

Self Assessment for Quality Audit Housing Landlord Services

20th May 2011



HOUSING LANDLORD SERVICE

Quality Audit June 2011

Self Assessment

For further information please contact

Amanda Roberts,
Project Administrator
Tel : 01722 434307
Amanda.roberts@wiltshire.gov.uk

Front Cover: clockwise from top - Friary Estate Inspection; New council houses, Trowbridge; Durrington Estate Inspection; New tenants, Trowbridge; Bemerton Heath Estate Inspection; Sign up for new council home; Mere Estate inspection; site for 22 new homes, Corporate team of the month Voids Team

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FOREWORD

As Chairman of the Wiltshire Housing Commission, a board set up to take ownership of the improvement plan for the council's landlord service, I have greatly enjoyed working alongside tenant representatives, fellow councillors and independent experts in developing the strategic direction of the landlord service and driving change and improvement.



The Commission was created as an early response to the Audit Commission's assessment of the service as a zero star landlord service and a one star for performance and prospects and has been a source of great energy and enthusiasm in supporting housing officers to take forward the many improvements that have occurred, and I am pleased to say that of the 113 actions that made up that plan, 75% have now been completed. Much of the work we have carried out since the inspection in February 2010 has laid the foundations for the significant improvement we hope to deliver over the coming year and I am confident that the service is in good shape to deliver the outcomes that tenants have asked for.

Amongst the major successes this year has been the tripartite working of the Commission – we have certainly seen the value of tenants and independent experts working with the council to shape the service. We have also seen the benefit of sharing experiences with other high quality landlords. I am encouraged to believe that this type of working has a good future in Wiltshire and will be a key ingredient in delivering future Improvement.

The inspection of 2010 provided us with a much needed realistic appraisal, highlighting areas such as equalities, void management and customer service where we needed to improve (there was considerable scope for improvement). In the period that has followed we have been able to bring together the ability and knowledge of housing staff, the breadth of resource of the new unitary council, the aspirations of tenants and experience of other high performing landlords to greatly improve performance in many areas such as customer service, voids and repairs. However we are also very aware that some significant challenges remain around governance, scrutiny, climate change and anti social behaviour. It would have been naive to believe we could put everything right in one year. We embarked on an ambitious two year programme that has delivered significantly improved performance in some areas in year one as well as laying essential foundations to deliver success in other areas in year two.

The response of staff to the need for improvement has been phenomenal and I have been incredibly impressed by the creativity, flexibility and sheer hard work on display in every corner of the team. I know from my own visits to our estates and conversations with tenants and staff that there is great delight in the results so far and a strong belief that we can carry forward further developments and improvement in the year ahead and beyond. The prospects are extremely good.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be 'John Brady'.

Councillor John Brady

Cabinet Member for Finance Performance and Risk

Section 1 setting the scene

Our Council, created in April 2009 has 5400 council homes and 400 leasehold flats in south Wiltshire. In February 2010 the Audit Commission awarded the landlord service zero and one star for performance and prospects.

We immediately put in place an ambitious [Improvement Plan](#) that is already delivering top quartile performance on some key indicators and has laid very solid foundations for very high quality performance to be delivered in all areas by April 2012. From inception the Wiltshire Family of Partnerships identified Affordable Housing as a top priority and we knew that the combination of a well maintained stock, motivated staff and corporate capacity and vision could deliver the service tenants aspire to. Our corporate objectives of delivering high quality services to the public, with open and honest decision making and partnership working have all been so relevant and very evident in the way we have approached service improvement.

Our experience with localism enabled us to quickly set up a tripartite commission of tenants, councillors and independent expertise to own the improvement plan. In the first year we completed over 75% of actions within the plan. These included some challenging goals such as moving to fully DDA compliant premises. The full status of all our actions from that first year plan is set out in the [Improvement Plan Update](#)

Wiltshire Has a large rural area with a population of approx 460,000 in market towns and villages. Salisbury and nearby villages are high house price hot spots. We are a national leader in localism and area based engagement. Annually we have delivered more affordable homes than any other council in the region and also have the largest new council house building programme in the South West

Premises Although the county town is Trowbridge, our main tenant base is in Salisbury where we have recently moved our housing management staff to brand new offices. We also now deliver customer facing services through a one stop shop in the city centre. Additionally we have refurbished our two estate offices.

