefing sessions for leading Members on the formal regulation of council housing and the steps being taken to prepare for inspection
- meet with Scrutiny Group chairs to raise the profile of the Single Regulatory Framework, Communities Scotland's role as regulator, and the Council's self-assessment framework and related action plans, and
- develop a statement for the inspection setting out the role of Elected Members in relation to performance review and monitoring.

3.5 Tenants

Tenants' views may feed into service reviews and plans through the monitoring of customer feedback and techniques of this kind are discussed in Section 7. This section discusses the ways that tenants are involved in shaping performance management systems and scrutinising their outputs.

In contrast with some local authorities, all the case study councils had fairly or very well-developed tenant representation frameworks. Partly associated with the establishment of local ALMOs, these were most sophisticated in Derby and Westminster. In Derby, for example, as well as four tenants and a leaseholder having seats on the main ALMO board, 15 community panels brought together tenants representing sub-areas across the city, with these bodies nominating members to area boards (sub-committees of the main ALMO board). In addition, tenant involvement in housing service Best Value reviews is facilitated by the Service User Review Group (SURG), set up and run by tenants (see below). It was estimated that, thanks to a 12-year history of formalised tenant involvement, as many as 300 (of 15,000) Derby tenants were 'active' in terms of attending meetings about and otherwise contributing to the housing policy agenda.

A general theme emerging from a number of case studies was that it can be easier to engage tenants' interest in service review rather than in routine performance monitoring. Derby's SURG provides perhaps the best example of a vehicle which facilitates this former role. As part of the Council's official BV review of front line housing services and supported by a local housing association manager, the SURG carried out its own independent assessment involving staff interviews, examination of procedures and office visits. Capacity building to facilitate this process took the form of accompanied visits to estates, training and briefing by housing department staff. More commonly, tenant involvement in service reviews takes the form of representation on working parties such as Fife's Voids Service Improvement Team or the Quality Improvement Teams established around BV reviews in West Lothian.

Another service-review type activity to which tenants contribute in West Lothian involves tenant-led inspections. This concept emerged from discussions around the drafting of the Council's tenant participation strategy with one argument in its favour being the contention that, in substituting for the commissioning of external consultants, it could save the Council money. By 2003 12 tenant-led inspections covering a wide range of housing service functions had been carried out, with each resulting in a documented report. A pool of around 20 tenants has been recruited to take part in inspections, with each exercise involving 3-5 people drawn from this group. Mirroring the Derby SURG experience tenant inspectors are assisted by one or two 'expert advisers' who have included staff of other local authorities and housing associations, as well as the civil service. West Lothian's tenant-led inspection system is further discussed in Section 5.2.

Substantive involvement in more routine performance management matters is exemplified by the Perth & Kinross system where draft performance reports destined for committee are first seen by the tenants' Federation and subsequently incorporate the Federation's comments. In West Lothian, tenants are represented on monthly meetings of the Council's three area committees which routinely receive performance bulletins relating to their area (the design and content of the bulletins also being influenced by area committee priorities). Whilst the committees have been in place only since 2002 it is reported that they have developed their understanding of performance issues to the extent that they now challenge performance information provided and how it should be interpreted.

3.6 The Corporate Centre

The Scottish case study LAs varied in the extent to which the corporate centre influenced performance management practice in housing. Perth & Kinross was typical in that the housing department was routinely expected to produce an annual service plan to a corporate model and to ensure that in its content reflected corporate commitments. North Lanarkshire's Chief Executive exerted influence through managing the council's Best Value review programme – though departmental representatives could also help shape this programme through their participation in quarterly corporate Best Value officers group meetings. With the exception of customer complaints, however, the setting of housing service standards was devolved to housing managers.

In Fife the corporate centre had played a more assertive role in performance management, having adopted the European Foundation for Quality Management (EFQM) approach to service assessment in 1999. The corporate centre has been working with service directorates to implement EFQM using Level 1 assessments to determine a baseline, followed by level 2 assessments which provide more detailed feedback. By Spring 2004 three quarters of the services had undergone level 2 assessment and many were preparing for a follow-up assessment where improvements against the model were to be identified.

West Lothian's experience illustrated the other side of the coin in that housing was perceived to have led the performance management agenda across the entire council. This reflected the fact that housing managers had been developing self-assessment methods well ahead of other services, initially based on adapting the 'Commitment to Quality' approach developed by NCH Scotland. It also showed a corporate recognition of housing's success in gaining kitemark awards and achieving consistently good performance against statutory performance indicators.

By 2003 it was clear that housing's approach was demonstrably influencing the corporate approach as applied across the organisation. The initiative to secure Chartermark status for housing services, for example, resulted in the achievement of Chartermark being identified as a more general corporate aspiration. Acknowledging their expertise in this area, housing had been formally tasked with developing a self-assessment model applicable to all council services.

4 Performance Management Frameworks

4.1 Service Planning and Target Setting

Service Planning

Service planning – a periodically updated set of organisational objectives, priorities and targets – has become a standard keystone of performance management regimes operated by local authorities and many other forms of public body. Typically, the service planning framework involves an annually reviewed array of interlinked strategies which attempt to reconcile ‘top down’ and ‘bottom up’ objectives together with budgetary projections. The aim is to weld together a coherent organisational agenda for the plan period and, through the use of measurable objectives, promote managerial accountability.

In all of the case study LAs service plans were seen as a crucial element of the performance management framework. In several instances the production of local office or local team plans was regarded as significant in facilitating the involvement of tenants and residents representatives as well as local managers and front-line staff.

The standard service planning process involves the development of a corporate (or ‘community’) plan identifying overriding organisational priorities, perhaps structured under headings such as ‘maximising value for money’, ‘providing customer-responsive services’. Departmental plans incorporate relevant corporate targets and more detailed objectives consistent with these.

Case study LA service planning processes generally conformed to this model though they varied in terms of the balance between top down and bottom up dynamics. West Lothian, for example, saw their model as substantially ‘led from the front-line’. The Council’s standard approach to service plan development involved a 3-day ‘locality planning’ event, held annually at housing management team level and including local tenants’ representatives. Recorded performance over the past year was measured against the previous year’s targets and a consensus reached on targets for the year ahead set at levels considered meaningful for the team or area concerned. Local plans, developed in this way, were then synthesized by senior managers into an overall service plan reconciling locally agreed targets and incorporating locally agreed priorities. The resulting housing service plan was described as informing the Council’s corporate plan, emphasizing interviewees’ view of the process as mainly ‘bottom-up’ in character.

In Westminster the use of the term ‘service improvement plan’ emphasized the intended objective of defining organisational goals for the forthcoming year. The plan drew on the views of service providers and service users, as well as the outcomes of external inspection, internal service reviews and performance monitoring. The Westminster-wide plan was translated into an improvement plan for each sub-area, again incorporating input from local area teams and residents’ representatives.

Fife and North Lanarkshire worked with 3-year service plans, updated annually on a rolling basis. In Fife the Service Plan fitted into the corporate framework using the Community Plan as the ‘top level’ document. The Plan was also used ‘to direct operational implementation’ of Fife’s Local Housing Strategy. In North Lanarkshire’s case the current service planning framework had been introduced corporately in 2001 to link financial and operational planning. Similarly, Derby Homes (the Derby ALMO) saw its annual service plan as an internal work schedule setting out in a practical fashion how the Housing Revenue Account (HRA) business plan and DH’s ‘contractually agreed’ undertakings with the council could be taken forward.

Performance Target Setting

Performance target setting is an integral aspect of service planning. As far as housing services are concerned, however, it was by no means universally practised in Scottish LAs in 2002/03 (see Table 4.1). It might be found particularly surprising that less than half of councils responding in our postal survey (44 per cent) reported working to a service-wide performance target on rent collection (though this may partly reflect that rent collection targets were the ‘property’ of another

council department – see Section 2.2). Only just over half (56 per cent) said that there was a specific rent arrears target. Whilst rent collection and arrears projections must be in place as part of the budget-making process in every council, these findings could indicate that these figures are not seen as (portrayed by senior managers as) formal ‘performance targets’.

