

Leicester
City Council

Wards Affected: All Wards

Housing Scrutiny
Cabinet

15th January 2004
15th December 2003

**BEST VALUE REVIEW OF THE HOUSING MANAGEMENT SERVICE:
IMPROVEMENT PLAN**

Report of the Corporate Director of Housing

1. Purpose of the Report

- 1.1 The report presents the findings of the Housing Management Service Best Value Review and recommendations for an improvement plan to address the issues raised in the review.

2. Executive Summary

- 2.1 This review adopted a customer focused approach to improve services provided to tenants.

The objectives of the review are to:

- Challenge current Housing Management arrangements and seek ambitious improvements in order to tailor the best service to meet client needs.
- Consider available alternative services for the Management of stock and assess their contribution to improved management/tenant experience.
- Set out plans for delivering short and long-term improvements.

Cabinet approved the Scoping Report for the review on 13th March 2003¹.

- 2.2 The review Director is Pat Hobbs (Service Director for Housing Management & Hostels) the Scrutiny Director is Tot Brill (Corporate Director for Cultural Services and Neighbourhood Renewal). A special review team undertook the review: Tracie Rees (Landlord Services

¹ A copy of the Scoping Report can be found at Appendix 1.

Manager) Helen McGarry (Project Manager) and David Nicholls (Business Services Officer). The review team also engaged 9 Tenants Representatives as part of the review process: 2 from each of the Community Association areas and the Chair of the Leicester Federation of Tenants Associations. The 'critical friend' for the review was Julian Beaney (Derwent Housing Association, Derby).

3. Housing Context

- 3.1 There are approximately 116,000 dwellings in the City. The overall housing tenure is estimated at 60 per cent owner occupied, 23 per cent local authority, 9 per cent Registered Social Landlords (RSL's) and 8 per cent private rented.
- 3.2 The city has an ageing population and 20 per cent of households contain a person with a disability. A wide variety of minority communities have been living in the city for a number of years supplemented more recently by asylum seekers and refugees and migrants from within the European Union.
- 3.3 Leicester's unemployment rate is approximately 6.7 per cent, which is above the national average of 3.9 per cent and 20th highest in the country. Although Leicester has pockets of affluence, it also has high levels of deprivation. Household income, rates of pay and skills levels are all below the regional average and more than 50 per cent of the population live in areas classified amongst the 10 per cent most deprived in the country – the 12th highest out of 354 councils. The whole authority is an area supported by the Neighbourhood Renewal Fund.
- 3.4 The Housing Needs Survey (2002) highlighted that there are 13,982 households living in unsuitable housing in the city. 5,222 of these households indicated that they were seeking alternative accommodation within the city. It is interesting to note that 73% of survey households (approximately 3,800 households) indicated that they could not afford to rent privately or buy a property.
- 3.5 The Council's current housing stock comprises of 24,670 dwellings. The number of dwellings has decreased substantially over time as a result of Right To Buy purchases (13,000 dwellings since 1981) and disposal of properties considered to be too expensive to upgrade. An average of 3,000 dwellings become available each year to new tenants. Allocation is dependent on need, and the majority of new tenants could be considered to be 'vulnerable' when compared to the population as a whole. Demand for council housing by far outstrips supply: the Housing Register currently has over 13,000 applicants. The stock will continue to decline through Right to Buy.
- 3.6 Demand for other rental housing from Registered Social Landlords (RSL's) also exceeds supply. Available Government funding allocations

to build additional RSL stock in Leicester has been limited with approvals given for only 74 new for rent units and some rehab work for 2003/04.

- 3.7 Leicester's continuing social and economic climate will maintain pressure on the need to provide lower priced social rented accommodation to meet the housing needs of those households that cannot afford to buy their own housing or access housing through the private rental sector. Tensions around the Council's ability to meet demand are further exacerbated by Government policies aimed at rent restructuring and convergence (single formula for setting the rents of all social housing) and the requirements around meeting of decency standards for the condition of its housing stock, which includes the need to undertake a Stock Options Appraisal.

4. 4 C's

- 4.1 The main **challenge** element was provided through the engagement of a 'critical friend', a door-to-door street survey, applying the EFQM principles, user questionnaire analysis of the current housing market and the need for the service. Extensive **comparisons** were made with other housing providers, including the Metropolitan Authorities, RSL's, private rented landlords and benchmarking activities. **Consultation** was undertaken with service users, including:

- Postal survey to a random sample of 2,500 tenants
- Questionnaires to 300 internal & external stakeholders
- Postal surveys to 1,200 leaseholders/freeholders
- Door to door survey of 300 tenants & residents
- Survey of 160 members of staff
- Questionnaire to Elected Members
- Challenge workshops

The **competete** element of the review will be addressed by the pending Stock Options Appraisal, which will inform the Council of the best financial model to provide the service in the future.

- 4.2 The main findings of each of these elements of the review and how they informed the improvement plan are summarised below:

- a) **Challenge**. The review focused on three main challenge questions: What is it like to be a tenant/customer of the service? Are we providing the services our customers want? Are we the best providers of the service? The feedback from tenants and their representatives was positive: 73% of survey respondents said they liked living on our estates; 70% were satisfied with the current service; and 79% thought the Council was a good landlord. The consultation did not identify any gaps/omissions in service provision. The issue instead was the quality of provision, particularly in regard to 'customer care'. This issue is picked up in the improvement plan. Is the current Housing

Management Service the best provider? The cost and quality of the service are discussed below. The review² found that the current service provides a range of support to individual tenants not provided elsewhere that has a bearing on tenant's quality of life on estates. This support includes initiatives, such as tackling anti-social behaviour, harassment and domestic violence and the service's activities link to support services for vulnerable tenants – who represent the majority of new tenants. The Improvement Plan contains changes that will raise the quality of current service provision – through an enhanced focus on customer care and with the support of a new IT system, revising policies and procedures to provide a consistent service across all neighbourhood offices.

b) **Compare.** The review examined comparative providers (both Local Authority & RSL's), analysed 3* housing management services and reviewed performance against local and national Best Value Performance Indicators. In comparison to other similar housing providers, the council provides a lower cost service. However, the review³ found the service not yet to be at a 3* rating, with more work required on improving customer care, reducing the overall level of rent debt owed to the authority and reducing void re-let times. The key changes highlighted by the review are:

- Human resources – Restructuring of the service to increase the number of front line staff to ensure a more customer focused service delivery.
- Customer Care – Development of a 3 year Customer Care Strategy to ensure that new initiatives are implemented in a structured and consistent manner, ensuring satisfaction targets are achieved.
- Communication – Develop an internal Communications Strategy, review the telephone system and create consultation mechanisms with non-tenants. Again ensuring satisfaction targets are achieved.
- Improved Staff Training – Develop a Housing Management Training Strategy to ensure that training is appropriate, timely and linked to individual job profiles. Therefore, increasing job knowledge to ensure improved performance and customer care delivery.
- Equalities – Develop a Housing Management Equality Strategy to ensure the service meets the Government Equality Standards in accordance with the corporate timetable. This will ensure that

² Activities undertaken for the review are detailed at Appendix 2.

³ Details of the analysis of the findings are detailed throughout the report and in the corresponding appendices.

satisfaction targets are achieved, especially those related to the BME Best Value Performance Indicators.

- Voids – To improve the letting process to improve performance and maximise the rental income to the Authority.
- Rent Collection & Debt Management – To improve the collection of rent and to provide pre-tenancy counselling to maximise income to the Authority.
- Improved Performance Management Information – To enhance the quality of data and mechanisms to ensure that performance is monitored and targets achieved.
- Empowering Tenants – To ensure that tenants are fully informed, so they have the opportunity to participate in the decision making process and to ensure that satisfaction targets are achieved.
- Improved IT – To ensure that staff have the technical support to deliver a high quality housing management service. This will enable stringent performance targets to be effectively monitored, leading to increased customer satisfaction levels.

The assessment of the reviews ‘critical friend’ is that there is a real opportunity to take the service forward. *‘The vast majority of the participants in the challenge workshops were proud of the Housing Management Service and were keen to make the service improvements necessary.’* He felt that many short-term improvements would not require significant additional resources and would build on service improvements already made.

- c) **Consult.** A considerable amount of work was undertaken to ensure the review gave an accurate reflection of tenants’ views, using different methods to derive a robust picture of their needs. Staff and stakeholders were also surveyed⁴. The main findings focused on tenants’ demands for better customer care. This is reflected in the proposed improvement plan, which presents a series of initiatives to further embed customer practices within the service.
- c) **Compete.** The Housing Department will undertake a Stock Options Appraisal within the next 6 months, leading to recommendations for the best financial model for the housing service as a whole. Therefore it is inappropriate to explore alternative providers at this time, when any decision/outcome may be over turned by decisions arising from the appraisal.

