

# Housing Management Services

Wakefield and District Housing

The Audit Commission is an independent body responsible for ensuring that public money is spent economically, efficiently and effectively, to achieve high quality local services for the public. Our remit covers around 11,000 bodies in England, which between them spend more than £180 billion of public money each year. Our work covers local government, health, housing, community safety and fire and rescue services.

As an independent watchdog, we provide important information on the quality of public services. As a driving force for improvement in those services, we provide practical recommendations and spread best practice. As an independent auditor, we ensure that public services are good value for money and that public money is properly spent.

### **Copies of this report**

If you require further copies of this report, or a copy in large print, in Braille, on tape, or in a language other than English, please call 0844 798 7070.

© Audit Commission 2007

For further information on the work of the Commission please contact:

Audit Commission, 1st Floor, Millbank Tower, Millbank, London SW1P 4HQ

Tel: 020 7828 1212 Fax: 020 7976 6187 Textphone (minicom): 020 7630 0421

[www.audit-commission.gov.uk](http://www.audit-commission.gov.uk)

# Contents

<b>Housing Association Inspections</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>Summary</b>	<b>5</b>
<b>Scoring the service</b>	<b>7</b>
<b>Recommendations</b>	<b>10</b>
<b>Report</b>	<b>13</b>
Context	13
The locality	13
The association	14
The service	14
<b>How good is the service?</b>	<b>16</b>
What has the service aimed to achieve?	16
Is the service meeting the needs of the local community and users?	16
Access and customer care	16
Diversity	20
Stock investment and asset management	23
Regeneration	31
Housing income management	34
Tenancy and estate management	37
Is the service delivering value for money?	40
How do costs compare?	40
How is value for money managed?	41
<b>What are the prospects for improvement to the service?</b>	<b>44</b>
What is the service track record in delivering improvement?	44
How well does the service manage performance?	46
Does the service have the capacity to improve?	49
<b>Appendix 1 – Performance indicators</b>	<b>52</b>
<b>Appendix 2 – Positive practice</b>	<b>55</b>
Text messaging re repairs appointments	55
In-house occupational therapy	55
Reducing staff absenteeism	55
Funding for increased police presence	55

## Housing Association Inspections

The Audit Commission is an independent body responsible for ensuring that public money is spent economically, efficiently and effectively and delivers high quality local services for the public.

Within the Audit Commission, the Housing Inspectorate inspects and monitors the performance of a number of bodies and services. These include local authority housing departments, local authorities administering Supporting People programmes, arms length management organisations and housing associations. Our key lines of enquiry (KLOEs) set out the main issues which we consider when forming our judgements on the quality of services. The KLOEs can be found on the Audit Commission's website at [www.audit-commission.gov.uk/housing](http://www.audit-commission.gov.uk/housing).

For housing associations our inspection role and remit is set out in sections 41(A) and 41(B) of the Audit Commission Act 1998 (as amended by section 109 of the Local Government Act 2003), and is in line with the Audit Commission's strategic regulation principles. In broad terms, these principles look to minimise the burden of regulation while maximising its impact. To meet these principles this inspection:

- is proportionate to risk and the performance of the association;
- judges the quality of the service for service users and the value for money of the service;
- promotes further improvements in the service; and
- has cost no more than is necessary to safeguard the public interest.

We are committed to working in partnership with other regulators, and the Audit Commission and the Housing Corporation are working together to improve the performance and efficiency of housing associations. Our shared objectives are to ensure that associations provide services for the diverse range of customers in their areas of operation, high standards of customer services and access, and value for money for both customers and the taxpayer.

The Housing Corporation is the statutory body which regulates housing associations to ensure that they are well governed, well managed and financially viable, as set out in its Regulatory Code. Its regulation staff work with housing inspectors to ensure that there is adequate information provided for the inspection and that the inspected body implements recommendations in the inspection report. The overall findings of the inspection are also used to inform the Housing Corporation Assessment (HCA) which determines eligibility for further public investment and may influence the Housing Association's future business prospects.