Three functions – allocations, void management and rent arrears management – were fairly commonly monitored against local office (as well as service-wide) performance targets (see Table 4.1). Only a few councils reported setting local targets for other housing service activities.

Table 4.1 – Adoption of Service-wide and Office-specific Performance Targets by Function, Scottish LAs 2002/03

Function	Targets service-wide		Targets local office	
	No of LAs	% of LAs	No of LAs	% of LAs
Response repairs	23	85	5	19
Homelessness	19	70	4	15
Allocations	19	70	11	41
Void management	17	63	16	59
Rent arrears management	15	56	11	41
Anti-social behaviour response	13	48	4	15
Rent collection	12	44	4	15
Estate management	10	37	3	11
Aids & adaptations	8	30	0	0
Tenant participation	4	15	1	4
Services to Gypsy/Travellers	3	11	0	0
House sales	2	7	0	0
Factoring services to owners	1	4	0	0
Information & advice services	0	0	0	0
Tenancy Support	0	0	0	0

Note: figures in the ‘local office’ column are generally a subset of those in the ‘service-wide’ column – for example, five of the 23 LAs which operated service-wide response repairs targets also worked to office-specific targets.

Source: Postal Survey

Evidence from the 1999 study in relation to void management suggested that local target-setting was not designed to ensure an easy life for Housing Departments. Only a minority of councils which had set void rate or relet interval targets for 1998/99 had succeeded in meeting these (Scott et al, 2001).

In a number of the case studies target-setting was seen as a particularly important element of team level discussion (in some instances also involving tenants) around the review and updating of office- or area-specific service plans. The activities against which targets are considered necessary are, of course, crucially influenced by statutory performance indicators and other national monitoring requirements. They will also generally reflect organisational priorities as identified in the corporate service plan or, perhaps, local perspectives on issues particularly relevant to a specific neighbourhood. The range of activities subject to targets may need to be reviewed in the context of:

- changes in local circumstances (e.g. changing demand)
- shifting corporate priorities
- changing national policy objectives (e.g. introduction of Scottish Housing Quality Standard).

Case study evidence confirms that the methodology of target-setting (whether at service-wide or lower levels) generally involves reference to:

- past performance as measured through routine monitoring systems (see Section 5)
- 'benchmark' figures – e.g. as recorded performance of parallel teams, 'peer' local authorities
- national policy objectives (e.g. eliminating the use of B&B for homeless families).

Allowing target-setting latitude to area teams, as in most of the case studies, is seen as beneficial in ensuring that all 'business units' are working to goals which are demanding yet realistic. Particularly for landlords operating across diverse areas as in the case of many larger local authorities and some HAs, there is clearly a logic to this. However, sub-service targets introduce a degree of complexity into the system in terms of the implicit need to reconcile local and service-wide goals. In one Scottish case study there was a degree of ambiguity where locally-specific targets were in theory encouraged but where, at the same time, published performance data (in the council's monthly PI bulletin) was set against service-wide targets only.

A sophistication integrated within the Derby Homes approach to target-setting involved the adoption of 'floating targets' for rent arrears. These involved seasonally-adjusted target figures to take account of familiar fluctuations in rent-paying behaviour (e.g. reduced collection around Christmas).

Target-setting practices at Derby Homes were also notable in terms of tenant involvement. In 2003 tenants representatives were asked to name their own 'top 10' service priorities potentially measurable through the development of specific PIs. Some of these mirrored familiar measures whilst others were more novel – e.g. clearance of gardens of empty properties within five working days, reflecting concerns about the tidiness of estates. Whilst some of the tenant-inspired targets are seen as having proved unrealistic, Derby Homes saw the system being maintained into the future, with some indicators and targets being modified to reflect experience. Tenants would be encouraged to retain at least some of the original suite to facilitate trend-over-time performance tracking.

4.2 Self-assessment Through Service Review

The concept of service review is central to the Best Value framework and to the notion of 'self-assessment'. Under BV, service reviews are expected to incorporate 'the four Cs' – challenge, compare, consult, compete and all services are expected to be subjected to such assessments on a regular basis. Service reviews are, therefore, seen as periodic, focused exercises quite distinct from 'service plan review' which typically takes place on an annual basis. Nevertheless, the outcomes of service reviews – e.g. in terms of the identification of 'under-performing' functions or new customer priorities – should feed into the routine service planning process.

As a means of structuring self-assessment and service review activity many local authorities use 'proprietary' Quality Assurance (QA) methodologies and toolkits. A distinction is made here between 'quality assurance systems' and 'kitemark accreditation'. The former is seen as primarily a set of tools for *analysing and improving* service delivery and although the latter can help to improve service delivery as a by-product of the preparation process, systems such as Chartermark are regarded as primarily 'badges' validating 'excellent' service delivery and/or management processes. On this basis, kitemark accreditations are separately discussed in Section 5.

Outline descriptions of the most frequently used QA models – European Foundation of Quality Management – EFQM (or Business Excellence) and Balanced Scorecard are set out in Appendix 1. At the time of the postal survey in 2002/03 10 councils had used one or more of these systems as part of housing service performance management frameworks, with EFQM being by far the most popular (see Table 4.2).

Table 4.2 – LAs Using Quality Assurance Methodologies for Reviewing/Self-assessing Housing Services, 2002/03

Authority	System used	Housing functions covered
Aberdeen City	EFQM	Whole
Aberdeenshire	EFQM	Whole
Angus	Balanced Scorecard	Part
Argyll & Bute	EFQM	Whole
East Ayrshire	EFQM	Part
Fife	EFQM / Balanced Scorecard	Whole
Moray	EFQM	Part
North Lanarkshire	EFQM	Part
Renfrewshire	EFQM / Balanced Scorecard	Part
West Lothian	EFQM	Whole

Source: Postal Survey

Postal survey respondents were also asked whether they had used another well-known QA toolkit – ISO 9000. Whilst this system had yet to be applied to local authority housing services, one council was considering an application in relation to its repairs service. Five authorities reported plans to develop their own QA methodology at the time of the survey, indicating a view that the 'off the shelf' models on offer were not considered ideal for application in this context.

There is a view that individual local authority departments often find themselves obliged to work within corporately imposed policies on the use of certain types of kitemark and or quality assurance systems. The questionnaire responses do not bear this out. Only four authorities reported that such a decision would be/had been taken outwith the housing service.

In most of the case studies the corporate centre played a key role this area by prescribing a standard 'BV review' methodology and/or a BVR timetable. In Perth & Kinross, for example, both the scheduling of and approach to BV reviews involving housing services was determined centrally. At the same time, however, interviewees drew a distinction between Best Value reviews (covered by the corporate framework) and 'service reviews' whose timing and content was largely within the remit of housing service managers.

Fife Council had adopted the European Foundation for Quality Management (EFQM) approach to service review and all operational divisions involved in the delivery of housing functions had been subject to an EFQM-style assessment in 2001. The assessment of each service was carried out by assessor teams trained and accredited by Lloyds Register Quality Assurance (LRQA) bringing together staff from different departments, with three of the six assessors (and all Lead Assessors) looking at each service being officers from outwith that service.

The experience of this first corporately-inspired review process had informed subsequent service review activity in Fife. Clearly prompted by the advent of regulatory inspection, the Council had carried out a series of self-assessments or service reviews covering housing functions in 2002 and 2003. These had been structured around Communities Scotland's Guiding Standards and Activity Standards, with a 3-year review programme being established to prioritise the various housing functions for attention. This involved assessing whether functions covered by each Guiding Standard or Activity Standard had already been reviewed since 2000. The review process took the form of 'gap analysis'. A scoring system, drawing on Communities Scotland's self-assessment template, involved a numerical score being assigned to each question within a Standard. 'Scope for improvement' was then measured by deriving the cumulative score on all questions and comparing this with the maximum possible score.

Fife's self-assessment review procedure was operated as follows:

Phase 1 – Overview

Functions associated with specific Communities Scotland Guiding Standards or Activity Standards are targeted for review on the basis that they have yet to be assessed in the current (post-2000) cycle.