⁴ Findings of all surveys can be found in the appendices, which are numbered accordingly

5. Review Findings

5.1 Consultation and comparative analysis undertaken as part of the review process have also thrown up a series of issues, some being external to the boundaries of the Housing Management Service that need to be corporately considered. The main issues are as follows:

5.2 Provision of non-HRA services

A work-study analysis indicated that 22% of officer time in Neighbourhood Housing Offices was being spent on non-HRA services, dealing with tenant and local resident queries on other council services (A breakdown of the type of service of percentage of activity can be found at Appendix 19). Leaseholders & Freeholders indicated in their survey that they wanted this kind of service from the local Neighbourhood Housing Offices. The issue is that funding is not provided from the General Fund and that the cost for responding to queries on other council services is borne from the HRA. It is important to note that continued provision may be jeopardised in future depending on the outcome of the stock options appraisal process.

5.3 A related issue is the fact that staff do not have the required skills nor training to provide this broader service. Therefore, some of our users may perceive that we do not always provide a satisfactory service. This may explain lower satisfaction levels for some tenant surveys than have been recorded for this review. A corporate view needs to be taken on how best to provide local council service contact points for customers: where will these points be located, how joined up they will be (the range of service information provided), the nature and quality of service provision and standards of customer care. In the interim, a corporate steer should be given on how the Housing Management Service should continue to handle these customer queries.

5.4 Impact of the Right to Buy Legislation

Although the number of properties managed by the service has reduced through the Right to Buy legislation the overall workload of the service has increased.

5.5 Reducing rent/arrears debts owed to the Authority

The service has experienced problems in relation to the collection of rent, which was adversely affected by the Housing Benefits crisis, due to IT problems and changes in legislation. Although, performance has greatly improved over the last 12 months, consideration should be given to outsourcing the rent/arrears collection element of the service if current debt levels do not continue to reduce and performance targets are not achieved.

5.6 Supporting vulnerable tenants

Comparative analysis with other providers has highlighted the unique role played the Housing Management Service, including joint working with other council services to support vulnerable tenants as part of their objective of maintaining stable tenancies. As raised previously, continued provision of this active support may be jeopardised in future depending on the outcome of the stock options appraisal process.

5.7 An aging tenant population will mean future increased support will be likely. Consideration needs to be given to the consequences of future changes to the service on the continuing provision of these initiatives.

5.8 Tenants' most important housing needs

A participatory needs survey was undertaken asking tenants to prioritise their housing needs. Their top priority was 'living in the area you want', followed closely by 'feeling safe in your home/the area you live in'⁵. Although prospective tenants are given the choice to live in the areas they want, due to shortages in available accommodation across the city this may not always be possible. The links to community cohesion work currently being undertaken by the council should be explored to enable potential tenants to make more informed choices about areas to live in. This would focus on perceptions about how welcoming communities are to people from different social/cultural groups. Some links with tenant groups have already been made on community cohesion issues, providing a base upon which to develop this approach further.

5.9 Local environmental issues

Tenants raised several environmental problems affecting the quality of life on their estates that are beyond the control of the Housing Management Service. One problem is the inadequate provision of parking facilities (although this is in conflict with the council's commitment to reduce the number of cars in the city). Many of our estates were built in the 1950's and lack parking provisions. The lack of suitable parking causes congestion problems and damage to the grass verges and green areas.

5.10 Another problem raised is the maintenance of local play areas: this had the lowest satisfaction rating of 'other council services' in one of the tenants' surveys. A co-ordinated approach is required between services responsible for provision and the Housing Management Service operating on behalf of tenants and tenants groups, in order to provide a satisfactory response to local environmental problems raised by tenants.

⁵ In keeping with the findings of larger residents surveys undertaken throughout the city.

5.11 The need for improved transportation was an issue for both tenants and residents.

5.12 Many of the Councils one-bed bungalows were built in the 1950's and have small kitchens that do not fit the expectations and kitchen equipment that people expect today. As a consequence these bungalows are often difficult to let. In recent years some have been re-designed using Capital Receipts monies, the kitchen has been knocked into the coal shed, creating a spacious kitchen. These properties are extremely desirable. However, this work can no longer be financially supported at present. With the number of applicants on the Register requiring family type accommodation, consideration needs to be given to accelerating this programme to give older tenants living in family homes an incentive to move to smaller dwellings. It is proposed that an Older Persons Strategy will be written by the Housing Department detailing the needs of this group and developing an action plan to address those needs.

5.13 Improved Inter-department communications

An issue of poor inter-departmental communication is an area for concern. However, this may be resolved with the implementation of the forthcoming corporate Communications Strategy. Issues raised in the review will be fed into the strategy.

6. Recommendations

6.1 Members are recommended to: Support the approach taken in the Housing Management Best Value Review and agree to the proposed Improvement Plan.

7. Headline Financial & Legal Implications

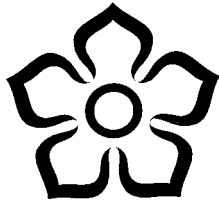
7.1 There are no direct legal issues relating to this report. However, details relating to the 2% financial savings required as part of the Best Value Review are detailed at paragraph 19 of the Supporting Information report.

8. Report Author/ Officer to contact

8.1 Pat Hobbs – Ext 6803
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Tracie Rees – Ext 3407
Landlord Services Manager, Housing Management & Hostels

1st October 2003

Key Decision	Yes
Reason	Significant effect on communities in 2 or more wards
Appeared in Forward Plan	Yes
Executive or Council Decision	Cabinet



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Supporting Information

9. Background & Service Profile

9.1 The Housing Management service currently manages the Council's housing stock of 24,670 dwellings. The service deals with over 270,000 telephone contacts each year, 120,000 callers to the local Neighbourhood Housing Offices and 1 million cash transactions. This level of service does not include dealing with arrears debt, environmental management, the allocation of vacant dwellings, and enforcement of the Conditions of Tenancy, such as dealing with ASB or other serious breaches.

9.2 The total stock is broken down into: -

Type of Property	Number of Properties	% of Total Stock
Houses	13 032	53%
Flats	6926	28%
Bungalows	2885	12%
Maisonettes	1827	7%

9.3 From an original total stock of 37,352 dwellings, nearly 13,000 (29.96%) of properties have been sold since the Right to Buy Legislation was introduced in 1981. The areas losing the most stock are Eyres Monsell (47.47%), Thurnby Lodge (44.26%) and Rowlatts Hill (41.90%). The majority of properties sold tend to be family type dwellings (2 bed units plus). However, a workload analysis⁶ highlights that the workload has increased to meet the challenges of new legislation and tenants' desires for enhanced services.

9.4 Service Aim for the Housing Service

⁶ A summary report of the Workload Analysis is detailed at Appendix 3.

The overall aim for the Housing Service is “A decent home for every citizen of Leicester.”

9.5 Service Aim for the Housing Management Service

Our role is to provide decent homes to Council tenants, and to contribute towards the creation and support of neighbourhoods where people choose to live.

We will achieve this by:

- a) Developing and supporting customer involvement by listening to our tenants and the wider community.
- b) Working towards Community Cohesion by empowering and investing in communities through community partnerships and regeneration activities.
- c) For the housing we directly manage, we will:
 - Provide good quality Housing Management Services that acknowledge the diversity and expectations of local communities across the City
 - Contribute towards a safe and pleasant environment
 - Co-ordinate services to promote partnership working to maximise social inclusion
 - Let individual tenancies and offer advice and options to tenants and customers
 - Maximise rental income through effective implementation of rent arrears policies
 - Continue to provide local, neighbourhood based services
- d) Investing in our staff to ensure that they provide a comprehensive, customer focused Housing Management Service.
- e) Exploring a number of alternative service options, in order to ensure value for money.

9.6 **The Housing Management Service**

9.6.1 The main activities of the service include:

- Letting vacant properties
- Collection of rent including arrears management
- Responding to nuisance and harassment
- Tenancy management
- Tenant consultation and participation

- The provision of advice and assistance on a range of housing related issues

9.6.2 These functions are delivered from 14 decentralised local Neighbourhood offices across the city. For the financial year 2003/04 the Housing Management Service receives £6,451,000 from the Housing Revenue Account.

9.7 History of the service

9.7.1 The Housing Management service has been in existence since the early part of the 20th century. It has seen the mass building programmes of the 1950's, to the decline of social housing with the introduction of the Right to Buy legislation of the 1980s. It has faced the challenges of the Compulsory Competitive Tendering (CCT), winning on two occasions, and has been at the forefront of community leadership to create estates where people want to live.

9.7.2 The management structure has changed to meet the ongoing service challenges and considerable improvements have been made. Nonetheless, the service has struggled with:

- a) Outdated and fragile IT systems that cannot meet current & future demands (especially e-government)
- b) The recent Housing Benefit crisis
- c) The collection and outsourcing of water rates
- d) Increased voids and relet times
- e) Addressing the housing needs of the new and emerging communities
- f) A legacy of under development in procedures

9.7.3 These issues will need to be addressed because they impact on the delivery of services to tenants and on the level of performance management. Each issue will be dealt with either through the implementation of the Improvement Plan or will need to be considered council wide.