## Summary

- 1 Wakefield and District Housing (WDH) provides an excellent three-star service that has excellent prospects for improvement.
- 2 Wakefield and its surrounding districts face significant socio-economic challenges in areas of education, employment, health, environment and housing. In just over two years since transfer the association has made outstanding progress towards its vision of creating confident communities.
- 3 The range of housing services have been thoughtfully designed to ensure high quality outcomes for customers, with flexible and interactive access as well as 24-hour support and emergency assistance where needed.
- 4 The needs of vulnerable people are well catered for with strong approaches to dealing with harassment, hate crimes and domestic violence. Some additional provision such as handyman type services and gardening have been developed with the needs of older and more vulnerable people in mind.
- 5 Progress on delivery of major repairs, improving compliance with the Decent Homes requirement is strong with over 8,000 homes improved to the enhanced 'Wakefield Standard'. The national Decent Homes timescale for completion has been extended to 2012 by agreement with tenants and the Housing Corporation. Projections show that all homes will be improved to the enhanced standard three years ahead of the promise made to tenants at transfer.
- 6 A primary concern of tenants at the time of transfer was improving responses to anti-social behaviour. The association has made particularly impressive progress by establishing specialist teams, working with partners and communities, taking firm action when needed and increasing confidence in communities.
- 7 The approach to value for money is strong, with the association's operating costs among the lowest when compared to similar organisations nationally. The association has focused upon areas that improve efficiency particularly in delivery of its major repairs programme and in-house repairs and maintenance provision, but also across many other services including a keen emphasis on the social return on investment linked to regeneration.
- 8 Regeneration of homes, communities and neighbourhoods is a central theme for the association which is clearly evident in all its work. Partners are enthusiastic about the contribution that WDH make with employment and training initiatives such as 'Homebuilder', the Community Leadership Programme and 'Motive8' engaging people in highly successful projects that build community capacity and also provide positive role models.

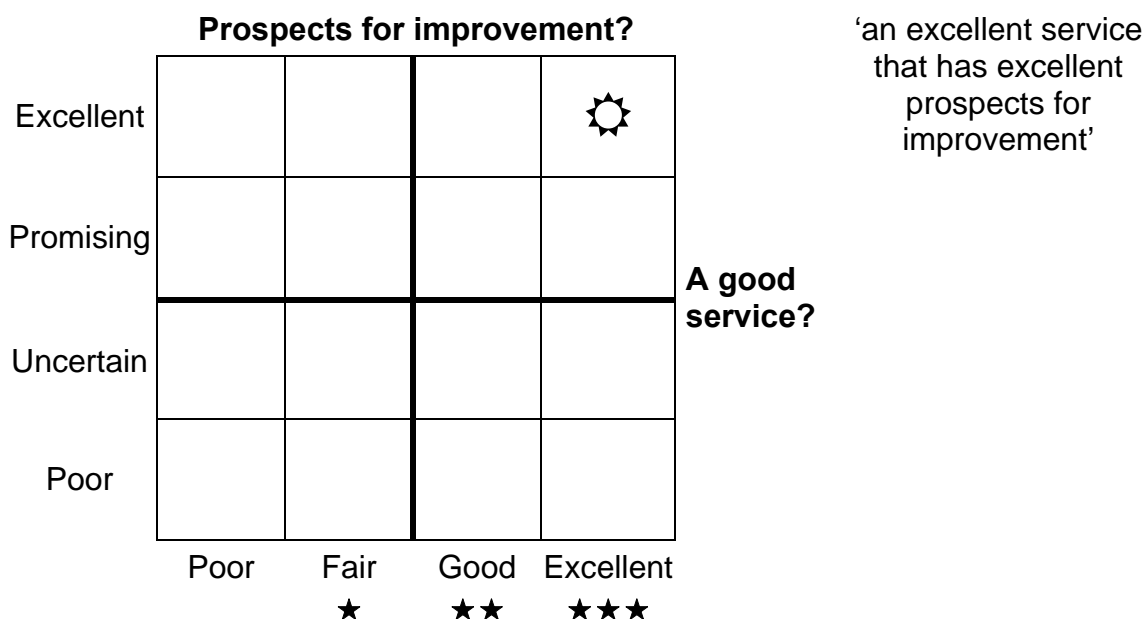
## 6 Housing Management Services | Summary

- 9 Prospects for improvement are excellent. The association has a track record of delivering on the promises made to tenants, resulting in rising customer satisfaction across all areas of service. There is a clear vision for the future with highly effective leadership driving and inspiring improvement. Performance management systems are refined and in the area of external challenge are quite innovative. The capacity of the association to deliver is enhanced by professional and highly motivated staff, effective working with partners and local people and by inward investment that is targeted to deliver upon community priorities.
- 10 Some areas are relatively under-developed, however. Some service standards are not robustly measured; some improvement is recent and has yet to deliver consistent outcomes across all areas including some key performance areas such as responsive repairs. Staff and member representation does not reflect the levels of diversity in the communities served.