Phase 2 – Self-assessment of selected functions against CS standards

Specialist working groups involving front-line staff and senior managers carry out 'desk top' performance assessment of selected functions against CS activity standards.

Phase 3 – Amalgamation

Working groups' conclusions are brought together and reviewed by the Joint Performance Group – a cross-departmental body charged with monitoring housing service performance and composed of middle managers with a relevant remit.

Phase 4 – Reality checking

The evidence for the working groups' conclusions is validated through (a) file checks, and (b) interviews with front-line staff and team leaders in local offices. This process is seen as useful in highlighting instances where the perceptions of headquarters-based senior managers are at variance with activity on the ground.

Phase 5 – Assessment

Development of a function-specific action plan to respond to identified areas offering scope for improvement. These findings are incorporated within the overall housing service plan.

North Lanarkshire's approach seemed to be somewhat less centralised. Whereas the schedule for BV reviews was determined by the corporate centre, Property Services – the department encompassing most housing functions – had considerable freedom to carry out reviews according to its own specification. Business Process Re-engineering (BPR) had been judged a useful technique.

The BPR approach, already applied to repairs, void management and allocations, was interpreted as focusing on identifying and eliminating 'wasted resources'. The goal here is to focus staff resources on tasks that 'add value' – e.g. minimising the number of repeat calls to chase up a repair by 'getting things right' on the first visit. Service reviews of this kind focus on specific operational processes and attempt to define the data required in order to assess performance according to that perceived necessary to answer 'big picture' questions such as:

- what is the purpose of the process from the customer's viewpoint?
- how well do we meet the purpose of the process as seen from the customer perspective?
- what helps and what hinders our ability to meet this purpose?

An example of a conclusion emerging from this process as it related to repairs, for instance, was that there was a 'high level' of additional works ordered on empty properties (i.e. potentially costly variations to original works specifications). One response had been to pilot a specialist maintenance team seen as better qualified to ensure the comprehensiveness of initial specifications. Some front-line staff interviewees believed that 'areas with scope for improvement' as identified through this process were predictable. Whilst this might be so, it is important to appreciate that service improvement recommendations could be hard to impose on a contractor

or another Council department if based largely on anecdotal evidence rather than emerging from a more systematic review process.

Key stakeholder ownership of BVR conclusions and recommendations is essential and this provides an entirely pragmatic reason for involving front-line staff and managers in the service review process. However, in common with some other local authorities, North Lanarkshire also saw a potentially valuable role for consultants in BVRs. In its 2003 review of the housing allocations process, for example, the Council involved a consultant to co-ordinate the assessment as carried out largely by front-line staff (including representatives from a repairs contractor). This kind of approach was seen as likely to be adopted as standard in future reviews.

Service Quality Assessments

In North Lanarkshire, a file check exercise was carried out in 2003 as part of a review of estate management procedures to measure service quality. The work focused on events such as abandonments, tenancy changes and on responses to reports of anti-social behaviour. Checks, in relation to randomly selected batches of files held by each district office, were carried out by comparing recorded activity against documented procedures. The findings were seen as highly informative in terms of measuring the extent to which practice in different offices conformed to official policy.

Under Best Value, service reviews ought to include a significant role for tenants and other housing service users. This was particularly apparent in Westminster, West Lothian and Derby (see Section 3.5). In Derby tenants were also involved in routine service quality self-assessment in a more operational sense, having taken on a direct role in repairs post-inspection. Whilst such checks are a fairly standard activity for social landlords, it is highly unusual for the assessments tenant-led. The Derby system, initiated on an experimental basis in 2003/04, involved tenant volunteers because direct payment was found to be unworkable due to interaction with benefit entitlement. Instead, Derby Homes had decided to make 'in lieu of pay' contributions to the tenant participation budget.

As well as drawing on routinely collected performance statistics, housing service reviews employ a variety of other market research techniques. In Westminster, for example, periodic assessment of reception services involved mystery shopping and file checking together with staff and customer interviews. Under the framework for these 'service audits' the reception function was divided into elements such as:

- office facilities
- correspondence response
- office management
- appointments

Measures had been developed to assess activity under each of these headings. Office facilities, for example, were rated in relation to the types of customer information made available, whilst correspondence performance was measured against standard response timescales and whether queries raised were fully and politely addressed.

A similar approach had been developed in North Lanarkshire, initially stimulated by the requirements of the Chartermark qualification process and carried out by headquarters-based QA staff. By 2003 NLC's annual audit of reception services had become a well-established procedure.

4.3 Intra-organisational and Inter-organisational Relationships

As the postal survey carried out as part of this project demonstrated, stand-alone housing departments headed by a second tier chief officer are becoming increasingly rare in Scotland

(see Section 2.1). There is, anyway, an established tradition in a number of authorities where certain key housing-related functions – e.g. rent collection or repairs ordering – are under the managerial responsibility of departments such as Finance or Technical Services (see Section 2.2). Even a ‘comprehensive’ housing department on the model of a 1970s city authority relies on other LA departments – or on outside organisations – to assist in delivering housing services. In terms of performance management, therefore, it is crucially important to understand how such relationships are structured and how accountability for performance is assured.

Table 4.1 shows that services provided by non-Housing council departments and by external agencies, were only rarely defined by any kind of formal contract agreement. In the case of aids and adaptations, for example, in only one instance was the provider (generally the Social Work department) bound by any documented agreement specifying the service to be provided. In the case of rent collection, for example, in none of the 11 councils in which this service was primarily a Finance Department responsibility was there a formal agreement between Housing and Finance to define the service (see Table 4.1).

On the other hand, it seems that services provided by external agencies and/or more recently outsourced were more likely to be accompanied by a formal agreement. For example most anti-social behaviour and tenant participation projects had formal agreements in place (see Table 4.3). All of these had been set up in the year preceding the survey.

Table 4.3 – Housing Services Provided by Departments or Agencies Outwith Housing Departments by Whether Contractually Defined*

Function	Whether function provided by other LA dept or outside agency		Formal contracts or agreements in place?	
	Other LA dept	Outside agency	Yes	No
	No of LAs	No of LAs	No of LAs	No of LAs
Aids and adaptations	13	0	1	12
Rent collection	11	0	0	11
Sheltered housing management	7	0	0	7
Rent arrears	6	0	0	6
Repairs ordering	5	0	0	5
Improvement programmes	5	0	0	5
ASB response	3	2	2	3
Tenant participation	1	3	3	1
Estate management	3	0	0	0

* i.e. Organisational unit under managerial control of Director or Head of Housing

Source: Postal Survey

It is, therefore, clear that where housing functions were provided by LA departments other than Housing this rarely involved formal agreements with the Housing Department. In part, this may reflect a view that Housing was in no sense ‘a client’ for these services. The case study evidence suggested that the picture in respect of ‘support functions’ (e.g. Legal, Personnel or IT functions) provided to Housing Departments might be somewhat different. Even in these areas, however, formal service level agreements (SLAs) were a relatively infrequently used device for regulating relations between housing and other departments. Nevertheless, at least one housing-related SLA was in place in all four Scottish case study councils. In Fife and North Lanarkshire, for example, SLAs had been agreed with Finance departments specifying HB service standards, though these were seen more as procedural rather than contractual documents. The same was true of the SLA negotiated between Housing and Environmental Services in Perth & Kinross.

In none of these three authorities did housing managers believe that SLAs could be used as an effective tool to lever service improvements. Rather, they were useful as a basis for defining respective responsibilities of the relevant departments and officers, for monitoring service provision and for negotiations between the parties.

West Lothian took a slightly different position from the other Scottish case study councils in that SLAs were seen as having the potential to play a substantial role in regulating inter-departmental relationships. At the time of the fieldwork SLAs were being drafted to specify services provided to Housing by the Council's Finance and Legal Departments. Uniquely, among the housing-related SLAs and contracts cited by Scottish case study LAs, West Lothian's repairs contract made the council's Building Services Department liable for financial penalties for 'overdue' void properties. It was, however, noted that this clause rarely needed to be invoked.