9.8 Access to housing

9.8.1 The City Councils Housing Register currently has nearly 13,000 applicants waiting for council accommodation with an average turnover of just over 3,000 dwellings per year. This demonstrates that there is currently 4 years worth of demand for council housing.

9.8.2 Local RSL's also provide accommodation in the City and Leicester City Council has at least 50% nomination rights. However, demand outstrips supply and the majority of RSL's can only afford to build new properties via the Approved Development Programme (ADP). Money for this programme is limited and for 2003/2004 only 74 new for rent and some rehab work was approved. The grant for 2004/2005 is due

to change with the introduction of the East Midlands Regional Housing Board and future resource allocations are uncertain at this time.

- 9.8.3 Many BME & new emerging communities wish to live in certain areas of the city because of community networks and culturally appropriate facilities. The shortage of these facilities on the peripheral estates mean many BME groups refuse to consider housing in these areas, creating greater demand for the central areas with increased waiting times. Extra effort is provided by the Housing Management service, such as tenancy support and harassment policies. But these measures are only partly successful and a Council wide approach needs to be taken to the location of culturally specific facilities.
- 9.8.4 The Housing Needs Survey (2002) shows that there is a shortfall of 635 units of affordable housing in Leicester, overall there is a shortage of 2 & 4 bedroom units. The main groups affected are private rented tenants, low-income groups such as lone parents, BME households and people with special needs. Despite falling interest rates, property prices are increasing and the above group is unlikely to be able to purchase suitable accommodation on the open market. There are also issues of people on lower incomes accessing the better standard of private rented accommodation⁷, due to the requirement of references, deposits etc. Therefore this group are likely to look towards social housing or the poorer private rented dwellings as the only means of securing accommodation⁸.
- 9.8.5 An analysis of our current tenants highlight that over 46% are over the age of 50 years and consideration will need to be given to their future needs, such as adaptations, alternative accommodation and tenancy support.
- 9.8.6 We needed to consider why people leave their current tenancies⁹ to determine if our policies, for instance our ASB policy might have a negative impact on community cohesion and tenancy sustainment. The number of terminations has reduced over the last 3 years, which suggests that our policies coupled, with the use of tenancy sustainment initiatives, are contributing towards communities where people want to live and remain. This view was also mirrored by the findings of the Tenants and Residents surveys.

9.9 Government policies and there impact on the service

- 9.9.1 The Government has introduced a Rent Restructuring & Convergence policy to be fully implemented by 2012. Rent restructuring contains a

⁷ A summary of the findings relating to private rented accommodation in Leicester can be found at Appendix 4.

⁸ A summary of our likely future customers can be found at Appendix 5.

⁹ A summary of the top 5 reasons for people leaving can be found at Appendix 6.

single formula for setting the rents of all social housing. Rent Convergence relates to removing the differences between the rents charged by Local Authorities & RSL's. Basically if Leicester City Council charges rent above the formula the Government will 'claw' it back in negative subsidy at no benefit to our tenants. Therefore, it is not possible to increase rents to increase services funded by the HRA.

9.9.2 The Government's Sustainable Communities Plan (2003) sets out a programme of action to achieve successful, thriving and inclusive communities. Part 1 of the plan re-affirms the commitment to provide all social housing tenants with decent homes by 2010. This means that all Local Authorities must carry out a rigorous and objective Stock Options Appraisal by 2005 that must be signed off by the Government Office of the East Midlands (GOEM). If authorities cannot meet the decency standards within current resources, then they will be expected to consider other alternatives, such as an Arms Length Company (ALMO), Private Finance Initiative (PFI) or Large Scale Voluntary Stock Transfer (LSVT). Once the appraisal has been completed it may be necessary for the Council to consider an alternative provider of the service.

9.10 Key Stakeholders

9.10.1 The Housing Management Service has links with a range of stakeholders, which include:

a) Internal stakeholders

- These are the tenants of our 24,670 Council tenancies. We also have strong links with the 24 individual Tenants & Residents Associations (TARA's) across the city, who are funded from the HRA and supported by the Community Development Team.
- Elected Members, who represent our tenants
- Housing Management Board, which is the decision making body for the Housing Management service.
- Other Council services, these are sections that have direct links i.e. Homeless & Options service, Customer Service Centres, Technical Services etc.

b) External stakeholders

- The police and community safety initiatives
- Voluntary sector, such as Women's Refuge, SHARP, faith groups etc
- Other public agencies, including DSS, RSL's, Health Authority etc

- Agencies delivering local area initiatives, with links to the estates, such as the Single Regeneration Programmes, New Deal etc

c) Staffing Profile

The Housing Management Service employs 188 members of staff, of which 66.7% of staff are female. The majority of our staff are over the age of 40 years and 21% if these are over 50. This age group could potentially retire in the near future leaving a gap in experienced staff. Staff below the age of 30 years are in the minority. This data reflects the national trend.

Post	Number of Posts
Service Director	1
Landlord Services Manager	3
Neighbourhood Housing Manager	11
Team Leader	13
Neighbourhood Housing Officer	69.5
Housing Support Officer	61
Customer Care Training Officers	2
Somalian Development Workers	2
Tower Block Officers	9
Total	171.5
Gender	% of Posts
Female	66.7%
Male	33.3%
Ethnicity	% of Posts
Asian/Asian British	35%
Black/Black British	4.5%
Other Ethnic Origin	0.5%
White/white British	60%
Age	% of posts
15 – 19	0.5%
20 – 29	12.5%
30 – 39	29%
40 – 49	37%
50+	21%

9.11 Linkages to Other Best value Reviews

9.11.1 The following three reviews directly relate to Housing services.

- Services to Homeless People
- Repairs & Maintenance
- Supporting People

a) *Services to Homeless People* was a year two best value review. The links to this review are significant because the Housing Management

service re-houses many of the people that are approved as 'statutory homeless'.

- b) *Repairs & Maintenance* was a year two best value review. Again the links to this review are significant because part of our performance for dealing with void properties is intrinsically linked to the performance of the Maintenance service.
- c) *Supporting Vulnerable People* was a year three review. This review links to the Housing Management service because many of the clients of these support services are also Council tenants and they rely on our service to provide referrals. However, we also rely on them to help maintain vulnerable tenancies.

9.11.2 The following reviews relate to tenants issues and the improved quality of life on our estates.

- a) Older People
 - b) Crime & Disorder
 - c) Human Resources
 - d) IT & e-government
 - e) Communication & Promotions
 - f) Customer Care
- a) *Older People* was year one review and links to the Housing Management service, because we re-house older persons and over 46% of our tenants are over the age of 50 years.
 - b) *Crime & Disorder* was a year three review and has implications for improving the lives of tenants living on the local estates.
 - c) *Human Resources* was a year two review and impacts on our staff in terms of individual performance linked to targets and appraisals.
 - d) *IT & e-government* was a year three review and impacts on the future development of the Housing Management Service IT Strategy, which is detailed in the Improvement Plan.
 - e) *Communications & Promotions* was a year one review and links to published information and the way our service is marketed to our tenants.
 - f) *Customer Care* was a year one review and links to the customer care initiatives that are being developed to improve the service delivery to our tenants and other service users.

10. Applying the 4 C's

10.1 To achieve the aims and objectives of the review the 4 C's have been applied as follows:

11. Challenge

11.1 *Why does the service exist?* The service exists because as a landlord there is a statutory duty for the Council to provide certain services. In addition it is a community leader committed to improving local well being and promoting sustainability and community cohesion the Council would wish to give an enhanced service to tenants. However, it is not essential that the service is provided 'in house' & other service models can be considered.

11.2 The Councils owns 24,670 properties and provides accommodation to people in housing need, including homeless cases that would otherwise have little or no opportunity securing other types of tenures. Therefore, the landlord function should be provided, whilst the Council has responsibility of the stock.

11.3 *Who are our customers?* They are our tenants (24,670 properties), Leaseholders & Freeholders who live on our estates and people seeking council accommodation.

11.4 The fundamental challenge questions are:

- "What is it like to be a tenant/customer of the Housing Management Services?"
- "Are we providing the services our customers want?"
- "Are we the best providers of the Housing Management Service?"

11.5 ***"What is it like to be a tenant/customer of the service?"***

11.5.1 To answer this question we looked at the reasons why tenants leave our properties. The top reason was to transfer to other council accommodation; this happens for a variety of reasons, such as moving to a larger property due to overcrowding, medical needs, under-occupation etc. When we asked our tenants if they liked living on our estates 73% said they did, we also asked them if they wanted to move what action had they taken. Of those seeking a move 60% stated that they had applied for a transfer via the Councils Housing Register. Also there are only 2,683 (20%) of our tenants seeking a transfer, which suggests that the majority like where they are living.