The Team Approximately 70 staff provide a very low cost management service that has in the past had a key focus on delivering 100% decent homes. They have worked impressively hard in year one to keep the good results on decent homes but also learn from other high performing landlords in order to deliver excellent results in the more challenging areas such as voids. Through systems reviews many staff have voluntarily started working outside the constraints of the existing structure. This was essential for service improvement. In the coming year we need to shape the structure to meet the new ways of working. During the last year we have a full programme of appraisal, two all staff seminars and two staff surveys. The second survey in December demonstrated clear progress from July. At a recent corporate awards event, the voids team and a DLO plumber were recognised as team and employee of the month respectively.

A knowledge culture In order to lay good foundations for the coming year we have put much effort into getting the data right – collecting customer profile data also collecting, recording and producing [performance data](#) in a way that is useful to us and our tenants - Commissioning an IT system that can handle the knowledge and use it to our customer's benefit

The [New Plan for Improvement](#) reflects how we will continue to deliver the improvements and how we will work in partnership with tenants to make sure there are clear and deliverable service benefits. The new plan was developed following field trips by tenants, councillors and almost all staff to high performing landlords. The original plan had been shaped by the KLOE system but the new plan sets out how we will clearly deliver improvement under the framework of our service standards

Plan for the Business One third of rents are being paid to central government in negative subsidy, prompting past consultations on transfer of the stock to a housing association. However tenants have placed great value on their homes remaining in council ownership and they have voted twice against transfer. Council leader Jane Scott has reassured tenants that transfer is not on the agenda; and that our overwhelming purpose is to develop, over the coming year, the Best Deal for Council Housing

using the opportunity of self financing to deliver a package of services that meets tenants expectations and completes the move from low cost to high quality *and* low cost. We are currently working on a Business Plan for self financing that will later in the year be able to incorporate the aspirations of the Best Deal.

Tenants central Every step of the improvement plan has been developed and delivered alongside tenants. For the coming year we want to build on the success of the tripartite commission to establish effective scrutiny and to have tenants central to future governance. Crucially we need to continue to expand opportunities for tenants to be involved, shape and influence housing services. We have many older tenants with 64% of respondents to our status survey being singles or couples aged 60 and above. This has significant implications for the way we shape service delivery. The TSA's new framework of service standards importantly places great emphasis on tenants shaping the service and this is very much reflected in our New Plan for Improvement.

Accountability Whilst the Commission holds no formal powers there has been willingness on the part of the Cabinet Member for Housing, the Deputy Leader (who has been on the Commission since its inception) and Chief Officers to use their executive powers to implement the expressed preferences of the Commission and where necessary to take matters to Cabinet to seek their approval. There are also reporting lines between the Commission, the Tenants' Panel and Council Scrutiny (who receive a report every 6 months).

Better with Partners The introduction of a fast track adaptations scheme for new tenants exemplifies the importance of both internal partnerships with Children and Adult care services as well as external partnership with our contractors. We have driven much improvement through a key partnership with Poole Housing Partnership and recently have commissioned the service of the Chartered Institute of Housing to continue to drive improvement through mentoring and quality audit.

Section 2 Service areas

2.1 Tenant involvement and empowerment standard - customer care, complaints, diversity and tenant involvement

Working Well	Future Improvement Focus
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Vastly better access through new receptions, upgraded leaflets, improving web, free internet through libraries • Profile data on two thirds of tenants • Embedding estate inspections • Equalities focus – specialist officer, training for all staff and contractors, DDA compliant premises, Gypsy and Traveller site management has moved to housing management and we now need to work hard to develop an effective and customer focused management service for these sites. • Wide training programme for tenants – including procurement and VfM • Establishing a Wiltshire wide tenant forum for all social housing tenants • High quality tenant magazine with tenants on the editorial board and writing copy. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Develop a new local offer on investment and services through the Best Deal • Developing Equalities training in specialist areas such as Gypsies and Travellers • Sharing experience of local landlords to develop an effective tenants scrutiny role • Launch the new handbook and website that have been developed with tenants over the last year • Use profile data and the planned new IT system to customise services to individuals and groups • Developing new and creative ways for tenants to effectively engage with service development

We have worked especially hard over the last 15 months to deliver genuine improvements in this area which was a point of focus in the inspection report. There are real and tangible differences in our offices. Information available to tenants is of a much higher quality, offices are accessible and tenant representatives have been key to shaping the improvements. However, much of the work this year was to put in place the building blocks, such as tenant profile data, that are needed before some major improvements can be delivered in the coming year.