With the partial exception of West Lothian, the prevailing Scottish LA approach to relationships between housing and other agencies emphasized the importance of co-ordination, monitoring and negotiation as opposed to a formal contractual style. In Fife great emphasis was placed on an inter-departmental structure of relationships established to achieve a corporate approach to performance management of (managerially disparate) housing functions. Under this structure, officers from the three key departments – Housing, Building Services and the Local Office Network (LON) – were brought together in three fora:

- a Joint Management Executive (JME) – involving senior managers from the three relevant departments and with decision-making powers over performance-related issues across all 'joint housing functions'
- a Joint Performance Group (JPG) – involving team leaders from the three departments and with the role of co-ordinating routine monitoring activity and analysis, as well as preparation for housing inspection
- Service Improvement Teams (SITs) – service-specific working groups to oversee functions such as voids and response repairs, involving managers and front-line staff with a direct role in providing the service concerned, and responsible for developing and monitoring action plans to improve performance.

This structure is seen as vital in achieving a corporate focus on housing service improvement in a council which retains a relatively decentralised structure and a differentiated set of departments.

Inter-organisational relationships were structured rather differently in the English case studies. To an extent this follows from the fact that housing management service delivery is devolved to Derby Homes and CityWest Homes as arms length management organisations (ALMOs). As noted above, the LA/ALMO relationship is semi-contractual in nature with a clearly defined set of service delivery objectives being prescribed by each 'parent LA'.

In Westminster the existence of area-based housing management contracts added another level of complexity to the scenario. Under these contracts, which date from the era of Housing Management Compulsory Competitive Tendering (HMCCT), contractor payments were structured so that 90 per cent of the fee was 'standard' with 10 per cent being performance-related. Payments of 'performance-related supplements' were dependent on analysis of routine PIs against measurable targets specified in contracts. However, whilst CityWest Homes saw these payments as an addition to the contract value, the contractors themselves had tended to factor them into business plans so that the system was seen as involving 'non-performance penalties' rather than 'performance-related rewards'.

With Westminster's housing management provider agencies bound by 'single source contracts', the contractors were empowered to procure all estate management services themselves. They were, in this way, freed from the obligation of contracting functions such as grounds maintenance from council departments. As an ALMO, CityWest Homes also enjoyed freedom to negotiate and procure its own support services such as personnel and legal support. However, where services such as pest control and refuse collection were sourced from the Council itself it was felt that contractual terms designed to incentivise 'good performance' were, in practice, difficult to enforce.

As in Westminster, Derby City Council had delegated powers for managing SLAs with other council departments to Derby Homes, though it was unclear whether DH enjoyed freedoms comparable to CityWest Homes in relation to procuring services externally.

More originally, in commissioning catch-up repairs works, Derby Homes had recently opted to set up partnering rather than standard contractual relationships. To facilitate its hugely increased level of spending (having qualified for ALMO funding), DH had concluded partnering deals with two contractors. The 'open book accounting' approach encompassed by these arrangements was seen as generally successful in already having generated significant savings available to be ploughed back into additional works. At the same time, however, there had been some initial difficulties with contractors seen as only gradually adapting to the essential openness of 'partnering culture'.

5 Kitemark Accreditation, Peer Review and Other Independent Evaluation

5.1 Kitemark Accreditation

Since the early 1990s kitemark accreditation has become a popular among local authorities as a means of validating 'quality service' or 'managerial excellence'. Kitemarks such as CharterMark or Investors in People can be sought for specific services, or at the organisational level. Such accreditations generally apply on a time-limited basis (e.g. three years in the case of IIP) and organisations can seek re-validation at the end of this period.

This section looks specifically at the range of kitemarks being used in local authority housing services across Scotland, the factors influencing the decision to seek accreditation and the benefits seen as flowing from preparing for and attaining accreditation.

CharterMark was the most popular service quality kite mark amongst local authority housing providers, with six councils (22 per cent) having attained CharterMark accreditation by 2002/03 – up from only three in 1998/99 (Scott et al, 2001). Another three councils were working towards an application in 2002/03 (see Table 5.1). However, only one council (North Lanarkshire) had CharterMark accreditation covering its entire housing service. The other five authorities have, in total, 11 CharterMarks covering a range of discrete housing functions (see Table 5.1).

Table 5.1. CharterMark Accreditations of Local Authority Housing Services, 2002/03

Authority	Service covered	Date awarded
<i>(a) Accreditations held in 2002/03</i>		
Edinburgh	Aids & adaptations	2002
Falkirk	Mediation	2002
North Lanarkshire	Whole housing service	2001
Renfrewshire	Anti-social behaviour	2001
	Repairs	1999
	Private sector grants	2002
Stirling	Repairs	2002
West Lothian	Local office service (3)	2001
	Repairs	2001
	Tenant participation	2001
<i>(b) Planning to seek accreditation, 2002/03</i>		
East Renfrewshire	Repairs	NA
Edinburgh	Whole housing service	NA
Fife	Energy management	Jan 2003
North Ayrshire	Concierge	NA

Source: Postal Survey

Two authorities (Edinburgh and North Lanarkshire) had IIP status for housing services at the time of the survey and in both cases this covered the whole service. Four authorities (Angus, East Dunbartonshire, Fife, South Lanarkshire) were actively working towards IIP for the whole housing service at the time of the survey. Comparing these results with the 1999 findings reported by Scott et al (2001) it appears that CharterMark had become a more popular approach, whilst the appeal of IIP had declined.

Four of the six case study councils (two of the Scottish LAs) had qualified for CharterMark and/or Investors in People accreditation covering some or all housing services. In Derby this was particularly long-established, with the Council having gained a housing service CharterMark as early as 1993 and having been an Investor in People since 1997. Derby Homes, in common with

North Lanarkshire and West Lothian, saw the accreditation assessment preparation process as having been a useful vehicle for service improvement. In the DH view, however, the criteria were no longer sufficiently challenging to serve as a main driver for performance improvement. At the same time, though, DH saw re-validation as worthwhile at least as a form of 'safety check'.

In West Lothian, as noted in Section 3.6, a sign of the Housing Department's influence on corporate performance management thinking was the recent decision to seek Chartermark status across the entire council. The Council had already achieved organisation-wide IIP accreditation and the preparation process had stimulated the enhancement of the Housing Department's career development scheme. West Lothian housing staff and management interviews generally saw CharterMark, in particular, in a positive light. Front-line staff felt this represented a considerable achievement validating their own efforts and conferring prestige among colleagues working for other councils.

North Lanarkshire had gained both Chartermark and IIP accreditations in 2001, with the former covering all housing services and the latter the council as a whole. The effort involved in attaining kitemarks was not universally viewed as an appropriate use of resources. At the same time, however, clear spinoff benefits had been generated from the preparation process. As in West Lothian, the Council's staff development scheme had been improved alongside – and arguably as a result of – the IIP groundwork. The generally increased focus on 'investing in the workforce' had also led to the introduction of monthly half-day office closures – widely seen as a highly positive innovation (see Section 9). Similarly, the self-assessment ethos emphasis of the CharterMark regime at least helped to embed – if not instil – a performance ethos among staff.

5.2 Peer Review and Other Independent Evaluation

Peer review as it has developed in the housing field involves a group of professionals coming together from a range of social landlords to review each other's services. Among its other advantages peer review:

- offers the possibility of 'free' advice from other organisations in exchange for giving your time to them
- meets the requirement of Best Value in that other organisations provide a *challenge* by acting as *critical friends*
- is an effective and practical way of *comparing* services provided across a range of organisations (peer review is especially useful for services that do not readily lend themselves to purely statistical analysis – estate management is a good example)
- involves assessors who are able to judge the extent to which levels of performance can be explained by external factors such as housing market conditions
- can identify the issues that are likely to attract the attention in a regulatory inspection.