11.5.2 79% of tenants said that they thought Leicester City Council was a good landlord. From this data it can be concluded that the majority of tenants appeared to be happy to be a tenant of the service. The most important things for our tenants are:

- Living in the area they want
- Feeling safe in their home/the area they live in
- Having good neighbours
- Living in a decent home
- Their home meeting their housing needs

- Living in a clean environment
- Access to local shops
- Access to transportation
- Parking facilities

The things that annoyed them were:

- High ASB/Community safety
- Poor parking facilities
- The way properties are let
- Lack of involvement in the decision making process that affect their estate
- Environmental management (Cleanliness)
- Poor customer care

11.5.3 In terms of our customers, a survey of the Leaseholders & Freeholders identified that 72% wanted to remain on our estates, of those seeking alternative accommodation 9% had applied for Council housing. Although, owner-occupiers may have greater housing choice, they still see Council housing as one of these choices. They also listed similar aspirations to tenants. In addition 58% still wanted a service from their local housing office, despite the fact that we only deal with housing management issues. This suggests that they value the local services and the assistance provided.

11.5.4 The service deals consistently with 22% of non-housing management enquiries, this suggests that people value the access to local services. It was not possible to determine from the study why people come to the local offices, rather than contacting the relevant Council Department directly. However, if the Housing Management service did not provide this assistance there would be a gap in the service to customers.

11.5.5 Overall 70% of our tenants were satisfied with the current service and 59% of Leaseholders & Freeholders stated they were satisfied. The street survey explored what elements of the service tenants were most satisfied with, the results are as follows:

11.5.6 *“How satisfied are you with the Housing Management Service?”* (On a score of 1 – 5, 5 indicating total satisfaction)

The way you pay your rent	4.4
The way conditions of tenancy are handled	3.9
The way any problems with rent are handled	3.7
Your being able to contact a housing officer when you need to	3.7
The support given to you if problems arise that affect your tenancy	3.5
The way the estate is kept clean	3.3
The way nuisance & harassment problems are handled	3.2
Your involvement in decisions affecting your estate	3.2
The way properties are let	2.9

11.5.7 The findings elaborate which features of the Housing Management service are more satisfactory to their users than others. It is interesting to note that some of the lower rated features such as handling of nuisance and harassment and involving tenants, despite being given a lot of attention and resources still attract a lower score. This may reflect the difficulty in matching tenant expectations with what can be delivered within a service that must compete for limited HRA funds. Nevertheless further work is required to improve tenant satisfaction, which is detailed in the Improvement Plan.

11.5.8 In order to test whether tenants could distinguish between Housing Management services and services delivered on the estates by other council departments. They were asked to rate their satisfaction with other specific non-Housing services.

11.5.9 *“How satisfied are you with other Council Services?”* (On a score of 1 – 5, 5 indicating total satisfaction).

Your street lighting	4.1
The way your household rubbish is collected from your home	4.1
Care of local trees and bushes	3.6
The way the grass is kept	3.6
Street cleaning/litter picking	3.6
The removal of graffiti from your estate	3.5
Availability of advice and assistance for non housing problems	3.5
Availability of parking close to where you live	3.4
Maintenance of local play areas	3.0

11.5.10 On the whole tenants had slightly higher levels of satisfaction with the range of primary environmental services. The lowest level of satisfaction was in regard to the maintenance of local play areas. The providers responsible for their delivery on estates should address issues around service satisfaction.

11.5.11 Conclusion

The review found the service not yet to be a 3* rating, with more work required on improving customer satisfaction. The Improvement Plan presents a range of proposed actions to improve the performance of the service. The assessment of the review's 'critical friend' is that there is a real opportunity to take the service forward. *'The vast majority of participants in the challenge workshops were proud of the Housing Management Service and were keen to make the service improvement necessary'*. He felt that many short-term improvements would not require significant additional resources and would build on service improvements already made. We can conclude that tenants & residents want to remain on our estates and are satisfied with the services they receive. However, there are some issues that will need to be considered council wide.

11.6 ***"Are we providing the services our customers want?"***

11.6.1 To effectively answer this question we have listed examples of the services our customers want and highlighted the gaps in service provision.

a) We give customers the choice to live in the areas they want, but due to shortages of accommodation across the city this may not always be possible. The number of applicants (non-tenants (10,007) that are currently waiting for accommodation highlights this.

b) The service resources policies to tackle ASB and supports bids for community safety activities. The service is also the lead organisation on the Crime & Disorder Group for ASB and has developed a citywide mapping system, linked to Home Office initiatives to identify 'hot spots' and tackle incidences of ASB. The service has a robust ASB policy that is recognised by other organisations as good practice. However, tenants stating that they do not feel safe in their homes raise an issue for the service, because it appears that we are not actively promoting initiatives to tackle the problem. Although our policy has been identified as good practice, further testing is required to determine the quality aspect.

c) Living in a decent home is a government priority and all local authorities are required to have a signed off robust Stock Options Appraisal by 2005. Approval has been given by Cabinet to engage a consultant to undertake this work, which will identify the most cost effective model for improving the stock in the future.

e) The Council operates a transfer policy, which enables tenants to move to alternative accommodation. However, due to the shortage of accommodation across the city, only priority need cases tend to move. Therefore, for many tenants we cannot meet their aspiration of providing suitable accommodation in an area they want.

f) The service employs estate wardens who are responsible for collecting 'dumped rubbish' on housing owed land. At the tenants challenge workshop this was highlighted as a positive element of the service.

g) The shops are managed by Property Services on behalf of the Housing Management service and have been given low priority in terms of re-furbishing, as spending money on providing decent homes has been the priority. However, tenants and residents see shops as an important resource and this is an issue that will be reviewed as part of the Improvement Plan.

h) Access to transportation is not an area that can be resolved through this review. However, it links to tenants and residents' desire for improved parking facilities. Perhaps if the transport were improved then there would not be a need to provide this facility.

i) The way properties are let is an issue that will be addressed in the Improvement Plan; especially in view that council housing is now becoming a scarce commodity.

j) The service invests a large amount of resources to support and encourage tenants to be involved in decisions that affect their estates. This includes the support given to the TARA's. However, it has been recognised that more promotional work is required to encourage tenants to engage. This is an area covered in the Improvement Plan.

k) Poor customer care was recognised prior to the review and resources were allocated to introduce a range of initiatives to address the problem. However, it should be recognised that improving customer care is not an overnight solution, but a fundamental change in attitude. For this reason, improving customer care is a key theme in the Improvement Plan. It is positive to see that tenants, leaseholders & freeholders have started to see an improvement in our customer care delivery.

l) Tenants (58%) & residents (71%) state they want non-housing management enquiries dealt with at the local offices. Currently 22% of enquiries are non-housing management issues that staff are not trained to answer. Therefore, consideration is required council wide to respond to this need.

11.6.2 Conclusion

Overall we are delivering the majority of services that our customers want, we know this because we asked them, through the consultation element of the review. Over 70% of tenants & 59% of residents stated they were satisfied with the services we provide. Resident's satisfaction levels are likely to be lower as we are not addressing their issues, because our staff do not have the appropriate skills. In some areas we do not meet our customers expectations because we do not have the resources, such as vacant dwellings, to meet their needs.

11.7 “*Are we the best providers of the service?*”

11.7.1 To answer this fundamental question we needed to define ‘best’ – ‘having or most of the good qualities’ (Oxford English Dictionary). Therefore, we needed to prove that we are in fact the best provider of the service. To do this we have listed the advantages of being a Council tenant and the advantages of being an RSL or private tenant.

Advantages LCC

- At present cheaper rents
- Right to Buy
- Succession rights
- Local housing offices
- Tenancy support facilities
- Secure tenancies
- Policies for tackling ASB, Harassment, DV
- Tenants Inspectorate
- Funding for TARA's
- Community Development Team
- CCTV
- 3* Repair service
- Only 4 weeks notice to end a tenancy
- No deposit required

Advantages RSL's

- Tend to be newer properties
- Specialist providers
- Can develop new schemes
- Higher standard of property

Advantages private rented

- More choice in location & type
- No waiting times
- Some provide furnished acc

11.7.2 As the above comparison shows there appears to be more advantages of being a council tenant. In conclusion, at the present time we are the best provider of the service in terms of level of services and at the cost we provide these functions.

11.7.3 79% of our tenants stated they thought we were a good landlord. In comparison the average satisfaction levels for the RSL's were 75%. Also tenants opportunity to participate was 51% for Leicester City Council compared to an average of 48% for the RSL's.

11.7.4 It is clear that customers want an extended decentralised service and consideration should be given to joining other service providers on the estates to create ‘one stop’ shops. However, the majority of other service providers are struggling to locate services and are limited for

office accommodation. LIFT could have been a possibility but they are looking at providing primary health care and other community services at this time.

11.8 Conclusion

We are able to demonstrate that we have answered the 3 fundamental challenge questions and that we are the best provider at this time, especially in terms of cost & the value added element, as we do not act within the confines of a 'landlord' role. The consequence of not providing the service would mean gaps in services and tenants expectations would not be met. The Council could also lose part of its community leadership role, which may lead to the deterioration of community cohesion. Consultations with our tenants and other customers show they want to maintain local decentralised Housing Neighbourhood Offices. However, other methods of delivering the service will be determined as part of the Stock Options Appraisal process.