Access and customer care

- In 18 months we have provided DDA compliant reception areas where previously there were none and a dedicated tenant group worked with officers to totally upgrade all our leaflets, website and handbook. Tenants have a big say on the editorial board and also producing material for the highly regarded Housing Matters magazine, and we recently completed a tenants' survey on HM that will help shape future editions.
- Customer care starts from before day one when customers are offered a home that meets defined void standard. All prospective tenants have an accompanied viewing and at sign up there is set on site introduction to their tenancy and a satisfaction survey. We then courtesy call after 6 weeks.
- We monitor satisfaction on all key activities such as repairs, ASB, Adaptations and tenancy sign up.

Equality and diversity

- We are building Browse-a-loud: software into our new website
- We have worked with contractors to check compliance with their equalities policies and provide training

- We have carried out equalities impact assessments on all major policies
- We have a mental Health self-help group with the primary focus on developing self-confidence and social skills

Tenant involvement and empowerment

- Tenants are at the heart of the improvement plan, sitting on the Commission and also a dedicated improvement steering group
- Tenants are part of the procurement project to secure future maintenance services
- Tenants have joined officers and councillors on field trips to good practice landlords
- We have developed a new performance report that puts data in an accessible and consistent format and highlights indicators that tenants wish to focus on
- Tenants have been trained in Mystery Shopping and have put this into practice
- The Housing Matters magazine has an editorial group and tenant writers
- A new residents association on the Friary estate as part of intensive management project.

2.2 Home standard

Working Well	Future Improvement Focus
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Decent Homes Standard was achieved by December 2010 • Visits to new tenants advising on how to manage their home, e.g. how to find stop tap • Task and Finish tenant group to make recommendations for the Repairs Service • Lean systems review of repairs • Reduced pre inspections from 90% to below 10% • Appointments made and kept 97% • Tenant profile flagging on repairs IT system to assist repairs administrators to understand an individual callers needs • Delivery of 40 new council homes at level 4 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Finalise Asset Management Strategy • Complete procurement of full capital and repairs services • strategic review of sheltered accommodation • Achieve overall improvement in home energy efficiency • Completion of current new council house building programme and start of new programme for 2012-15 • Make available cleaning services for communal areas across all flats

We inherited from Salisbury District Council an effective programme for the delivery of decent homes and we were able to see the completion of that programme with virtually 100% of homes reaching the standard. That programme did not provide for maintenance in communal areas and the tenants' panel has now agreed to make available cleaning services across communal areas attached to all our blocks of flats. Through our Asset Management Strategy and the opportunity of self financing we now have the possibility of making available greater investment in our stock and there will be a thorough consultation with all tenants that will enable us to agree the Best Deal for Council housing in Wiltshire.

Improving responsive repairs 12 months ago we pre inspected almost all repair requests. Today our repairs administrators diagnose a repair over the phone and are able to cut out the inspection and make an appointment so that we get a high percentage right first time. This has freed up repairs inspectors to focus on Stock Conditions surveys and voids. However we know that there is still much to improve and a combination of work that is underway – reviewing systems, procuring contractors and procuring new IT will all combine in 2011/12 to have a highly efficient and cost effective responsive service

Being Proactive A member of our repairs team realised that many calls come from tenants who often are not familiar with the utilities in their home. We have now introduced visits to new tenants shortly after they take up their tenancy to explain the central heating system, the fuse box and how to change a light bulb. This helps them enjoy their home better and cuts out avoidable repair call outs. Our next step will be to introduce training for long standing tenants.

Health and Safety We have been very successful in completing 100% of gas safety inspections, however in the last 12 months we have focussed on other aspects. We have a specialist Health and Safety officer attached to the service and this had driven progress on training and procedures in areas such as managing asbestos.