## Scoring the service

- 11 We have assessed Wakefield and District Housing as providing an 'excellent', three-star service that has excellent prospects for improvement. Our judgements are based on the evidence obtained during the inspection and are outlined below.

**Figure 1 Scoring chart<sup>1</sup>**



Source: Audit Commission

- 12 We found the service to be excellent because it has a range of strengths including:
- high standards are delivered for customers. The OneCALL customer centre is highly responsive providing access to all services including outside normal working hours. Tailored services such as repair with care and gardening have been developed to meet the needs of older or more vulnerable people;
  - services are highly convenient for customers, with evening and weekend appointments available, high standard service access points, some interactive services and competent and professional staff;
  - customers views are effectively gathered and have been thoughtfully used to improve services;
  - there is a strong strategic framework to deliver equality and diversity supported by monitored action plans;

<sup>1</sup> The scoring chart displays performance in two dimensions. The horizontal axis shows how good the service or function is now, on a scale ranging from no stars for a service that is poor (at the left-hand end) to three stars for an excellent service (right-hand end). The vertical axis shows the improvement prospects of the service, also on a four-point scale.

## 8 Housing Management Services | Scoring the service

- responses to harassment, hate crimes and domestic violence are well coordinated with partners, and provide effective assistance;
- major repairs are transforming homes and neighbourhoods with significant improvement in levels of decency;
- substantial improvements in value for money have been made through supply chain management and partnering arrangements resulting in reduction in costs and improved customer satisfaction;
- gas servicing is efficient and effective with no services outstanding for more than six months;
- the adaptations service is enhanced by in-house Occupational Therapists who undertake all assessments. Budgets are appropriate to current needs;
- area regeneration initiatives are comprehensive, designed around a clear strategy that aligns with the Local Area Agreement, and are delivering evident benefits for communities and neighbourhoods;
- the benefits of regeneration initiatives are being assessed to ensure that social capital is maximised and to gather lessons from which to improve;
- responses to anti-social behaviour are well-developed, prioritising community concerns and resourced through the provision of specialist teams that include uniformed Police and Police Community Support Officers;
- rent collection has improved with over 99 per cent of rent due collected;
- target hardening has effectively reduced repeat crime; and
- operating costs are among the lowest of comparable associations nationally, innovative procurement is realising substantial savings and partnership working is increasing investment for customers.

### 13 However, there are some areas which require improvement. These include:

- some customer charter standards are vague and are not robustly and routinely monitored;
- although available for 70 per cent of customers, a robust profile is still being developed and is not yet systematically used to tailor services;
- some areas of the response repairs service have yet to deliver consistent improvements; completion of repairs is not consistently within targets; controls to limit variations are lacking; and measures to determine the level of response repairs completed in one visit have yet to be implemented beyond a pilot project;
- a lack of targets and appropriate monitoring for each stage of the adaptations process;
- the level of representation among staff and member groups does not reflect diversity in the communities served;

- the scale of existing and potential future mobility needs among tenants has not been researched and used to plan future service provision; and
- collection of some rechargeable debt is below target.

**14** The service has excellent prospects for improvement because:

- customer satisfaction across the range of services has improved significantly since transfer;
- transfer promises and commitments have been prioritised and are being delivered;
- WDH challenges itself to improve using external consultant insights, auditor challenge and benchmarking;
- the vision for the short, medium and longer terms is absolutely clear, consistently evident in plans, strategies and corporate branding. Staff understand the vision and how they contribute to its delivery;
- leadership is strong, maintaining focus and momentum in delivering improvement in services and value for customers and improving capacity and prospects in communities;
- the Board and local management committee members add value through direction and effective scrutiny of actions; and
- partnerships and inward investment have increased resources that are available to achieve the organisation's stated aims.

**15** However, there are some barriers to improvement. These include:

- performance in completing repairs within target timescales does not demonstrate a consistent trend of improvement;
- the repairs and maintenance service has not been subject to comprehensive market testing; and
- some targets are at odds with the organisation's overall thrust of continuous improvement and are lower than achievements in previous years.

## Recommendations

- 16 To rise to the challenge of continuous improvement, organisations need inspection reports that offer practical pointers for improvement. Our recommendations identify the expected benefits for both local people and the organisation. In addition, we identify the approximate costs<sup>2</sup> and indicate the priority we place on each recommendation and key dates for delivering these where they are considered appropriate. In this context, the inspection team recommends that the Association shares the findings of this report with tenants and board members, and addresses all weaknesses identified in the report. Associations forming part of a group structure should share the lessons and findings of the report amongst the wider group. The inspection team makes the following recommendations.