Table 5.2 LA Housing Services Subjected to Peer Review, Period to 2002/03

Function	Internal peer review No of LAs	External peer review No of LAs
Anti-social behaviour	0	1
Day to day repairs	2	1
Estate management	1	9
Factoring services	0	1
Gypsy/Travellers	1	2
Homelessness	1	2
Information & advice	0	1
Rent collection	0	1
Rent arrears	0	3
Void management	0	2

Source: Postal Survey

As Table 5.2 demonstrates, the greatest level of activity in terms of peer review has occurred in relation to estate management. This partly reflects the impact of the model developed by SHBVN, as well as the fact that service quality in estate management is relatively difficult to assess on the basis of standard or easily definable PIs. Some other functions such as rent arrears and gypsy/travellers site management have also been exposed to internal and/or external peer review, suggesting that other benchmarking clubs and officer forums in Scotland are conducting peer review, albeit perhaps at a more informal level.

This estate management peer review model used by SHBVN involves an on-site inspection of services taking into account performance, staff and elected members' views as well as those of other stakeholders such as Social Work and the Police. By mid-2003 13 authorities had participated in this programme and further inspections were scheduled for 2004. The Network was considering developing peer review models for both homelessness and tenant participation functions, which could ultimately generate much more of this kind of self assessment activity.

All the Scottish case study councils were Scottish Housing Best Value Network members and at least three had been involved in the SHBVN estate management peer review programme. North Lanarkshire Council's experience was seen as positive partly in that it highlighted the need to place a higher priority on routine environmental inspections. Perth & Kinross had also developed an action plan stemming from the findings of its SHBVN estate management peer review. Reflecting the view of tenants' representatives, however, the Council had decided to place its main future emphasis on internal peer review – i.e. involving contact between area offices within the council.

Consultants were seen as having played a useful part in housing service reviews in North Lanarkshire and had helped in designing solutions to identified service failings. At the same time, however, the Council was keen to equip in-house staff with an understanding of Business Process Re-engineering techniques so as to become less dependent on external assistance.

Consultants – in the form of the Royal Bank of Scotland – were reported as having made a positive contribution in West Lothian through an evaluation of the Council's repairs service in 2000. However, whilst the Council had no general policy favouring external evaluation, there was general agreement that the tenant-led inspections already mentioned in Section 3.5 had made a positive impact and should be fostered as a key element of the overall performance management system.

Tenants involved in West Lothian's programme of tenant-led inspections (see Section 3.5) were convinced that these had triggered numerous service improvements and that they had also been beneficial in furthering their understanding of housing's role within the local authority. Case study interviewees saw the inspections as having facilitated the development of an open and honest relationship between tenants and staff at all levels.

6 Routine Performance Monitoring

6.1 Data Collected

With statutory performance indicator frameworks having been in existence since the early 1990s, the culture of statistical monitoring is now fairly deeply embedded within local authority landlords. Approaches have become increasingly sophisticated over time, reflecting the target-driven culture of Best Value, the growing volume of inter-landlord benchmarking activity and the expanding capabilities of computerised operational information systems.

Table 6.1 Routine Monitoring of Housing Functions, 2002/03

Function	Service-wide	Office-specific	Frequency of monitoring/reporting		
			Weekly/ fortnightly	Monthly	Quarterly/ annually
	No of LAs	No of LAs	No of LAs	No of LAs	No of LAs
Aids & adaptations	8	2	0	8	2
Allocations	25	14	5	17	4
ASB response	15	10	0	11	5
Repairs	24	10	3	17	4
Estate management	13	4	0	9	6
Factoring	1	0	0	1	0
Gypsy Traveller services	4	1	0	5	1
Homelessness	21	5	1	17	3
Information & advice	0	0	0	1	0
Improvement programmes	11	1	0	9	3
Rent collection	15	7	4	10	2
Rent arrears	22	12	9	10	3
Sheltered housing management	2	0	0	3	0
Tenant participation	4	0	0	1	2
Tenancy support	1	0	0	1	0
Void management	24	17	7	16	3

Notes: 1. Table relates to the 25 councils which responded to the relevant questions. 2. Responses were not entirely consistent in terms of the extent to which PIs existed (cols 2 and 3) and the frequency with which data was collected/reported (cols 4-6).

Source: Postal Survey

Table 6.1 shows fairly marked contrasts in the extent to which functions are subject to routine statistical scrutiny. Largely reflecting the scope of the statutory PIs, certain key functions – allocations, repairs, homelessness, rent arrears and void management – were routinely monitored by the vast majority of councils. Others, such as estate management, ASB response and services to gypsy travellers (site management) were less commonly covered by councils' PI frameworks. In part, these differences probably reflect the extent to which certain services (e.g. rent collection) are provided by Housing Departments – or at all.

Whilst most Scottish councils operate housing management within a decentralised framework, only two functions – allocations and void management – were routinely monitored at local office level by more than half of all LAs. This suggests that considerable scope for the development of PI frameworks still remains.

By and large, routine monitoring was carried out on a monthly cycle (see Table 6.1), through there were five authorities which reported on no more than one of the specified indicators on this frequency. Certain functions (e.g. allocations, rent arrears, void management) were quite often reported on a weekly or fortnightly basis. In a number of councils monthly reporting was tied into the production of a performance bulletin or report (see below).

Case study evidence confirmed that, in the Scottish context, the suite of routinely collected PIs was mainly influenced by:

- statutory PI requirements
- objectives and targets incorporated in corporate and departmental service plans (and, in some cases, influenced by tenants representatives and/or analysis of customer feedback)
- PI benchmarking requirements

In Derby and Westminster the situation was different in that a key consideration influencing the scope of PI systems was the set of service delivery targets incorporated within contractual or semi-contractual agreements between LAs, ALMOs and (in the Westminster case) housing management contractors. With the ALMOs having been set up primarily as stock improvement vehicles, the targets themselves were shaped partly by this priority.

Councils such as West Lothian saw themselves as having passed through a phase where the range of routine PIs was ever-expanding. More recently, with the system bedding-down, the number of indicators had been streamlined somewhat (monthly PIs reduced to 28). At the same time, there had been efforts to replace 'activity-based' indicators with service quality or outcome measures. One example of such work involved the development of a regular monthly file-checking regime. The checks themselves were carried out by junior front-line staff under the direction of designated (headquarters based) QA staff. The involvement of local office staff was intended to 'get quality issues out to the front line', whilst at the same time asserting the QA team's overall oversight role.

There is also a growing recognition of the need to validate PIs – particularly those reliant on manual data collection systems. In Westminster, annual audit plans were drawn up for each housing provider (akin to an area office) by CityWest Homes acting on the Council's behalf.

6.2 Use of PI Data

Twenty-three authorities (85 per cent) produced function-specific performance information. Some authorities clearly had well developed systems for disseminating performance information and used a variety of methods to communicate to staff and other stakeholders. In 14 authorities, for example, regular performance bulletins were produced for all staff (see Table 6.2), with half of these being published on a monthly basis. Other than feeding into corporately produced annual statutory performance indicator reports, however, only a few authorities (7) provided data on a regular basis to tenants or other stakeholders. Where this did take place it was achieved mainly via regular tenants newsletters.

Elected members appeared to be informed on a regular basis through a variety of methods ranging from receiving the same information as staff and tenants, to specific committee reports.

Authorities were asked in the postal survey about their use of performance data in relation to a range of possibilities (see Table 6.2). The list was split into two categories: day-to-day management and strategic/policy issues. Table 6.2 details these choices and ranks them from the most to the least widely operated. Each category within the list is referenced to whether it was in the day-to-day (d) list or the strategy/policy (s) list.

Table 6.2 Use of Performance Information

Activity	No. of LAs	% LAs
Specific meetings held with managers to raise issues of concern (d)	23	85%
Use information in service review process (s)	22	81%
Performance raised during staff meetings (d)	22	81%
Have recognised system to feed performance data into strategy planning process (s)	18	66%
Hold regular performance meetings to discuss issues (s)	18	66%
Use information in budget setting process (s)	16	59%
Performance bulletin used to inform staff of performance expectations (s)	14	51%
Have meetings with individual staff to assess performance (d)	13	48%
Use information to plan staff development / training (s)	12	44%
Have system to recognise good performance across teams (d)	6	22%
Don't have recognised system to feed performance data into strategic planning process (s)	3	11%

Source: Postal Survey

Table 6.2 demonstrates that use of performance data is varied and used to inform a mixture of day-to-day management of services as well as strategic planning activities.