Aids and adaptations Working as one unitary council has delivered a significant dividend here. Housing, adult care and children's care services agreed new policies and approaches on: creating a fast track service for new tenants who need adaptations, looking at alternatives to costly large scale adaptations and agreeing a new system for prioritising adaptations. The council is also carrying out a corporate review of services to disabled people and this will enable us in the coming year to improve and streamline delivery of adaptations and disabled facilities grants.

Tenant priority Our status survey tells us that repairs are the single most important issue for tenants, and it confirms high levels of satisfaction with the service. We also survey on completion of

2.3 Tenancy standard – allocations rent and tenure

improve on this.

Working Well	Future Improvement Focus
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Rent arrears reduced from 2.35% in 2009/10 to 2.06% in 2010/11 • Developed a comprehensive corporate debt policy. • Void turnaround time reduced from 43 days to 24.07 days (top quartile). • Anti-social Behaviour Reduction Officer placement in Housing to achieve sustainable communities and also working with Regional ASB advisor on ASB health check • Review of Choice Based lettings complete and revised policy now in place 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Use profile data to analyse characteristics of those in rent arrears and introduce proactive measures. • Work with tenants to understand the possibilities of new flexibilities around tenure and allocations • Carry out a systems review around income management • Complete commissioning of new housing management IT system supporting more effective use of profiling data, income management and tenancy management • Deliver further improvements in arrears indicators

Managing voids Prior to inspection we had an average void turnaround time of over 43 days. We recognised that this was a poor use of stock and bad value for money so clearly it had to be one of our highest priorities. Through training, analysis and learning from other landlords we quickly established some key improvements that could be introduced. We set a target to achieve top quartile performance by March 2012 and an interim target of 35 days for March 2011. We have achieved an average of just over 24 days for ALL our voids. The newly created voids team were very pleased to be recognised as the council's team of the month earlier this year. Our focus on voids has also fed into a much more thorough lettings process, with clear void standards, a programme of meetings and visits with tenants from viewing through sign-up to follow up visit, supported by set templates and customer satisfaction surveys.

A corporate approach to debt This can be a challenging policy for a council to introduce, however we have achieved agreement across the main areas of income collection on how we can work with customers who are significantly in debt to a number of council departments. The policy seeks to ensure that knowledge is shared across collecting services and that debtors are not dealt with in a way that could lead to them ultimately losing their home when alternatives exist.

Rent arrears We have achieved a good level of performance on rent arrears having slightly improved our position over the year. Improvement in this area had not been a priority for year one and it is reassuring that the team have been able to maintain a focus on this whilst trying to deliver significant improvement in other areas. This year we will undertake a system review of our income management as a whole and will use tenant profile data to better understand the nature of tenants in arrears. There will be a clear focus on prevention and working with tenants to help them avoid debt and maintain sustainable tenancies. We expect to be able to introduce mobile chip and pin as a new payment option. Our goal is to achieve top quartile performance by April 2012.

Tenancy changes A significant achievement was to eliminate the use of bed and breakfast for homeless families within a month of the new council coming into existence. This was achieved through the introduction of the Homes 4 Wiltshire choice based lettings system, and effective working between housing options and the landlord service. Families who had been in temporary homes for some time started to move into council tenancies. However the time is now right to consult with tenants and applicants about the new flexibilities that are to be provided, in particular on making more internal transfers available, introducing flexible tenancies and the possibility that the housing waiting list might be limited to only those in housing need.

IT The service currently uses a housing management system that is over 12 years old and the Commission and Cabinet have identified its replacement as a priority. A project team is in place and a provider will be identified in the next couple of months with the system going live later in the year. Already considerable market research has taken place. The introduction of a new system will be essential for improved ways of working and a much improved customer experience.

Tenancy Handbook over the past year we have been working closely with tenants on the development of a new handbook. The new handbook has been agreed and is greatly improved. It is currently with the printers and should be available to tenants very soon.