### ***Recommendation***

*R1 Strengthen the focus on customers by:*

- thoroughly reviewing monitoring arrangements for the Customer Charter standards and putting in place comprehensive and routine reporting to accountable groups; and*
- setting and monitoring challenging targets that result in an improved diversity of staff and member groups.*

The expected benefits of this recommendation are:

- improved focus on delivery of agreed standards for customers;
- improved accountability and challenge;
- more complete information for customers on the delivery of agreed standards; and
- improved perceptions among all sections of the community that WDH is meeting their needs.

The implementation of this recommendation will have high impact with low costs. This should be implemented within six months of the publication of this report.

---

<sup>2</sup> Low cost is defined as less than 1 per cent of the annual service cost, medium cost is between 1 and 5 per cent and high cost is over 5 per cent.

**Recommendation**

*R2 Improve asset management by:*

- *introducing measures that ensure response repairs are consistently completed within target timescales;*
- *introducing appropriate arrangements that both promote the completion of repairs at the first visit and appropriately control the level of response repairs variations;*
- *introducing targets and monitoring for each stage of the adaptations process;*
- *researching and analysing existing and likely future needs for adaptations and using this to inform resource and service planning in the medium term; and*
- *undertaking a full and transparent market test of the repairs and maintenance service.*

The expected benefits of this recommendation are:

- prompt repairs completed within stated timescales;
- improved cost control;
- reduced timescales to install adaptations;
- improved knowledge of, and planning for, mobility and access needs; and
- repairs and maintenance services that deliver value for money and that are competitively procured.

The implementation of this recommendation will have high impact with medium costs. With the exception of the requirement to market test the service which should be undertaken no later than 2010 this should be implemented within nine months of the publication of this inspection report.

**Recommendation**

*R3 Improve value for money by:*

- *developing knowledge of activity based costs and using this to inform service reviews and to refine ways of working; and*
- *routinely reviewing service costs alongside service performance.*

The expected benefits of this recommendation are:

- improved knowledge of the costs of service provision in key areas;
- increased economy, efficiency and effectiveness in key areas of service; and
- service reviews that deliver better outcomes for tenants.

The implementation of this recommendation will have high impact with medium costs. This should be implemented within nine months of the publication of this inspection report.

**Recommendation**

*R4 Improve performance management by:*

- *ensuring that SMART3 targets are used in all action plans; and*
- *developing a range of measures to assess the impact of local initiatives and sustainability of estates.*

The expected benefits of this recommendation are:

- improved certainty that improvement actions will be delivered; and
- increased focus upon improved outcomes for neighbourhoods and communities.

The implementation of this recommendation will have high impact with low costs. This should be implemented within six months of the publication of this report.

- 17 We would like to thank the staff of Wakefield and District Housing who made us welcome and who met our requests efficiently and courteously.

Dates of inspection: 3 to 17 September 2007

**Regional contact details**

Audit Commission

Kernel House

Killingbeck Drive

Killingbeck

Leeds, LS14 6UF

Telephone: 0113 251 7130

Fax: 0113 251 7131

[www.audit-commission.gov.uk](http://www.audit-commission.gov.uk)

---

<sup>3</sup> SMART- Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Realistic and Time-bound

# Report

## Context

### The locality

- 18 Wakefield is one of five metropolitan districts in West Yorkshire. Covering approximately 500 square miles and made up of the city of Wakefield plus a number of smaller towns, it has a population of 321,000. Just under one in four of all properties in the district are owned by Wakefield and District Housing (WDH).
- 19 The district is diverse, including prosperous areas that border with Leeds, a relatively deprived south eastern area and a rural zone. It ranks as the 54th most deprived local authority out of 354<sup>4</sup> in the index of deprivation.
- 20 Population projections predict increases in line with national averages, with the over-65 age group seeing the largest increases by 2010, which will by then account for 22 per cent of the population. The 2001 Census identified a black and minority ethnic community of 3.3 per cent but this masks some high concentrations in particular wards.
- 21 Unemployment is around the national average at 4.2 per cent, however, there are five super output areas where it is significantly higher, especially among young people. Wakefield is the most deprived employment area out of 354<sup>5</sup> areas and the 11th most deprived income area in England, with 14.4 per cent of the population of working age involuntarily excluded from paid work. As a district, Wakefield has a lower percentage of its residents describing their health as 'good' when compared to regional and national averages.
- 22 The Local Area Agreement (LAA) identifies six strategic strands for improving the lives of people living within the district. These are:
  - skills and enterprise;
  - healthier communities;
  - safer and stronger communities;
  - children, young people and their families;
  - older people; and
  - voluntary and community sector.