12. Compare

12.1 Profile comparisons

12.1.1 The following data provides a general picture of the age, gender and economic status of Leicester City Council and RSL's compared to the general population. Leicester Housing Association was used as the comparator for RSL's as it has the largest stock in the city and provides similar services to Leicester City Council. 56% of Leicester City Council tenants are in receipt of Housing Benefit. Data is collected on ethnic origin for our tenants, but this information is inconclusive at this time. Details were not available for the other providers. However 36.1% of the general population of Leicester are from BME communities and this is predicted to increase to over 50% by 2011.

Age	LCC Tenants	Leicester Housing Association	General Population
15 – 19	2%	0.3%	9%
20 – 29	16%	50.6%	21%
30 – 39	19%	17%	19%
40 – 49	17%	17%	16%
50+	46%	15.1%	35%

Gender	LCC Tenants	Leicester Housing Association	General Population
Female	59%	52.9%	53%
Male	41%	47.1%	47%

Average Income	£
LCC tenants	5 287
RSL tenants	7 983
Private rented tenants	13 835
General Population	27 921

12.1.2 We have compared our service against all National¹⁰ and Local Housing providers including Registered Social Landlords (RSL's) and private rented landlords in terms of price and quality of service.

12.1.3 Leicester City Council has the lowest management costs of £8.26 per week, against comparable local RSL's operating in Leicester. It has been difficult to compare like for like in respect of quality of policies and procedures, as local RSL's have been reluctant to engage in the process. However, in respect of our Anti-Social Behaviour, Domestic Violence and Harassment policies Leicester City Council is certainly far more advanced than our comparator group, as many RSL's do not have such a policy. This was reiterated recently following a 'whistle stop' visit (July 2003) by Louise Casey (National Director of the Government's Anti-Social Behaviour Unit), who was impressed by the Authority's response to ASB, especially the citywide Neighbourhood Nuisance Team and its results.

12.1.4 The service also has the lowest management costs when compared with similar East Midland Local Authorities (Derby & Nottingham). Despite being a low cost service our policies for delivering the services appear to be comparable. However, quality checks need to be undertaken to confirm that the quality of our service is as good or better than the more expensive providers. This is an area that will be addressed in the Improvement Plan.

12.1.5 The Housing Management service also undertakes frequent comparisons through its membership of the Major Cities Group and from information published by the Audit Commission in relation to the National Best Value Performance Indicators.

12.1.6 The local private rented market was also examined and it was established that the average private rent is approximately £115.00 per week compared with £50.00 per week for a similar 3-bed Leicester City Council property. Private landlords usually require a deposit (normally 1 months rent), plus 4 weeks rent in advance and often refuse to take people on Housing Benefit. However, there are no waiting times and prospective tenants can choose what property type they want in any area of the city.

12.1.7 Private landlords do not provide the 'value added' benefits such as Tenancy Support or Domestic Violence provision etc, as they often operate on a profit-making basis.

¹⁰ Summary information relating to comparator organisations is detailed at Appendix 7.

12.1.8 There is also another side to the private rented market that provides the worst housing often to the most disadvantaged groups in society. Often the tenants are from emerging communities and people on low incomes, who have little or no choice in the housing market. The Head of Private Rented Accommodation for the city has confirmed that the majority of enforcement action is taken against the landlords for this group.

12.1.9 There are also categories of people who are excluded from social housing, such as students or people seeking short-term accommodation. In some cases private rented accommodation may be the only option.

12.2 Comparison of National Best Value Performance Indicators

The following performance information shows the performance of the service against targets.

12.2.1 BVPI66a - % Rent Collected (Key & PSA target)

Target 2001/2002 99%	% Short fall	Target 2002/2003 95%	% Short fall
Actual 2001/2002 89.25%	9.75%	Actual 2002/2003 94.74%	0.26%

12.2.2 For 2001/2002 Leicester City Council was in the bottom quartile of the National Best Value league table for Metropolitan Councils. Our performance at that time was adversely affected by the Housing Benefit crisis due to IT problems and changes in legislation. 2002/2003 performance improved to 94% putting the authority in the mid quartile. We predict that we will reach top quartile and achieve our targets by 2004.

12.2.3 The service has taken measures to improve performance in rent collection as follows:

- The creation of a temporary Rent Arrears Team, tasked to resolve the more difficult cases and to audit existing accounts and provide training as required
- Two Housing Benefit Officers have been recruited to resolve complex Housing Benefit claims
- The development of a Rent Collection/Debt Management Strategy
- The introduction of a new IT System
- NRF pilot project to employ 2 Debt Advisers in conjunction with Cultural Services & Neighbourhood Renewal Directorate
- Proposal to end the collection of water rates on behalf of Severn Trent Water Authority with effect from the 1st April 2004, reducing the level of water rates debt owing to the Authority

12.2.4 The impact of these initiatives can already be seen in an overall reduction of debt to the Authority and more arrears cases being

resolved satisfactorily. If the debt does not reduce and the service does not meet the performance target then future consideration should be given to outsourcing this element of the service. However, a recent outsourcing exercise was undertaken to 'sell' the water rates debt to a debt collection agency. This resulted in a cost to the Council of nearly twice as much as was collected.

12.2.5 BVPI74a – Satisfaction of tenants with the overall service (CPA, PSA & KEY target)

Target 2001/2002 66%	% Short fall against target	Target 2002/2003 78%	% Short fall against target
Actual 2001/2002 59%	7%	Actual 2002/2003 Awaiting results of Status Survey	Awaiting results of Status Survey

12.2.6 The actual figure for 2001/2002 is taken from the Status Survey, last conducted in 2000, which put the Authority in the bottom quartile. The survey is due to be completed again in November 2003. However, the results of customer satisfaction surveys conducted over the last 12 months as part of the Best Value review show that satisfaction is much higher at over 70%, which could put the authority in the top quartile.

12.2.7 The service has introduced several new initiatives over the last 12 months to increase satisfaction levels as follows:

- The appointment of two Customer Care Training Officers working with the staff and Tenants and Residents Associations (TARA's) to deliver training and customer care techniques
- The creation of the Tenants' Inspectorate
- Reality & mystery customer exercises
- Induction programmes for new front line officers
- Appointment of two Somalian Development Workers

These initiatives will be enhanced further in the Customer Care Strategy that will be developed as part of the Improvement Plan.

12.2.8 BVPI74b Satisfaction of BME tenants with the overall service (CPA, PSA & KEY target) – This is a new Performance Indicator in 2002/2003 - details will be obtained from the Status Survey due to be completed in Nov 2003. – Target for 2003/2004 is 78%.

12.2.9 BVPI74c Satisfaction of tenants (non BME) with overall service (CPA, PSA & KEY target) - This is a new Performance Indicator in 2002/2003 - details will be obtained from the Status Survey due to be completed in Nov 2003. – Target for 2003/2004 is 78%.

12.2.10 BVPI75a % of tenants satisfied with the opportunity to participate (CPA target)

Target 2001/2002 55%	% Short fall against target	Target 2002/2003 57%	% Short fall against target
Actual 2001/2002 51%	4%	Actual 2002/2003 Awaiting results of Status Survey	Awaiting results of Status Survey

12.2.11 The actual for 2000/2001 put the authority in the mid quartile. This was taken from the Status Survey, which will be completed for 2003/2004 in November 2003. We anticipate that the overall level of satisfaction will increase as the customer care initiatives start to have an impact. The role of the TARAs will be enhanced to ensure they meet the needs of the local community, especially the BME and other disadvantaged groups. If tenants are to have opportunity to participate the TARA's need to be well promoted to tenants.

12.2.12 **BVPI75b % of BME tenants satisfied with the opportunity to participate (CPA target)** – This was a new Performance Indicator in 2002/2003 - details will be obtained from the Status Survey due to be completed in Nov 2003. – Target for 2003/2004 is 57%.

12.2.13 **BVPI75c % of non BME tenants satisfied with the opportunity to participate (CPA target)** – This was a new Performance Indicator in 2002/2003 - details will be obtained from the Status Survey due to be completed in Nov 2003. – Target for 2003/2004 is 57%.

12.3 Comparison of Local Performance Indicators

12.3.1 No. of days taken to re-let a property (KEY & PSA target)

Target 2001/2002 37	% Short fall against target	Target 2002/2003 40	% Short fall against target
Actual 2001/2002 47.5	10.5	Actual 2002/2003 40 estimated	0

12.3.2 The actual performance for 2001/2002 was 47.5 days putting Leicester in the mid quartile. The actual for 2002/2003 is estimated at 40 days, pending further guidance from the Audit Commission on calculation methods.

12.3.3 During the past 3 years the service has taken a systematic approach to dealing with long-term void properties. This includes the selective demolition of unpopular and high maintenance dwellings. Properties have been leased to Refugee and Advance Housing Association and dwellings with structural problems are sold to RSL's or to the private market.

12.3.4 Unfortunately, increased costs of materials and recruitment problems in the building industry have hindered progress and void performance continues to be a concern, especially when there is a high demand for vacant dwellings.