2.4 Neighbourhood and community standard

Working Well	Future Improvement Focus
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Program of estate inspections established including tenants, leaseholders, housing officers, Anti-social Behaviour Reduction Officer, Councillors, Police and Parish Representatives • Friary estate – intensive management Pilot Project • All new ASB cases are screened immediately, if urgent dealt with within 24 hours, if non urgent dealt with within five days • Signed up to Government Respect Standard • We have engaged the regional advisor for Anti Social Behaviour to learn from best practice elsewhere with a health check having already commenced • Team have completed level 2 safeguarding training for vulnerable adults • Embedding of corporate ASB officer within landlord service • Development of corporate ASB policy • Partner in the Family intervention Project (FIP) at Bemerton Heath 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Take forward the “Help to Live at Home” project for our sheltered housing residents • Carry out a full review of the effectiveness of ASB policy and procedure • Develop and implement a rolling programme of intensive management projects to continue on from the estate pilot. • Enable and support sheltered housing tenants to look after a part of the communal areas as their own garden. • As part of the development of the Asset Management Strategy and Best Deal for council housing to identify land resources in and around our council estates and agree the most effective use of these assets for the future

Joint working to benefit our tenants our new council has provided some significant opportunities for effective cross council working on council estates, e.g. Friary pilot and Bemerton FIP

Help to live at home is a project involving adult care services and social landlords across Wiltshire. We are currently seeking to procure a county wide service that will deliver housing related and care support to sheltered housing schemes and meet the needs of elderly people who are more dispersed. The new service will see a single provider delivering a whole package of support services to each individual rather than have these delivered by different agencies. This will offer simplicity and improved value for money.

ASB Reduction is not just a landlord issue but has a council wide dimension. The placement of a member of the ASB reduction team within the landlord service has been successful in supporting our casework and building links with external partners such as the police

Friary Estate Pilot This estate of many 1970s flats and maisonettes has much communal space that in the past has not received the attention they need. In May 2010 the Commission visited the estate and immediately set up the project that has led to a new residents group, and delivered many environmental improvements through the close work between housing, highways and grounds maintenance. The lessons learned from this pilot are to be rolled out to other estates.

Sheltered Housing Gardens During a visit to a sheltered scheme at Poole a number of tenants were so impressed by Poole’s willingness to support tenants in taking on responsibility for parts of communal gardens, they were keen to provide that opportunity in Wiltshire and so that idea will be taken forward this year.

Developing our ASB offer We know that for many tenants ASB is a concern and that in Wiltshire the levels of satisfaction with the service are not as high as they should be. We have recently been working with the Regional Advisor on ASB who has carried out an initial health check and identified many improvements that can be made to our approach. We will use the health check and experience of good practice landlords to develop our offer to tenants around ASB. In November staff visited Gloucester City Homes to share in the good practice that they have developed, and there is considerable enthusiasm amongst staff to develop our approach.

2.5 Value for money standard

Working Well	Future Improvement Focus
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Major savings on void losses by using a void works benchmark target and reduced rent loss • Management costs are very low • The council's workplace transformation programme has resulted in housing management using fewer desk and office space through hot desking. • Significantly improved performance reporting • Delivering repairs efficiencies through far fewer inspections, appointments and getting repairs right first time • VFM training for staff and managers and workshops for tenants 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Completion of the current procurement process for maintenance services • Completion of the current procurement process for IT • Improving Income management through a lean systems review • Achieving top quartile performance whilst retaining low management costs • Restructuring the service to adapt to the requirements of systems reviews and good quality strategic management to meet the demands of quality business planning in a self financing environment

The Wiltshire landlord service is low cost compared to other LA landlords and in the last year has also delivered improvements.

Improved performance The service has raised its game over the last year to deliver top quartile performance in several areas (voids, satisfaction and decent homes) whilst controlling costs. This has been achieved by keeping additional staff to a minimum and instead using the experience of expert landlords and corporate support. In 2011/12 our goal is to deliver top quartile performance whilst retaining a low management cost. Whilst we are realistic enough to appreciate there will be some additional costs we are sure these can be minimised through systems reviews and restructuring.

Void and Repairs We have demonstrated that we can deliver a much improved service with lower resources. Reducing repairs inspections has freed up inspectors to deliver stock condition surveys and improve voids work. Improved performance on voids has reduced costs on void works, increased rental income and means that our homes are being used more.