---

<sup>4</sup> English Indices of Deprivation (2004).

## The association

- 23 Wakefield and District Housing (WDH) is a registered charity and company limited by guarantee, formed to receive a whole stock transfer of almost 32,000 homes from Wakefield Metropolitan District Council.
- 24 At the time of the transfer the district council was rated 'fair' in the Continuous Performance Assessment (CPA) assessment and in a repairs and maintenance inspection had improved from its one-star, unlikely to improve assessment of 2001 to two stars with promising prospects.
- 25 The principal drivers for the transfer, which took place in March 2005, were to enable funding of stock investment to achieve the Decent Homes Standard and to further the regeneration of Wakefield. At transfer, 62 per cent of the stock was non-decent. Plans identify investment of over £700 million in the first ten years of operation including an initial new-build programme of £10 million.
- 26 The association currently owns and manages 31,500 homes located throughout the district. These are divided into five management areas based on market towns and surrounding communities. The majority (93 per cent) of the stock is for general needs and the association owns 53 sheltered housing schemes. Over three quarters is comprised of houses and bungalows. There are 20 blocks of high rise flats which had already been refurbished by the date of the transfer.

## The service

- 27 WDH is the largest rented housing provider in the Wakefield district, housing 100,000 people, 19 per cent of the population.
- 28 WDH employs over 1,300 people in four directorates:
  - Operations - including technical services, housing management and customer contact;
  - Regeneration - including the capital programme and community regeneration;
  - Resources - including planning and performance, ICT and finance; and
  - Organisational development - including human resources and corporate services.
- 29 The OneCALL centre is the association's 24-hour, seven days a week contact centre, taking over 14,000 incoming calls a month relating to repairs, anti-social behaviour, rents and general enquires. A large direct labour organisation was inherited at transfer employing over 550 staff and providing all repairs and maintenance services for WDH tenants, as well as contributing as an in-house major repairs provider.
- 30 WDH has a presence in, and representation from, local communities through twelve local offices (service access points), and five Local Management Committees (LMCs). LMCs have equal representation from councillors, tenants and independent members.

**31** Budgets in 2007/08 are:

- housing management, excluding employee costs; £25.6 million;
- capital programme; £87.7million;
- responsive repairs; £16 million;
- servicing and planned works; £12.5 million; and
- void works; £4.65 million.

## How good is the service?

### What has the service aimed to achieve?

- 32 WDH has developed its vision for the future expressed in 'Vision 2020', which sets clear short, medium and longer term objectives. These are:
- by 2010, to have created neighbourhoods where people wish to live, with all homes being decent;
  - by 2015, to offer real choice and real opportunity; and
  - by 2020, for WDH as a social enterprise to have raised the bar and made significant social impacts.
- 33 The vision underpins the Community Strategy and Local Area Agreement targets and was endorsed by the Local Strategic Partnership which is attended by the association's chief executive.
- 34 The vision is an integral part of the association's corporate planning framework and is delivered through a five-year 'strategic planning staircase' which sets out annual corporate priorities.
- 35 The regeneration of the area and communities is central to the association's aims. Local visions have been tailored and agreed by consultation with local communities in each of the five management areas. The local visions help to meet the first corporate objective of creating neighbourhoods where people want to live and also commence a shift in existing management approaches making them more regeneration focused.

### Is the service meeting the needs of the local community and users?

#### Access and customer care

- 36 Strengths significantly outweigh weaknesses. The service is geared to improving access and meeting customers' expectations. Strong customer focus is evident throughout the organisation. The development of an access to services strategy and action plan helps to shape and coordinate improvements. Access to services has been re-designed using customers' views, and their effective input, in a range of groups. Performance reports improve accountability and reveal encouraging improvement in customer satisfaction. A customer charter has been devised with customers, but some standards are vague and others are not yet monitored. Although information technology (IT) is generally well used to support service delivery, in some areas better use could be made of its reporting capabilities.