12.3.5 To further improve our performance we propose that the following initiatives are introduced as part of the Improvement Plan:

- Pre-termination inspections to ensure that outgoing tenants leave their properties in good condition. If tenants don't leave the property in good condition they will be recharged the cost of making good
- Escorted viewings on all vacant properties
- More back to back lettings (a new tenant moves in on the same day the ex tenant leaves)
- Consideration given to rewarding tenants who leave their property in good order

12.3.6 Although some of the above have been piloted in the past it has been difficult to measure their impact, due to the ad-hoc way they have been implemented. However, this will be addressed in the Improvement Plan, which seeks to restructure the service to incorporate dedicated officers to undertake this role.

12.3.7 No. of New Tenants' and Residents' Associations maintained or created in Leicester

Target 2001/2002 20	% Short fall against target	Target 2002/2003 23	% Short fall against target
Actual 2001/2002 20	0	Actual 2002/2003 24	None Over target by 1

12.3.8 The tenant's movement in Leicester continues to improve with more new Tenants & Residents Associations being created. Capacity building work has started to ensure that existing groups have the necessary support to meet the diverse needs of their local community. The Housing Departments Community Development Team, created in 2001 to enhance tenant empowerment and to increase the opportunity for tenants to participate, has carried out this work.

12.3.9 % of rent lost through local Authority dwellings becoming vacant (PSA target)

Target 2001/2002 3.50%	% Short fall against target	Target 2002/2003 2.80%	% Short fall against target
Actual 2001/2002 3.11%	0.39%	Actual 2002/2003 2.61%	0.19%

We anticipate that the % of rent lost through vacant dwellings will reduce further as the number of vacant properties reduces.

12.3.10 Conclusion

In comparison to other similar housing providers Leicester City Council is certainly a lower cost service that is still able to introduce new initiatives to address the changing needs and demands of our customers. It would appear we provide a quality service if we consider that satisfaction levels are over 70%. However, further investigation is required to confirm that the quality of outputs is equal or superior to other similar providers. As previously explained the Housing Management Service provides the 'value added' element that no other providers in Leicester cater for. If Leicester City Council did not provide these services then gaps in provisions would need to be resourced by other means or it would impact on our tenants. For example if there were no ASB policy there would be a direct impact on the quality of life for our tenants and the fear of crime and disorder would increase.

13. Consult

13.1 Current consultation Mechanism

13.1.2 The Housing Management service has a 30-year long history of consulting with its tenants, which is formalised by a consultation and tenant empowerment structure that has been in place for over 20 years. It was last reviewed and enhanced in October 2001 to create a Housing Management Board, which gives tenants the majority voting rights.

13.1.3 There are currently 24 TARA's across the city who meet on a monthly basis to seek the views of the tenants they represent. These meetings are supported by Community Associations meetings conducted every 8 weeks split across the 6 geographical areas. Officers, Elected Members and the police also attend these meetings to report on local issues, allowing information to be fed up and down the consultation structure. Two tenants from each Community Association area sit on the Housing Management Board, as well as the Chair of the LFTA.

13.1.4 The Community Development Team provides support to the individual TARA's, including training and capacity building activities. They are also tasked to create new groups across the city.

13.1.5 The Tenants Inspectorate was created in 2001 to increase the quality aspect of our service. At present we have 40 trained inspectors who undertake quarterly quality audits.

13.1.6 Quarterly Stakeholders meeting have taken place since January 2001, so consultation and information sharing can take place with tenants and other agencies that have an interest in the service. These meetings have highlighted service improvements, such as customer care.

13.1.7 In addition to the established consultation mechanisms, further consultation on this review was carried out with the following users:

- A random sample survey sent to over 2,500 tenants across the city, resulting in a 41% return.
- A questionnaire was sent to all Housing Management staff, resulting in a 71% return rate.
- All Elected Members were asked to comment on the quality and level of service, five responded.
- A survey was sent to all our 224 Leaseholders and a random sample survey of over 1,000 Freeholders, resulting in a 16% return.
- A questionnaire was sent to over 300 identified stakeholders, partners and other agencies resulting in a 17% return.
- A door-to-door street survey was conducted of over 300 dwellings in diverse and differing areas of the city to determine how users perceive the current level of service and their desire for future service changes.
- Challenge workshops with tenants, staff and stakeholders¹¹. As part of the Best Value Review the Housing Management Service engaged the use of a Critical Friend. The person selected was a Housing Professional from Derwent Housing Association who held the challenge workshops. The Critical Friend also provided a final report¹² detailing his views on the way the Review had been conducted and findings of the consultation exercises.
- Ongoing dialogue with tenants and staff review group.

13.2 Consultation Findings: service strengths and weaknesses

13.2.1 Tenants' Views¹³ – Strengths

The following strengths were identified at the Tenants' Workshop:

- Tenants thought our approach to tackling harassment was good
- Tenants were positive about the level of consultation and with their opportunities to participate
- Tenants thought the upkeep & local environment on our estates were good

¹¹ A summary report of the findings from the Challenge Workshops is detailed at Appendix 8.

¹² The Critical Friends final report is detailed at Appendix 9.

¹³ A summary of the Tenants Survey findings is detailed at Appendix 10.

Respondents to the Tenants Survey had this view of the service:

- 73% of tenants wanted to remain on the estates
- 70% of tenants thought the service was good or very good
- 58% of tenants wanted to extend the level of service at the local neighbourhood housing offices to include non-housing services
- 22% value local shops and 21% value access to transportation
- 76% of tenants thought that our staff were polite & helpful

13.2.2 Tenants' Views – Weaknesses

The following service weaknesses were identified at the Tenants' Workshop:

- Tenants wanted to see improved Customer Care
- Tenants wanted to see more trained front line staff

Respondents to the Tenants Survey raised the following issues they wanted to see addressed:

- 45% of tenants wanted to see an improved telephone system
- 13% of tenants wanted to see staff knowledge increased
- 22% of tenants wanted better transport & parking facilities on our estates
- 46% of tenants wanted better Community Safety

13.2.3 Staff Views¹⁴ – Strengths

Staff at the Challenge Workshop identified what they considered to be service strengths:

- Customer Care improving
- Good training opportunities
- Good working conditions
- Equalities in employment

Staff Survey findings indicated that:

- 46% of staff thought internal communications were good
- 86% of staff felt team work was good

13.2.4 Staff Views – Weaknesses

Staff at the Challenge workshops considered these to be the main service weaknesses:

¹⁴ A summary of the staff survey findings is detailed at Appendix 11.

- Some inconsistencies between local Neighbourhood Housing Offices in respect of staff workloads
- Staff want more 'on the job' training
- Some inconsistencies in working practices
- Too many local performance indicators
- Some inconsistencies in local management and leadership

The Staff Survey recorded these areas of dissatisfaction:

- 31% raised issues of stress and sickness
- 33% of staff felt inter-departmental communications were poor

13.2.5 Leaseholders' and Freeholders' Views¹⁵ - Strengths

The respondents to the Leaseholder and Freeholder Survey had these views of the service:

- 58% stated they wanted a local service from the Neighbourhood Housing Offices
- 72% wanted to remain on our estates
- 59% stated they were satisfied with the services being received
- 20% valued local shops and 19% access to transportation
- 71% wanted to extend the level of service at the local neighbourhood offices to include non-housing issues

13.2.6 Leaseholders' and Freeholders' Views – Weaknesses

The Leaseholder and Freeholder Survey highlighted these service weaknesses:

- 70% want to see improved customer care
- 42% want an improved telephone system
- 60% of leaseholders and freeholders did not feel consulted about improvements to take place in the area they lived. They particularly want to be consulted on environmental issues, repairs and the cost of the service.

13.2.7 Stakeholders Views¹⁶ – Strength

The Stakeholder Challenge Workshop reached these conclusions about the Housing Management Service:

- Stakeholders thought there was a positive approach to partnership working
- Their perception of our service is progressive

¹⁵ A summary of the leaseholder and freeholder survey findings are detailed at Appendix 12.

¹⁶ A summary of the stakeholder survey findings is detailed at Appendix 13.

- They thought our staff were open, honest and committed

The Stakeholder Survey found that:

- 62% made regular contact with our local Neighbourhood Housing Offices

13.2.8 Stakeholders Views – Weaknesses

The two main service weaknesses identified from the Stakeholders Challenge Workshop were:

- There is a need to improve communication and information sharing
- There is a need to promote the service, especially new initiatives

The Stakeholder Survey findings showed that:

- 85% of Stakeholders want to see improvements in customer care
- 20% of Stakeholders want an improved telephone system

13.2.9 Street Survey

Street surveys¹⁷ were conducted in liaison with Neighbourhood Coordinators to find out how satisfied people are with living on our estates, to capture the quality of Leicester City Council services and identify gaps in provision. On the whole tenants and residents were satisfied with the services provided by the Housing Management Service and said that their local Community/Neighbourhood was important to them.