A new IT system We currently use an out of date housing management system that is not fit for the purpose of delivering many of the goals in our improvement plan. We have set out a business case showing that the move to a new system will be cost effective and remove the risk relating to a system that is no longer supported by the supplier. Our procurement route has also endeavoured to deliver possible benefits should Poole opt to buy from the same supplier.

Maintenance it is many years since the service went to the market place to procure maintenance services. We have now initiated a process that will enable providers to bid to provide the full array of maintenance services.

Self financing The switch to self financing will demand a rigorous approach to financial management and business planning. It will demand a robust 30 year business plan and an early priority for the council is to ensure that it has the right strategic skills in place to secure that robust planning. We are assessing the most effective approach to embedding financial and business planning expertise in the strategic management of the service.

2.6 Governance and financial viability standard



Working Well	Future Improvement Focus
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The success of the housing commission in promoting real improvement has established the huge value of council, tenants and independent experts working together. • The location of the housing service within a unitary council has provided a context and resource framework for improving the service. This has not only enabled many of the improvements to be delivered but has also made it possible for the service to deliver the largest new council housing programme in the region. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To build on the success of the Housing Commission and develop a robust model of governance that places tenants at the heart of strategic planning. • To continue the work that has started with tenants to build an effect scrutiny role that will not only provide tenants with the right information on performance but will enable tenants to challenge poor performance and commission investigation and research. • It is now important to develop the strategic capacity of the service. The service needs to have the capacity to continually look forward, change and improve. This will require the development of the strategic leadership role and the capacity of the whole service to manage change within a customer focus. • In order to effectively deliver a secure financial future that makes the most of our resources and opportunities in the new self financing environment it will be important that the strategic management of the landlord service includes effective financial and business planning expertise. This need will be assessed and developed with immediate effect.

Whilst this standard does not strictly apply to local authority landlords we feel that in the new world of self financing it is good for a local authority landlord to be mindful of some of the requirements of this standard. Moving to a self-financing system significantly alters the risk profile in HRA business plans, and will need to reflect more complex, longer term, financial management. There must be robust and accountable arrangements in place that will allow local decision making for housing investment whilst ensuring viability in both the short and longer term.

For governance, the required outcomes include that registered providers shall ensure effective governance arrangements that deliver their aims, objectives and intended outcomes for tenants and potential tenants in an effective, transparent and accountable manner. Clearly in a local authority there is well defined legislation setting out the arrangements and responsibilities for decision making. Wiltshire Council has a history that includes a beacon role in involving localities in shaping the way services are delivered. The council has been well regarded for the way it has introduced area boards and we are able to now use that experience and ethos to support the development of new governance arrangements for council housing.

We are committed to:

- Exploring with tenants the possibility of a future governance arrangement that builds on the successful work of the tripartite Housing Commission Board. In particular we would like to examine the option of councillors involving tenants and external expertise to plan the strategic management of the service.
- Developing new and robust arrangements for customer scrutiny. Currently the Tenants Panel has worked on the development of service standards and performance is reported to the panel regularly. We now want to investigate with tenants the significant strengthening of arrangements, including the

possibility of a dedicated trained team of tenants with powers to investigate and challenge and commission research and reports

- Putting in place a management structure for the service that is robust and accountable, capable of managing the long term financial risks within high quality financial and business plans. We will also put in place effective controls and procedures to ensure security of assets and the proper use of public funds.

Whilst the measures outlined above will address concerns around risk and accountability, they do not inherently create a service that has a culture and an in built drive to improve. Consequently we now need to develop the strategic capacity of the service. This will mean putting in place a structure that can deliver beneficial change and improvement and also building the capacity of the service management, front line staff, councillors and tenants to have progress as part of their culture and deliver continuous improvement.

Section 3 Prospects for improvement

When putting together our improvement plan in 2010, we shared a big ambition with our tenants to put right every part of the service that was poor and by April 2012 to be a top performing council landlord. Ambition has to be coupled with the capacity to change and improve. Over the past year we have had a lot of success and much of it has been in laying down the foundations for delivering major improvement in 2011/12. In addition there have been external changes such as the decision to end the Housing Revenue Account subsidy system, a change that makes getting better that bit more possible.