- 37 WDH ensures that it is well informed of the needs of customers and local communities, and uses this to design its services accordingly. Many mechanisms are used to gather customers' views, including the annual tenants' survey, tenant challenge days, service review groups, meet the chief executive forums, fun and feedback events, mystery shopping, virtual forums and learning from complaints and compliments. These views have been incorporated into an 'Access to Services Strategy' and associated action plan. The plan extends to 2010 but several actions are already delivering improvements such as the initiative to provide interactive kiosks in service access points. The service is designed to improve the experience of customers.
- 38 A strong corporate approach to customer care is embedded throughout the organisation. WDH is accredited with the Charter Mark for quality customer services, and 'putting the customer first' is one of four strategic objectives. Staff are trained to deal appropriately with customers and to handle a wide range of enquiries to a conclusion at first contact. Integrated IT modules ensure staff provide up to date advice to customers. This ensures services are customer focused.
- 39 A revised, comprehensive Customer Charter was agreed with tenants and contains standards for all services. Standards are generally challenging and have measurable targets. Quarterly newsletters and an annual report give good information and feedback about service developments, tenant participation initiatives and performance. Most published information is agreed with tenants through an editorial panel. Information is available in different formats. This ensures tenants understand the level of service they should receive.
- 40 There is a wide range of ways for customers to access services. This includes area offices known as service access points (SAPs), telephone and website contact. Out-of-hours services are very strong, provided through the 24/7 Care Link service which is the association's emergency call and care line. Reception facilities are welcoming, well managed, and have facilities for visitors with different needs, including minicom and audio loops. Private interview rooms are available. Opening hours, including out-of-hours contacts, are clearly displayed and publicised. Customers' access needs and preferences are well catered for.
- 41 The website provides a wide range of helpful information and is easy to navigate. A website focus group involves customers in improving how advice and information is provided and engages their views on additional online services. Information including recent survey results and performance data is accessible in different formats. Customers can apply and bid for housing, pay rent and report repairs online. This improves access to services.
- 42 Published information is comprehensive, clear and written in plain language. A strong corporate style ensures information is consistent and easy to read. Every SAP has a dedicated communication champion to ensure the information displayed is up to date and of the required standard.

- 43 Good use is made of call handling information. Data on lost or abandoned calls was used alongside a management information tool to review the number of staff working in OneCALL, the association's customer contact centre. Staff are now deployed more flexibly, providing additional part-time cover at the busiest times. The number of abandoned and deflected calls - those calls ended when there are already a number of callers queuing - has reduced to fewer than ten per cent (four per cent abandoned) in line with target. Customers can rely on their calls being answered.
- 44 Regular performance reports about access to services are presented to the executive team, local management committees, Board and tenants. Tenants are involved in mystery shopping with results used to improve services, such as providing better feedback to tenants, particularly about progress with anti-social behaviour complaints. Feedback also led to the provision of three more accessible town centre SAPs. WDH has started to monitor performance in meeting individual service standards with initial reports showing 98 per cent compliance with standards. The organisation is focused on how well services meet the needs of customers.
- 45 Good use is made of the IT system to 'flag' key information about tenants. Systems are integrated and the 'contact management dashboard' gives clear warning flags about asbestos location, outstanding gas service, potentially violent customers, communication needs and other vulnerability issues. Staff are trained to follow-up outstanding issues. They continually gather and update information such as mobile telephone numbers and other contact details. Information is automatically logged on repair orders. This makes services more sensitive and responsive to customers' needs.
- 46 WDH effectively involves customers in managing and improving services. It has a strong strategic approach to engaging residents through an involvement strategy, statement and comprehensive tenant compact, 'Pathways to Involvement'. WDH effectively supports resident involvement through training and support for local groups and the Resident Federation. It invests £432k annually in resident involvement; some £13.86 a year (26p per week), per household. Service Review Groups (SRGs) and widely attended Tenant Challenge Days look at how services can be improved. This ensures services improve to meet customer requirements.
- 47 There are many examples of changes made following feedback from residents. The development of OneCALL responded to how customers wanted to contact WDH. Rent statements and the website were re-designed to reflect customers' preferences. Other changes included responding to out-of-hours emergencies and providing better information on repair receipts. The service is responsive to its customers.
- 48 Satisfaction with opportunities to be involved in decision making is high and improving. Seventy two per cent of tenants were satisfied with opportunities for participation in 2006, increasing from 55 per cent in 2003. There is improving confidence among customers that their views can influence decisions.