13.2.10 Elected Members' Views

Overall, Members' views on the service were positive and issues raised tended to focus around the maintenance of the stock and Housing Benefit problems.

13.2.11 Feedback sessions

Feedback sessions, detailing the findings and improvements have been undertaken with all the following:

- Housing Directorate 9th July 2003
- Housing Management staff 9th, 25th & 29th July 2003
- Tenants Best Value Working Party 6th July 2003
- Joint Trade Unions 7th July 2003
- Stakeholders 24th July 2003
- HMB 20.8.2003

¹⁷ A summary of the findings from the street surveys can be found at Appendix 14.

Overall the findings and their links to the required improvements were accepted as a true reflection of the work undertaken by the Best Value Review Team.

13.2.12 Conclusion

There were clearly areas of frustration highlighted by the consultation process, such as the need for an improved telephone system and better customer care. Those improvements within the Housing Department's remit are detailed in the Improvement Plan. However, there are issues that will require a Council response, such as:

- Improved Transportation
- Improved Parking Facilities
- Improved maintenance of local play areas
- Poor inter departmental communications
- The provision of non-Housing Management service

14. Compete (Are we the best provider?)

- 14.1 The Housing Department will undertake a Stock Options Appraisal within the next 6 months (Cabinet approval was given on 22.9.2003), leading to recommendations for the best financial model for the housing service as a whole. Therefore it is inappropriate to actively seek alternative providers at this time when any decision/outcome may be over turned by decisions arising from the appraisal.
- 14.2 The focus of the review has been on long term tenants needs and the Improvement Plan reflects this. Any action arising from the Stock Options Appraisal will require minimum service changes as we feel this approach is geared towards a sustainable Housing Management service. Although, there may be significant changes in the future, the proposed Improvement Plan is robust enough to anticipate any major changes.
- 14.3 In 1997 & 1999 the service was subjected to Compulsory Competitive Tendering (CCT) and on both occasions Leicester City Council won the contracts to continue providing the service. At that time this process was a major challenge to the future provision of the service.
- 14.4 Since the last tendering process very little has changed in the housing market to suggest that there is any other organisation capable of managing the service at the same level. Also, Derby City Council (prior to becoming an ALMO) undertook a similar exercise and concluded that the local market lacked maturity in the majority of areas to undertake the key activities provided by the service.
- 14.5 It is likely that the Maintenance and Housing Management Service would go together if another provider were considered. Therefore an excellent rating from the Housing Inspectors would clearly demonstrate

that we had a service fit for purpose and would compliment the 3 star rating already achieved by the Maintenance Service.

15. Performance Management

15.1 The Housing Management service has a history of performance management since the introduction of CCT contracts in 1997. The service was initially monitored purely on the time taken to undertake tasks. Since the introduction of Best Value the local performance indicators have been reviewed twice to incorporate more quality checks.

15.2 Performance Management that takes place includes:

- Quarterly audits of service performance indicators
- Monitoring of the National Best Value performance Indicators against other authorities
- Monitoring of local performance indicators
- Benchmarking with the Major Cities Group
- The use of performance improvement websites for the housing sector
- Mystery customer exercises to produce reality checks
- Tenant Inspectorate

15.3 As part of the Housing Management review consideration was given to the effectiveness of arrangements for performance management. This study concluded there was a culture of performance management and seeking continuous improvement. However, the following issues have been identified. These are addressed in the Improvement Plan.

a) Staff stated at the challenge workshop there were too many service performance indicators and the recording of these was time consuming as was collating the information. This is not just an issue about too many performance indicators but the current IT system prevents effective and accurate recording and monitoring. It is not clear how issues identified at the quarterly audit lead to service improvements. However, work has already started on addressing the issue of too many performance indicators. Areas of work to be monitored are to reduce to 5 key indicators based on tenant's priorities. Staff and tenants have set the new indicators to be monitored.

b) The Major Cities Benchmarking Group was set up to compare performance between authorities. This has proved difficult as each authority has different procedures so comparison was not undertaken on a like for like basis. These meetings now concentrate on sharing good practice.

c) Housemark has a site where Authorities can submit performance information so comparisons can be made between authorities in addition to the National Best Value Performance League Tables

published by the Audit Commission. Unfortunately this has not proved as useful as first thought as many authorities have not submitted performance information to compare against. Also, some authorities information is 2/3 years old, and therefore out of date. However, the good practice site has proved useful when undertaking procedure reviews¹⁸.

d) Mystery customer exercises have been informative but have been ad hoc. There needs to be a structured programme for future exercises to ensure that service improvements are identified and actioned.

e) The Tenant Inspectorate has proved highly popular with tenants and has directly improved the quality of ready to let properties, our reception areas and the environment of our estates. However, this role requires enhancing further and administered in a more effective manner in conjunction with our tenants and is detailed in the improvement Plan.

15.4 Business Planning

The Housing Management service business planning process is detailed in the Housing Revenue Business Plan, which is produced on an annual basis and includes information relating to how services will be enhanced or new initiatives introduced to achieve the Local and national Best Value Performance targets. In addition performance information is presented to our tenants representatives on a regular basis, so they have an awareness of our achievement and target failures.

15.5 Improvement measures undertaken in the past 3 years (Best Value Performance Plan 2003-2004) are as follows:

Description of Service	Description of improvement measures	Progress in implementation	Outcomes of improvement measures
Improvements to customer care			
Improving customer care delivery to tenants, other stakeholders & customers.	Employment of 2-customer care training officers. Implementation of a customer care training programme.	Two local neighbourhood-housing offices have undergone training; the remaining 11 offices will be included in the programme over the next 12 months. This will be an ongoing process, which will include	Over 80% tenant satisfaction already recorded via a survey sent out as part of the Housing Management Best Value Review, in the areas that have undergone the training.

¹⁸ A summary of the Housemark good practice research is detailed at Appendix 15.

Description of Service	Description of improvement measures	Progress in implementation	Outcomes of improvement measures
		monitoring & evaluation.	
Improving the knowledge & customer care delivery of front line staff	Implementation of induction training for new front line Housing Support Officers (tenants are also involved in delivering the programme).	The first programme was delivered in June 02, the 2nd November 02 and the 3rd in June 03. The programme ongoing and backed up by on the job assessment, quality checks, etc.	Positive feedback from the tenant's representatives, plus over 80% satisfaction levels noted in recent Best Value surveys.
Improving the front line customer care delivery at local neighbourhood housing offices	Two offices have been piloted to include dedicated experienced Housing Officers at reception, therefore reducing the need to make an appointment in the future.	The initiative started in February 03 and included extra IT equipment at the reception desk.	Customer exit surveys conducted at the offices show a high level of satisfaction.
Service improvements			
To improve rent collection methods & reduce the level of rent arrears owed to the authority.	The creation of a temporary specialised rent arrears team (including dedicated HB officer) to reduce the backlog of HB claims, to provide training & to investigate complex cases.	The team started in April 03 & have started to audit the operations of the rent collection system. They have started to consider the training requirements for staff.	It is too early to assess the impact of the team, but the success will be measured by the reduction in the debt to the Council & improved customer satisfaction.
Improved relet times & improved customer care for new tenants	Employment of a voids officer in a pilot area of the city to undertake escorted views & to turn properties 'around' as quickly as possible.	Due to the success of the original scheme two more areas have been included in the pilot.	Levels of customer satisfaction have increased among new tenants.
Improving the quality of service delivery from a tenants' perspective & identify future service improvements	Creation of the Tenants Inspectorate.	To date we have 40 trained Tenants Inspectors. Audits of the Housing Management Service. New members are encouraged & training is provided.	Customer care, standards of ready to let properties & environmental management have improved since the introduction of the Tenants Inspectorate. The scoring levels have consistently increased over the last 15 months.

Description of Service	Description of improvement measures	Progress in implementation	Outcomes of improvement measures
Improving quality of life on estates			
Gaining an awareness of the cultural differences & to ensure services could be developed to meet the needs of the Somolian community.	Employment of 2 Somolian Development Workers to raise awareness of this group & provide a link with the Somolian community.	The workers started November 02. To date they have undergone the Housing Management Induction Programme & are starting to raise awareness & will be providing training to staff.	This initiative will be measured using customer satisfaction surveys. However, early indications show that the workers are welcomed by the Somolian & mainstream community.
Reducing the level of Anti-Social Behaviour across the city.	Review of the ASB Harassment, domestic violence policy. Creation of an ASB team to train Housing Management staff in the techniques available to tackle ASB. Creation of a city wide Nuisance Team.	The policy review was completed in March 02. The training completed in March 03 and is ongoing as new enforcement methods are developed. Nuisance Team in place since October 02.	Reductions in reported number of ASB for 02/03 (approximately 30% for the Housing Department)
Fast tracking enforcement action against the perpetrators of ASB	Introduction of the use of Introductory Tenancies - basically 12-month probationary tenancies for new tenants. Can also be used for rent arrears & other breaches of the conditions of tenancy.	Came into force in October 01.	Reduced levels of reported ASB and reduced arrears could be attributed to this initiative.
Improving tenant consultation			
Reviewing the formal consultation mechanism to ensure tenants are involved in the decision making process	Creation of the Housing Management Board, giving tenants a majority vote (officers do not have a vote).	The first meeting took place on 4 October 01. The Chair rota is between the Chair for Housing and the Chair for the LFTA. The meetings take place every two months.	The decision making process is now more streamlined & allows tenants to vote on appropriate matters.
Engaging with all stakeholders of the service. This is in addition to the formal mechanism to consult tenants.	Creation of a quarterly Housing Management Stakeholders Meeting, which also includes tenants.	The meetings began in December 01 and allow the department to raise new topics & gain feedback for all that we engage with.	Service improvements have been identified, such as improved customer care.