Track record in delivering improvement

Last year we adopted a very extensive and detailed improvement plan. It contained an overarching goal of achieving top quartile performance against a basket of key indicators by April 2012 and to agree an all encompassing Best Deal for Council. However a fundamental driver was to set goals to address the weakness highlighted by the Audit Commission:

- **Delivering services in a customer focused way** We worked swiftly to move reception to a fully modernised city centre one stop shop; our estate offices have been refurbished to provide disabled access and the bulk of our housing team now work from brand new offices at Bourne Hill where tenants are able to attend meetings in fully accessible premises. Extensive profile data is now in place for over 63% of tenancies this has been gathered through postal survey and a telephone surveys conducted by all staff including DLO staff. Satisfaction data is invited on all our main transactions including repairs, ASB and tenancy sign up.
- **Strengthening tenant involvement** We have enabled tenants to be at the core of the improvement programme: on the Commission; in dedicated improvement steering group; reviewing leaflets and web site and as key members of task and finish groups and equality impact assessment panels looking at policy developments. Estate inspections have been open to tenants who are able to identify problems and use a marking system to assess the communal environment. The best example has been the Friary Estate project where standards have been raised for not only housing services but also corporate functions such as refuse collection and recreation areas. This focus has led to setting up of a new residents association. Complaints are used to adapt the service and feed in to a “you said-we did” feature in the tenants’ magazine. Tenants have also taken part in field trips to other landlords and fed back strongly to a follow up seminar with staff and councillors to identify new good practice.
- **Embedding equality and diversity awareness** The appointment of a dedicated Equality and Diversity officer in the Housing service early in 2010 enabled us to swiftly take forward many of the advances that were needed in this area. Training for all staff on E & D as well as dignity at work and safeguarding vulnerable adults has been introduced and Equality Impact assessments on major policies carried out. An E and D perspective has been present throughout the comprehensive review of literature and web site it was also a key feature of the office changes that have taken place. We have done work with our contractors around their equalities statements and have also delivered E & D training to them.
- **Asset Management Strategy** The asset management strategy is strongly linked to some other major processes including stock condition assessment, business planning and self financing. Work has been carried out refresh our stock condition data and carry through a rolling programme of continual refresh. This data has now fed into the emerging asset management strategy that is feeding into the business plan. During the coming 12 months we will be using the asset management strategy as a vehicle for looking in detail at how all our assets can be most effectively used to support the ambitions of tenants that will develop as part of the Best Deal for council housing.
- **Letting empty homes** A dramatic improvement in performance has seen average turnaround times drop from a poor 43 days to an excellent 24 days (for all voids). Alongside changes to managing voids we have also established much clearer customer focused arrangements for viewing, signing up and both tenancy management and property management courtesy calls for new tenants.