- 49 The complaints, comments and compliments policy and procedure is robust. It was reviewed with tenants to enhance the quality of information. This led to improved IT systems which have helped improve reporting, tracking and monitoring of performance. Case management is in real time so that anyone dealing with a customer can give accurate advice. Performance against challenging targets while improving is still below expectations however. Detailed quarterly performance reports are presented to the Executive Management Team (EMT), the Board and tenants through newsletters and on plasma screens in SAPs. This ensures action is taken to learn from feedback and improve services.
- 50 There are some weaknesses with existing telephony systems. Limited performance information is provided for telephone call handling. Performance on average length of call or percentage of calls transferred (not dealt with at first contact) is not routinely measured and reported. When all lines are busy, calls are 'deflected' (ended) if there are already a number of callers queuing. Callers cannot leave a message or be given the option to hold. The telephony contract is due to be re-tendered and a new system will tackle these weaknesses. More detailed performance information would help identify trends in the nature of calls and reasons for transferring calls to help improve services further.
- 51 Some service standards lack clarity. Others are not challenging such as letting people know the success of Homeseach bids 'as soon as possible' and resolving ASB complaints - 'start two days and keep informed'. WDH has responded positively to feedback we provided on site to review the standards to ensure customers know what to expect from all services.
- 52 WDH does not yet routinely monitor and report on performance regarding all standards in the customer charter. Tenant mystery shopping is developing to check performance, but to date only covers the SAPs. Tenant inspectors are currently being trained to carry out other work, such as void inspections. WDH regularly measures performance of specific services through service review groups but there is no overarching summary report that shows how many customer charter standards are being met. This would help ensure any cross service trends and weaknesses are identified and addressed.
- 53 Customer profile information is not yet used automatically to ensure that tenants are contacted by their preferred means of communication. However, only a small percentage of tenants wish to be communicated with by 'non traditional' methods. Analysis of information has not yet led to significant changes in the way services are delivered to meet diverse needs.

## Diversity

- 54 Strengths outweigh weaknesses. WDH has a strong strategic framework through which services for diverse communities are developing. WDH complies with Housing Corporation good practice notes, and plans for implementing the gender and disabilities equalities standards are well advanced. There is a strong response to harassment, racial hatred and domestic violence, supported by well coordinated partnerships with appropriate agencies and statutory bodies in the district. All service access points are compliant with the Disability Discrimination Act and there are well resourced plans to bring all sheltered housing schemes up to the requirement during 2007/08. Some targets are not however challenging, and representation on key bodies and groups is not reflective of the communities served.
- 55 WDH demonstrates a clear commitment to diversity. One of its three core values is to 'be inclusive'. The Board and each local management committee (LMC) has a diversity champion, and a specialist equality and diversity (E&D) manager ensures initiatives are delivered. A wide range of diversity training is provided for staff, Board members, key partners and stakeholders. Awareness training led to 83 per cent of employees in 2007 saying they have a good understanding of equal opportunities compared to 77 per cent in 2006. Staff are able to deal appropriately with customers with diverse needs, and have received appropriate training.
- 56 An equality and diversity framework, supported by detailed strategies and action plans, provides a robust overview of how WDH will achieve its vision for customers and local communities. WDH complies with Housing Corporation regulatory requirements and good practice notes (GPN) four and eight but full compliance with the Commission for Racial Equality (CRE) Code of practice for rented housing is not yet evidenced, as equality impact assessments are still developing. The strategic approach provides a solid basis for providing services that meet a wide range of needs.
- 57 Suitable policies and procedures, agreed with the Diversity Service Review Group, are in place to deal with harassment and racial harassment. The group has already developed a draft disability equality standard and has plans to have a gender equality standard by the required deadline of April 2008. Up-to-date policy and process should ensure better practices.
- 58 Relevant publicity is displayed and all SAPs are designated hate incident reporting centres. Reports show 22 incidents were reported to agencies in 2006/07. A total of 17 'hate' incidents were reported to WDH. All these cases were closely monitored. Tenancy enforcement procedures ensure tenants are aware of their rights and responsibilities and that action will be taken against perpetrators. This ensures customers are clear about the firm stance WDH will take, and also the support available.