Description of Service	Description of improvement measures	Progress in implementation	Outcomes of improvement measures
Tenant capacity building			
Improving communications with the Tenants and Residents Associations (TARAs)	To create a tenants' website & to provide all TARA's with a computer with internet & email access.	All TARA have a PC & have the ability to update their own web page. Training was provided by the department to facilitate this programme.	Positive feedback from the TARA's on their ability to download information and make comments directly on important issues.
Enhancing the knowledge & skills of the tenants representatives	Following agreement at the tenants conference in June 02, a training programme was devised for the TARAs. The programme includes training on chairing meetings, minute taking, and managing conflict.	The programme commenced in November 02 and will be ongoing.	Positive feedback from the TARA's on how the programme had increased their confidence to get involved to a greater degree in the decisions that affect the local community.

15.6 In 2001, the service was also subjected to an assessment using the European Foundation Quality Model (EFQM) to determine where improvements were required. At the time 72 key service improvements were identified and to date 63 have been fully completed and in some cases have been taken a step further than the original improvement identified. This process demonstrates that 'challenge' has been a key driver towards excellence and that the service has an established culture of continuous improvement.

15.7 Those improvements were achieved with continuous monitoring and the majority were delivered within the specified target time and met the desired outputs. Those that were not completed on time such as the new IT system (due to be completed in April 2004) were delayed due to financial or external implications. At the time when the EFQM was undertaken, a score of 362 points was awarded; this was one of the highest scores of a local Authority at that time.

15.8 A further EFQM assessment¹⁹ was undertaken in June 2003 using the corporate guidelines and a further 22 areas for Improvement were identified. The majority of these mirror the aspirations of our service users and will be included in the proposed Improvement Plan. However, when re-scoring our service the score had increased to 603, which demonstrates that the service continues to diversify and change direction to meet our customer's needs.

¹⁹ A summary of the EFQM assessment can be found at Appendix 16.

16. Improvement Plan

16.1 Methodology

The Improvement Plan²⁰ flows from the issues raised by the Best value Review.

16.2 The Plan details the areas for improvement, the Lead Officer responsible for progressing the improvement, the target date for completion, milestones, desired outcome, methods of measurement, how the action links to improved performance and resources required.

16.3 The Housing Management Performance Management Team will monitor the Plan and progress will be reported to Housing Directorate and the tenants HMB on a 6 monthly basis. Over time the priorities in the plan will be subject to review due to the changing nature of our business and the changing needs and aspirations of our tenants.

16.4 The target date for implementing many of the improvements is April 2004. We are confident the majority can be implemented on time.

16.5 The overall aims of the Improvement Plan are:

- To reach an 80% customer satisfaction rating, a 5% increase, by 2006.
- To reach a 63% tenant satisfaction rating with their opportunities to participate, an increase of 5%, by 2006.
- A reduction in rent arrears to £1.5m by 2005.
- A 10% reduction in average re-let times by 2006.

The key tasks in the Improvement Plan will contribute to these overall targets.

17. Equalities

17.1 The service has already introduced many new initiatives to ensure equality within employment and delivery of services. These include: -

- Development of a Housing Department BME Strategy
- Multi-lingual staff available for customers with different language needs
- Audit of Housing Office accessibility in line with Disability Discrimination Act requirements and the development of priority action plan for the work required.
- Review of the Harassment and Domestic Violence procedures.
- Multi agency monitoring form for Anti-Social Behaviour and Harassment

²⁰ The top 5 wins, 8 short-term improvements and the full Improvement Plan are detailed at Appendix 17.

- Literature in other languages and formats
 - Recruitment of 2 Somalian Development Workers
 - Joint tenancies for same sex couples
 - Equality monitoring of staff in terms of age, disability and ethnic origin.
 - Equality training for staff
- 17.2 The Authority gained level 2 of the Government Equality Standards in May 2002 and many of the initiatives developed by the service were cited as good practice. Equality issues are an integral part of policy and procedure. Pursuit of equality is mainstreamed into service provision.
- 17.3 In October 2002 the Housing Management Service conducted an Equalities Survey for both staff and tenants. Neither identified that inequality was a fundamental issue. Problems related more to inadequate customer care delivery.
- 17.4 One of the items included in the Improvement Plan is the development of a Housing Management Equalities Strategy, which will ensure the service reaches level 3 of the Government Equality Standard within the required corporate timescales.

18. Sustainability

- 18.1 A checklist derived from the Government sustainability development strategy “A better quality of life”, has been used to assess whether the improvements identified through the Housing Management Best Value Review will have an impact on improving community sustainability²¹. Making a positive impact or diminishing the negative impact of a service can improve sustainability.

The proposed improvements noted in the Improvement Plan will impact of sustainability through: -

- Building sustainable communities
- Buildings, planning and land use
- Managing the environment and resources
- Health
- A sustainable economy
- Housing
- Social equity and Opportunity
- Transport
- Sending the right signals

²¹ A summary of the findings of the sustainability checklist is detailed in Appendix 18.

19. Financial Implications

- 19.1 Income to fund the Housing Management Service is generated through the rental of the Council Housing Stock. The Housing Revenue Account (HRA) monies are “ring fenced” by Government and can only be spent on matters associated with the stock.
- 19.2 For the financial year 2003/04 the Housing Management Service receives:
- £6, 451,000 from the Housing Revenue Account
Nominal income of £27,000 received for payments of services, for example garden maintenance and payment of court costs
- 19.3 The total income for the Housing Management service is £6 478 000.
- 19.4 The gross expenditure for the Housing Management service is £6 478 000. This pays for services provided by: -
- Neighbourhood Housing Offices
 - Project Team
 - Rent Arrears Team
 - HRA IT Team
 - St Marks Estate Management Board
 - Best Value preparations
- 19.5 68.6% of the gross expenditure is spent on staffing costs and 31.4% on the administration of providing services.
- 19.6 The Best Value principles require services to make a 2% saving on their annual expenditure. In terms of the Housing Management Service, this equates to an overall saving of £127,440pa. This will be achieved by reducing the level of debt owed to the Authority and the reduced number of days a dwelling is vacant (potentially if the total number of days that a property remains vacant were reduced by 2 weeks, this would create a saving of nearly £160,000pa).
- 19.7 In addition the new IT System due to be fully implemented by April 2004 will also increase efficiencies. Any extra savings identified will be re-invested in the service.

20. Other Implications

OTHER IMPLICATIONS	YES/NO	Paragraph Within Supporting information	References
Equalities	YES	17.1	
Policy	NO		
Sustainability	YES	18.1	
Crime and Disorder	NO		
Human Rights Act	NO		
Elderly/People on Low Income	NO		

21. Consultation

21.1 Extensive consultation has taken place with our service users to gain their views on the level of service provided (February – April 2003). In addition, Tenants Best Value Working party (6.7.2003) and Joint Trade Unions (7.7.2003), Staff (9th – 25th July 2003) Stakeholders (24.7.03) and HMB (20.8.2003) have been consulted on the findings of the review and the proposed Improvement Plan.

21.2 The LFTA has also been consulted about the findings of the Review and the proposed Improvement Plan. Chris Cronogue, the Chair on the LFTA, stated, “The LFTA welcomes and supports the proposed Improvement Plan. The tenants movement has been impressed with the content and thoroughness of the Review and looks forward to continued partnership working with the Management Service in the future.”

21.3 Although the Joint Trade Unions have not provided an independent letter relating to how the review has been conducted, the following statement has been taken from the minutes of the Joint Trade Union Consultative meeting held on 30th October 2003. “From the Trade Union viewpoint the review had been conducted in a thorough manner in line with the Council’s Best value framework”.

22. Aims & Objectives

22.1 “The aim of the Housing Services is a decent home within the reach of every citizen in Leicester”.

22.2 This report contributes to that aim by improving the Housing Management services provided to tenants to meet both current and future need, ensuring the service provided is customer focused.

23. Background Papers – Local Government Act 1972

23.1 Housing Management Best Value Scoping Report. LCC. 2003

Audit Commission Good Practice criteria. ODPM. 2001/2002/2003
Chartered Institute of Housing Good Practice guidance 2002/2003
Best Value Corporate Framework. LCC. 2003
Housing Needs Survey 2002
National Census 2001