The most frequent use of data is in a responsive manner – i.e. to deal with specific performance issues identified as a result of data collection (see Table 6.2). The use of performance data in a strategic planning process is less common but still occurs in over half of authorities. One authority indicated that it was developing a more systematic approach to performance management by introducing regular meetings between managers and individual staff to discuss performance rather than reacting to poor performance in an ad-hoc manner.

It is perhaps significant that in nearly half of authorities responding in the postal survey (12) PI data was used to inform staff training and development work, with 13 councils routinely referring to PI data in meetings with individual staff.

Most of the case study councils produced monthly PI bulletins reporting both at service-wide and local office level. These bulletins tended to incorporate the majority of routinely collected data, though sometimes focusing rather more on housing management functions than on homelessness and housing needs. In some instances (e.g. Westminster) alternative versions were produced for managerial and member level circulation on the basis that it was important to pitch the presentation so as to avoid information overload. The most useful bulletin formats showed recent performance set against various benchmarks – e.g. service plan targets, figures for the previous year, national average.

Presentation formats varied in the extent to which raw figures were accompanied by analytical commentary. Partly in an effort to achieve a concise presentation, North Lanarkshire's monthly bulletin eschewed any narrative; instead relying on graphically illustrated performance trends and a 'traffic light' system to draw attention to areas where targets were not being met.

Promoting internal competition

North Lanarkshire's monthly bulletin not only incorporated performance figures at area office level, but explicitly ranked area offices in relation to rent arrears statistics so as to encourage a competitive spirit. However, void management rankings had been dropped as accomplishment in this area was seen as unduly influenced by variable repairs contractor performance (over which area managers had relatively little control). Both front-line estate management staff and managers interviewed in the course of the case study work said they looked forward to receiving the bulletin to see how they had fared (in comparison with other offices).

Attitudes towards intra-council competition varied among the other case study LAs. In Perth & Kinross, for example, senior managers emphasized that this was not encouraged. At the same time, however, the very system of publishing area-specific performance figures seemed to have stimulated an ethos which was at least comparative if not competitive.

Under Westminster's more explicitly market-like regime it was felt that the regular publication of area-specific performance statistics encouraged 'healthy competition' between providers. Interest in the data was also clearly stimulated by the linkage between performance, contractor fees and staff pay.

Reporting performance data on a monthly cycle is quite a demanding task, particular if – as is often the case – the statistics need to be drawn together from a variety of sources. Operating such systems requires working to tight and relatively fixed timescales particularly where, as in the case of West Lothian, the production of the bulletin is closely tied to the management team cycle incorporating a monthly meeting specifically focusing on performance issues.

Engaging Tenants' Interest in PI Data

In most of the case study LAs monthly performance bulletins were circulated to tenants' representatives as well as to managers and, in some cases, elected members. Material designed to be more suitable for the wider tenant body was generally produced on an annual and sometimes – e.g. in the case of West Lothian – on a quarterly basis. In North Lanarkshire's 2002/03 annual performance report was a highly-designed 18-page booklet presenting key performance statistics and customer feedback data, as well as highlighting aspects of the Council's service improvement plan.

Given the potentially rather dry and technical nature of performance monitoring social landlords clearly face something of a challenge in fully engaging tenant interest. Of all the case studies, Derby's experience probably best illustrates what is possible in this area. The level of attention being paid by tenants to performance data here was exemplified by, among other things:

- tenants' requests for information demonstrating perceptiveness about the performance management role – e.g. seeking data on staffing numbers and training, asking about arrears rates for the same month in the previous financial year
- tenants unofficially benchmarking performance between offices and requesting explanations for differing staff levels
- playing an active role in discussions between Derby Homes and Derby City Council about possible service improvements – e.g. in relation to issues such as grounds maintenance.

7 Assessing Customer Feedback

7.1 Chapter Scope

Procedures for assessing customer feedback should be an intrinsic part of the evaluation of housing services because it is unlikely that quantitative 'service output' data of the sort normally embodied in routine PIs can provide evidence of actual outcomes or measure customers' perceptions of service provision. Customer feedback may be undertaken routinely or periodically as an element of service review. Structured complaints systems are a fundamental component of any customer care framework and the data generated can also be seen as a form of service user feedback of potential value in service planning. This section, therefore, first discusses 'routine' customer feedback methods before moving on to look at 'periodic surveys' and finally complaints systems.

7.2 Routine Customer Feedback

In the postal survey, authorities were asked to identify the types of routine customer feedback methods used during the two years preceding the survey and the perceived value of these in informing service development. The activities most commonly encompassed by some kind of customer feedback systems were response repairs, homelessness, allocations, improvement programmes and ASB response.

Table 7.1 Customer Feedback Methods by Usage

Customer feedback methods	Used in previous 2 years (no of LAs)	Perceived effectiveness ranking
Satisfaction slip	16	1
Exit survey	8	3
Postal opinion survey	8	2
Focus groups	5	4
Opinion cards	4	5
Other	3	6

Source: Postal Survey

Information on how frequently the surveys were used was not provided but several authorities explained that activities such as *focus groups* and *postal opinion surveys* were used only as part of a review rather than being a routine method of gauging customer feedback. The routine collection of customer feedback is commonest in relation to response repairs, homelessness and allocations.

Satisfaction Slips

Satisfaction slips are usually short postal questionnaires provided to customers following their use of a particular service – most commonly response repairs. Issuing satisfaction slips to all tenants at the point of repairs completion was standard in all the case study LAs. In addition to collecting tenant views on repair quality, North Lanarkshire's pro forma asked respondents how many times the repair had been reported and how many visits it had taken to complete.

However, whilst repairs satisfaction slips are widely used, councils responding in our postal survey had mixed views about the usefulness of such systems. A number of respondents argued that the typically very low response rates (e.g. 12 per cent in North Lanarkshire) undermined the credibility of the data collected. In an effort to counter this problem both Fife and West Lothian had begun commissioning regular monthly telephone surveys of recent repairs customers. Fife's use of the Council's internal call centre was reported to be highly cost-effective the task made productive use of the call centre 'down time' (i.e. periods when incoming calls are fewer in number).

Exit Surveys

Exit surveys are similar to those involving 'satisfaction slips' in that they focus on tenants or housing applicants who are recent users of a particular service. An exit survey might involve, for example, tenants leaving a housing office or having recently contacted a housing office by telephone. Particularly where reliance is placed on customer self-completion pro formas clearly need to be kept short and simple. Return rates – and data quality – are likely to be higher where responses are recorded by staff, either in person or by telephone. At the same time, however, the direct involvement of service provider staff could compromise the independence of the findings.

Of the nine postal survey authorities providing comments on exit surveys, five believed them to be time consuming for staff and therefore relatively expensive. Five of the nine authorities, however, also believed that such methods were very effective, if somewhat 'confrontational' for some services users.

These views are mixed – not to say contradictory – and probably reflect the varying ways that exit surveys have been undertaken by different councils. As with all other feedback mechanisms the sustainability of the exercise and the use to which the results will be put needs to be thought out in advance.

A number of the case study LAs operated exit survey-type systems for gauging the views of recent service users. In Fife, for example, tenants whose ASB complaints had been investigated were routinely asked for their opinions on the effectiveness of intervention. North Lanarkshire's experience here had been coloured by the council's Chartermark preparation process which had directly stimulated the commissioning of exit surveys. The Council had, in 2003, recently introduced routine surveys targeted on tenants who had recently made use of its adaptations and garden maintenance services. New tenants were also quizzed on their experience of the lettings process.

Opinion Cards

Opinion cards are most often provided in public reception offices to enable customers to provide general feedback or suggestions on services received. Not many authorities used this customer feedback method and only five postal survey respondents provided comments on it. Tenants were believed to view opinion cards as a 'complaints' scheme and authorities generally considered them of little actual value.