Managing performance well

- **Improvement planning** The 2010 inspection fed a number of areas of weakness into our improvement planning in addition to which we also added the corporate desire to see top quartile performance, low cost high quality services supported by open and honest decision making. This led to the setting up of the Housing Commission with tenants being part of the body that oversees improvement delivery. It also gave rise to the commitment to a large scale consultation to take place in 2011 on the Best Deal – a package of fundable services, service standards and investment. In 2010 we were able to engage with the TSA and tenants around the development of our annual report and initial service standards offer to tenants. That work has now fed into the new Plan for Improvement. Our status survey has also highlighted the issues that are of most concern to tenants the top three being – repairs; quality of home; keeping tenants informed. Taken together these factors have shaped our priorities for the new plan in which we will:
 - Complete the system review of repairs and implement improvements
 - Work with tenants to develop a high quality 30 year programme of investment
 - Establish effective governance and scrutiny
 - Creatively expand the opportunities for effective engagement with a much broader range of tenants
 - Get the basics working better – with improved approaches to ASB and income management
 - Deliver increased VFM and customer service through completing the procurement of new IT and maintenance services.
- **Plans that are deliverable** We are currently carrying out a resource planning exercise around the Plan for Improvement. We anticipate that the plan will be within the financial capacity of the service, however we also anticipate that in the early stages of the plan there are a number of aims that will require considerable staff resource and as a result some target dates may need to be rescheduled to a later date to achieve a more level and sustainable staff profile. We have developed a comprehensive basket of indicators that show in a clear and consistent form how we have been performing and the targets that have been set for the future.
- **Supporting continuous improvement** Improvement is owned by the Housing Commission which includes 5 councillors, two tenants, the CEOs of Wiltshire Council, Aster and Poole Housing Partnership, senior managers. The Commission sends reports to both the tenants' panel and the council's scrutiny. Week to week delivery of the plan is managed by a steering group of key corporate managers and the landlord service senior management team. There are several officers within the housing service who have a dedicated project role working on specific aspects of the plan. There is also a tenants Improvement steering group. This year a project manager will be engaged to take on the day to day responsibility for seeing the plan delivered and developed.
 - In this second year of the improvement process we plan to develop the strategic management capacity of both the management team and the councillors and tenants. We will move to a business improvement model that will facilitate the ongoing development of the service.
 - Currently performance reports go to the tenants' panel however in the next few months we will develop a robust mechanism for tenant scrutiny and co regulation that will take on the mantle of overseeing and regulating performance.
 - We will this year develop new governance arrangements that build on the experience of the Commission and will take forward ownership of the strategic management of the service
 - The Plan for Improvement also provides for a major restructure of the service. Through restructure, new governance, scrutiny and the introduction of an effective business plan model, business improvement will become embedded in a more permanent environment.
 - The Councils leadership at councillor and senior officer level has a great understanding of the journey the service is on and has from the outset been determined to provide every support to a project that will lead to an excellent service that meets tenants' expectations.

The past year has brought the service into much closer contact with other landlords that are high performing in one or more activities. Field trips have showcased many examples of good practice and these are being incorporated into the way we work. We have also established ongoing links

with Wiltshire based housing associations and ALMOs and local authority landlords from Cornwall to London. It is our intention to continue with the practice of using field trips to develop our own service. With the establishment of the Wiltshire Tenants and Residents Voice, council tenants are now sharing experiences with housing association tenants across Wiltshire and using those contacts on issues such as developing the scrutiny role and identifying common aspirations around allocations policy. This network also offers opportunities to exchange mystery shopping services.

Our capacity to improve

During the past year the team has discovered that significant improvement can be delivered relatively quickly and often within the resources available. However we also know that not everything can be delivered immediately and so as well as delivering improved performance in some areas, in others we have carried out the preparatory work for future improvement.

- We have established profiles of most of our tenants and will use this to create bespoke customer services in the future
- We are commissioning management new housing IT that will facilitate improved customer access, better use of profiling information and more efficient systems for repairs and ASB
- We are commissioning maintenance services and fully expect this to deliver additional VFM
- We have built up the capacity of staff through team wide training and development in areas such E & D also VFM and are using the appraisal system to manage the delivery of the improvement plan

We are able to benefit from strong support in other parts of the council and through strong external links that have been established:

- Corporate procurement work on IT and maintenance
- Corporate IT in managing the IT process
- Adult and children services have strengthened adaptations policies
- Housing associations in Wiltshire have offered strong support from improvement
- Poole Housing Partnership have established strong links and effective support at all levels
- Engagement with the regional ASB advisor
- Strategic Housing, property services, legal and Green Square have worked with the landlord service to very effectively deliver new council homes
- CIH have provided valuable mentoring and financial advice to the service.

Our housing team has the strength, will and ambition to deliver the further improvements needed and is enjoying each success.

We have delivered much improvement over the first year of the improvement plan and there is a strong level of self belief amongst the team that a lot more can be achieved. As we enter the second year we know that there are some of the biggest challenges ahead of us, however we also know that we have in place many of the building blocks to help us achieve those goals. We know we have worked hard and performed well and we are confident that the prospects for delivering the next phase of improvement are excellent.

Section 4 Action plan

Our action plan is based around the 6 TSA standards and is set out at the end of our [New Plan for Improvement](#) .

Information about Wiltshire Council's services can be made available on request in other languages including BSL and formats such as **large print** and audio.

Please contact the council on **0300 456 0100**, by textphone on 01225 712500 or by email on customerservices@wiltshire.gov.uk