7.3 Surveys and Focus Groups

Periodic Comprehensive Surveys

Regulatory guidelines have increasingly encouraged social landlords to carry out periodic surveys covering all (or a representative sample of all) tenants. Communities Scotland has, for example, expected housing associations to carry out such surveys on a three yearly basis. A standard form of tenants satisfaction survey, STATUS, has been produced by the National Housing Federation and its widespread use in England has helped to generate data more suitable for inter-landlord comparisons. The STATUS pro forma (in either its HA or LA versions) can be downloaded from the NHF's website at: <http://www.housing.org.uk/services/feedback/index.asp>

Since 2000, English LAs have been required to submit all-tenant service satisfaction data as part of the Best Value PI system. Hence, in Derby and Westminster, annual tenants surveys were an established part of the performance management regime. Similarly, North Lanarkshire had been carrying out an annual postal survey of all tenants for several years. However, whilst the response rate had improved to 20 per cent by 2003 it was felt that this remained inadequate for tracking year to year changes in tenants' views. The survey was, nevertheless, seen as useful in helping to inform investment priorities.

One of the advantages of postal surveys is their relative cheapness. West Lothian's annual tenants survey – involving staff visits to every tenant – was clearly a much more resource-intensive approach. The system, involved a rolling programme taking place continuously

throughout the year with front-line estate management staff conducting interviews. It collected a wide range of information ranging from household composition and ethnicity to employment status to satisfaction with housing services. Given the need to justify the substantial costs of such an approach, the benefits were clearly seen as considerable.

Focus Groups

The term focus group refers here to a discussion forum involving service users recruited to explore opinions from a customer viewpoint. Recruitment can be ad hoc or attempt to ensure representativeness or used to target specific groups. Meetings can be independently facilitated or led.

As shown in Table 7.1 focus groups remained a fairly rarely used method of sampling customer feedback in Scotland in the 2001-2003 period. Comments provided by 11 responding authorities suggest a recognition that focus groups can be useful in helping to thoroughly probe issues, with potentially positive results for the landlord. At the same time, however, there are understandable concerns over the costs and scarce expertise required to run successful groups.

7.4 Official Complaints Schemes

Complaints schemes provide an opportunity for customers to provide feedback on services received and have their dissatisfaction/problem with a particular service outcome, investigated and – ideally – resolved.

Postal survey responses emphasized that the usefulness of complaints schemes is highly dependent on whether they are well advertised and readily available to service users and that the actual complaints or suggestions are used proactively to inform service improvements. Several authorities reported developing more sophisticated systems to turn the results into actions. While specific details were not provided two authorities stated that the recent introduction of a computerised system would make the task of collating and analysing complaints much easier, therefore enhancing the likelihood of the feedback being used to inform service development.

In most of the case study LAs there was some recognition that complaints systems had the potential to generate data which could inform service development. In North Lanarkshire, Perth & Kinross and Westminster complaints information was routinely analysed for this purpose.

8 Embedding Performance Culture

8.1 Organisational Management

A 'performance culture' is a shared ethos where there is:

- a widespread appreciation of organisational objectives
- a staff member understanding of his or her own role in meeting corporate goals and a commitment to achieving measurable targets
- a commitment to self-critically identifying and addressing respects in which service performance is falling short of objectives
- a highly motivated workforce sharing with senior managers an overriding ambition to achieve better performance and higher customer satisfaction.

On the basis of case study evidence, organisational management actions seen as fundamental in fostering performance culture would include:

- investing in information systems with the facility for producing performance reports at a disaggregated level – e.g. specific to areas, management units and individual staff members
- promoting the easy accessibility of performance information to staff at all levels, as well as to other key stakeholders such as tenants representatives and elected members
- facilitating opportunities for discussion of performance issues where front-line staff are actively encouraged to contribute possible solutions to identified shortcomings
- routinely incorporating findings from performance monitoring and service review into service planning and promoting an awareness of this among staff and stakeholders
- placing a high priority on staff development and training.

For a number of case study interviewees the performance culture was seen as promoting managerial accountability. Through the development of service plans incorporating area and team level targets, managers were now tasked with specific objectives for which they were answerable. In West Lothian, for example, the Housing Department senior management team met monthly to discuss performance issues. Managers were expected to have studied the latest performance bulletin and be able to explain any variances from targets. Similarly in Fife, there were quarterly meetings where area managers and team leaders met with senior staff to review quarterly performance trends and account for any shortcomings against targets.

In several of the case study LAs the introduction of monthly half day office closure to facilitate team meetings and training was seen as of crucial importance in promoting performance culture among operational staff. In North Lanarkshire and West Lothian, for example, this practice was relatively well-established and was specifically intended to encourage discussion of performance issues (see also Section 3.3). This was seen as having helped to embed training and learning as a routine part of office life and many case study interviewees believed it had had a vital and beneficial impact on communication within and across teams, on job satisfaction and on the development of teamwork. Another element in common between NLC and WLC was the annual staff conference – a corporate training event with a social dimension.

Other case study LA actions symbolizing the commitment to staff development and its linkage with performance included Perth & Kinross's recent recruitment of a professionally qualified training co-ordinator within its central housing QA team. More broadly, West Lothian had developed a partnership agreement with a local FE college to deliver a wide range of learning programmes to employees and tenant representatives. Courses, validated by the CIH included a

foundation module on housing in West Lothian, skills development courses focusing on areas such as interviewing techniques and time management, and more demanding management training modules.

As noted above, the contractual framework operated in Westminster included the payment of performance-related fees to housing management contractors and this factor was seen as exercising a pervasive influence on all aspects of contractor organisation and activity. Under a non-contractual system it is possible to conceive of area managers being incentivised to maximise performance by the possibility of retaining locally generated surpluses (i.e. income exceeding budgeted targets) for defined activities (e.g. environmental improvements).

8.2 Individual Staff Management

Key to establishing linkage between performance and individual staff management is the ready availability of patch or officer-specific performance data. Only in some of the case study LAs was this condition met. In those councils annual appraisal and more frequent (e.g. monthly) 'one to one' meetings between staff and line managers routinely involved discussion of performance against targets. These meetings also identified training needs which were taken seriously by line managers and fed into individual and organisational training plans.

In Westminster, where performance-related pay had been established since the mid-1990s, annual appraisal meetings were used to set officer-specific targets. These were derived from the housing management specification and to be connected with future eligibility for performance-related supplements. To counter the potentially divisive effects of PRP the systems used by some of Westminster's housing management providers included team-level targets linked to pay bonuses.

A number of case study interviewees also stressed the importance of fostering an atmosphere in which front-line staff views are valued and where managers actively encourage staff creativity in responding to identified problems.

9 Conclusions

Overview

The case study evidence collected in the course of this research suggests that, in terms of housing performance management, Scotland's most proficient local authorities are a match for their English counterparts. As in England, the introduction of formal regulation has been a significant catalyst for creativity in this area and there are signs that this development may be particularly effective in engendering Elected Members' interest in performance management issues.

In authorities such as North Lanarkshire and West Lothian, however, it is clear that the origins of current systems considerably pre-date the creation of the new Communities Scotland regime. An important lesson from the case studies – both in Scotland and England – is that holistic performance management systems cannot be created overnight; their development is dependent on sustained senior managerial commitment over a considerable period.

Whilst the case study research has confirmed the existence of multi-faceted and in some instances quite sophisticated techniques for managing and self-assessing housing service performance among Scottish local authorities it is, at the same time, clear from the postal survey that in many authorities these functions remain fairly under-developed. Commonly weak areas include the involvement of tenants in performance monitoring and service review, the setting of area or team-specific performance targets, and the collection of customer feedback information.

Housing's Status Within Local Authorities

The postal survey confirms the waning profile and significance of housing within local authorities. To some extent this reflects the continued erosion of the housing stock and the consequent need to shrink the staffing establishment. The declining number of 'stand-alone' housing departments also results from the wider tendency towards the reduction of second-tier posts, with remaining post holders at this level often responsible for a wide range of largely unrelated services. The perceived trend in favour of functional specialisation (e.g. dedicated rent collection staff) could lead to further moves to 'hive off' housing-related activities to departments such as Finance or Technical Services.

Configuring Inter-organisational Relationships

More than a third of councils already operate 'fragmented' housing services, where key elements of the service are delivered by staff not under the managerial control of the chief housing officer. In very few cases, however, are partner departments subject to service level agreements (SLAs) specifying the precise nature of their obligations, setting out service delivery standards and targets, and incorporating performance incentives. In part, this seems to reflect a lack of any sense that the chief housing officer is a 'client' for the service provided by, for example, Finance Department colleagues. Fife, one of our case studies, stands out as an exception here, with an explicit recognition of Housing's 'client' function. Without directly controlling all relevant functions, this enables the chief housing officer to act as a 'champion' for housing services – a model which should, perhaps, be considered by other authorities where housing functions are departmentally split.

It is, anyway, notable that even managers in 'excellent authorities' profess relatively little enthusiasm for SLAs as a practical device for exerting effective influence over service provision and securing performance improvements. Future developments may well see a departure from the adversarial contracting model of inter-organisational relationships with the spread of 'open book accounting' or partnering arrangements.

Quality Assurance Methodologies and Kitemarking Systems

Recognised Quality Assurance (QA) systems are gaining in popularity, with their implementation often being driven from the corporate centre. Nevertheless, the use of techniques such as EFQM remains a minority pursuit in the housing field. In many authorities there remains a perceived distinction between 'Best Value reviews' and 'service reviews'. Given the central government (and regulatory) expectation that all service delivery assessments should incorporate BV principles, this seems somewhat curious.

There is also growing interest in seeking kitemark accreditation for housing services and a sense that this is more often initiated by chief housing officers rather than the corporate centre. Case study evidence confirms that councils which have experienced the assessment preparation process have found this a useful vehicle for self-evaluation and performance improvement, and for engaging staff with these agendas.

Embedding Performance Culture

Collation and circulation of monthly performance bulletins has become standard – though not yet universal, practice. Such bulletins often incorporate team and/or area-specific data, thereby enabling the identification of organisational units potentially in need of managerial support. Of equal importance, such systems provide essential feedback to operational managers and front-line staff on how they are performing against targets. The availability of such data must be seen as a necessary condition for the development of a genuine performance culture.

Case study councils were also enthusiastic about the recently-instituted practice of holding monthly 'training/briefing sessions' involving all staff members working in a specific office, and where recent performance trends could be analysed. These sessions, necessitating half-day closure to the public, were seen as highly valuable in embedding a performance ethos among front-line staff, in providing a medium for open discussion of service improvement ideas and in fostering team spirit. Such practices can also be seen as healthy in indicating a growing commitment to staff training and development.

Appendix 1 Quality Assurance Methodologies

ISO 9000

The ISO 9000:2000 series is a set of tools to help organisations ensure that their processes are managed to enable them to meet customers' needs and expectations and any related statutory and regulatory requirements. ISO 9000:2000 is flexible and can be implemented in any public sector organisation, whether for the whole organisation or for a particular customer-related service.

To comply with ISO 9000 an organisation needs to review its processes in accordance with the standard's requirements. When the quality system is in place and established, organisations usually seek an independent assessment by a certification body to check conformity with the requirements of the standard and to ensure that the declared system is working in practice. The certification body may itself be subject to independent assessment. In the UK such assessment is conducted by the United Kingdom Accreditation Service (UKAS), which is the only officially-recognised UK accreditation body.

Certified organisations are visited at regular intervals each year by their certification body to ensure that compliance with the standard is being maintained. The accredited certification bodies are themselves assessed regularly by their accreditation body.

The direct cost of gaining ISO9000 accreditation depends on the size and complexity of the organisation, but a typical organisation of between 60 and 70 people could expect to pay £2,000-£3,000 (depending on the number of locations involved) for the initial assessment and £1,000-£1,600 each year for the audits.

The lead-in time for assessment depends on the current state of the organisation's management system and the need to develop consistent working practices to comply with the standard's requirements. The process of implementation through to assessment can be completed in six to nine months.

For further information about ISO9000 see www.bsi-global.com

EFQM Business Excellence Model

The Business Excellence Model is a comprehensive framework for assessing the strengths and areas for improvement of an organisation across all its activities. It is based on the practical experience of public; private and voluntary sector organisations across Europe.

The Business Excellence Model consists of nine criteria, divided into Enablers (the how's) and Results (the what's). The Enabler criteria are concerned with how the organisation conducts itself, how it manages its staff and resources, how it plans its strategy and how it reviews and monitors key processes. The organisation's Results are what it achieves. These encompass the level of satisfaction among the organisation's employees and customers, its impact on the wider community and key performance indicators.

The starting point for most organisations is to gather evidence relevant to the nine criteria of the Excellence Model. This can range from a broad brush, internally compiled assessment to an externally validated evidence-based report. Self-assessment leads to a profile of the organisation's strengths and areas for improvement. These inform a prioritised improvement action plan.

The resources required for BEM self-assessment vary greatly. Simplified materials for very basic assessments are available free of charge. More rigorous assessment requires some resources to cover materials, training and, possibly, consultancy support: a recent survey shows that the majority of organisations spend less than £5,000.

Self-assessment against the Model can be completed very quickly - within days for a very basic assessment. However, as a diagnostic tool it highlights areas for action and the time needed to address those action points will vary between organisations.

For further details about EFQM see www.qualityscotland.co.uk

Balanced Scorecard

Balanced Scorecard is a framework for implementing and managing strategy at all levels of an organisation by linking objectives, initiatives and performance measures. The Scorecard provides a view of an organisation's overall performance by integrating financial measures with other key performance indicators around customer perspectives, internal business processes and organisational growth, learning and innovation.

Managers determine what is required to deliver and sustain the strategy and how to monitor progress. The respective measures within these dimensions are used to communicate the strategy, to allocate responsibilities and time frames and to monitor the progress. The Balanced Scorecard focuses all parts of the organisation on the critical success factors and shows how each part becomes a determinant of the eventual strategic outcome.

The resources required for Balanced Scorecard vary according to each organisation's specific requirements but organisations are advised to seek professional assistance before embarking on its use. Provided there is sufficient commitment and impetus at the outset, the Balanced Scorecard can be operational within a three-month period.

For further information about the Balanced Scorecard approach see www.qualityscotland.co.uk

Appendix 2 Quality Service' Kitemark Accreditations

CharterMark

Charter Mark was designed specifically for public services and focuses on the service that customers receive. To help organisations improve their customer service and to help them decide when the time is right to make an application for Charter Mark a free web-based self-assessment toolkit has been designed and is now available. The scheme is currently being updated and the new arrangements and costs will be in place in 2004.

Organisations that have used the self assessment toolkit will usually need to develop an action plan before they feel able to apply for the award some time in the future.

The toolkit is, however, only based on the organisation's own evaluation and, whilst it will provide an indication of when to apply for Charter Mark status, it cannot predict the outcome of any application. Once achieved, the Charter Mark must be renewed on a three-yearly basis.

For further information about Charter Mark see www.chartermark.gov.uk

Investors in People (IIP)

Investors in People is the national standard which sets out a level of good practice for staff training and development to achieve organisational goals. The standard was developed in 1990 by the National Training Task Force in partnership with leading national businesses, personnel, professional and employee organisations.

The standard provides a national framework for improving business performance and competitiveness, through a planned approach to setting and communicating business objectives and developing people to meet these objectives. IIP is cyclical and could be an important element in an organisation's efforts to develop a culture appropriate to achieving continuous improvement.

Once the award is achieved it is up to the organisation to decide when it should be reviewed—the maximum allowable interval being three years. The direct cost relates to the assessment stage and is currently £550 per day. The time required varies greatly but as a guide an organisation with 50-100 people would need between 3-4 assessor days, depending on number of offices etc.

Only one authority (Edinburgh) has IIP status for housing services and this covers the whole service. Four authorities (Angus, East Dunbartonshire, Fife, and South Lanarkshire) were actively working towards IIP for the whole housing service at the time of the survey. Thus, whilst Charter Mark has until now proved a more popular option than IIP this may be set to change in the future.

For further information about IIP see information@iipuk.co.uk

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