- 59 WDH has a firm and supportive approach to dealing with domestic abuse. It works with a range of partners including the safe at home scheme; family services; the primary care trust (PCT); Police and has been instrumental in setting up Wakefield's Multi Agency Risk Assessment Conference (MARAC) that structures support plans for victims. Some 65 domestic violence alarms have been installed and 51 victims supported through MARAC; 63 properties have had improved target hardening under the 'Sanctuary Project'. Safe rooms have been provided in six homes. Support helps victims live safely in their homes, reducing personal risk and potential homelessness.
- 60 A number of services demonstrate flexibility to account for diverse needs. A black and minority ethnic (BME) survey in 2005 identified some overcrowding. This led to a new build scheme providing more large houses. The Homesearch choice based lettings scheme helps applicants with diverse needs to access housing. This has positively resulted in an increase in BME applications to 7.2 per cent, which above the district average. New tenancy sign-up procedures also identify individual needs and housing support for vulnerable people is arranged where appropriate. The association is learning about community needs and adapting services to better meet them.
- 61 WDH recognise the needs of the ageing Wakefield population. The in-house special needs and disabilities unit includes five Occupational Therapists who offer specialist advice on disability and frailty, particularly regarding the major improvement and new-build programmes. WDH deals positively with residents' needs for adaptations and also provides a gardening service and a decorating scheme for 410 vulnerable tenants. In addition to providing sheltered and extra-care solutions the Care-Link service offers visiting services to over 14,500 customers including 1,158 private customers and 115 from other social landlords and agencies. Services are designed well to meet the needs of older and more vulnerable people.
- 62 WDH has taken some positive action to address under-representation. It currently monitors diversity at each stage of the recruitment process. Apprenticeship schemes and local recruitment events help to encourage applicants from minority groups. It works with Remploy to offer nine paid work experience placements to people with learning difficulties. Homebuilder provides training for disadvantaged people in the local community and has helped 137 people into employment. Positively, higher BME applications than reflected in the local population are being received, demonstrating increasing trust in WDH as an employer.
- 63 WDH provides support to help ensure vulnerable tenants are not excluded through choice based lettings. Homesearch employ three staff to help vulnerable applicants. Help is given at three levels. Basic help shows people how to make bids. More help is given to others by identifying suitable properties for applicants to make a bid. The highest level of support, automatic bidding, is used in exceptional cases. Two people have been rehoused from automatic bids and in the year to September 2007, 286 lettings were made to vulnerable people.

- 64 All service access points comply with the requirements of the Disability Discrimination Act (DDA). Only seven sheltered schemes are compliant but there are approved and resourced plans to ensure all others comply within the 2007/08 programme. All schemes need to comply to meet mandatory requirements and ensure easy access to buildings.
- 65 Publications are available in a range of formats. This includes seven community languages, audio tape and Braille. The website can also show information in other languages and in large font. This means that people who do not use English as their first language have immediate access to key information.
- 66 WDH regularly monitors investment contractor compliance with equality and diversity requirements. The equality and diversity manager meets contractors regularly to review performance. A recent contractor conference focused on equality and diversity to ensure diverse needs are recognised and catered for during improvement work.
- 67 WDH works effectively with community partners to improve services for people with diverse needs. Close working with groups ensures that young people are now contacted, and involved, in more suitable ways. Joint work has helped people access jobs through mentoring and community leadership schemes. WDH is now installing door entry equipment with video screens to ensure residents with hearing impairment are not disadvantaged. This helps people integrate within the community.
- 68 WDH increasingly works with hard-to-reach groups but recognises that more needs to be done to ensure that the needs of a diverse community are identified and catered for. Positive work with a local Polish delicatessen helped to reach newer migrant groups and BME surgeries have been targeted at Asian communities. Work with single parents and young people is developing. Contact has been made with the gypsy liaison officer but this is at an early stage. Although work has still to be embedded to deliver significant outcomes for some minority groups, there is improving contact leading to better understanding and participation.
- 69 WDH is not fully representative of the local community. The Board, local management committees (LMCs), tenant groups and staff composition do not reflect the local population. For example, only 1.54 per cent of staff are from BME communities and 1.54 per cent are disabled. Less than 1 per cent of WDH's direct labour organisation are from BME groups, significantly lower than the key investment partners. WDH may not be perceived by some to be fully inclusive.
- 70 Some diversity targets were not challenging at the time of inspection. For example targets set for staff with a disability, women in senior management and tenants from BME communities were two per cent, 40 per cent and 1.7 per cent respectively. Without fair representation it is harder for WDH to show its commitment to the wider community. WDH has positively responded to this and developed an action plan to achieve more challenging targets.

- 71 Some local community groups are not fully aware of the work WDH does to help vulnerable people access services. Gaps include helping vulnerable people access housing through the Homesearch system. There is also a lack of understanding about the impact and effectiveness of work to address anti-social behaviour. Good understanding helps to ensure that groups can best advise people with diverse needs.
- 72 Work producing equality impact needs assessments (EIAs) is developing but has not yet led to changes. A programme to complete EIAs has produced two examining human resources and stock investment which are being tested before completing all EIAs by June 2008. Implementation of EIAs is needed to deliver real change for customers in response to identified need.

## **Stock investment and asset management**

### **Capital improvement, planned and cyclical maintenance, major repair works**

- 73 Strengths significantly outweigh weaknesses. The asset strategy is well informed and resourced over the medium term. The association's major works programme is transforming homes and neighbourhoods, enhanced by comprehensive customer consultation and is being delivered to budget and ahead of time. There is an appropriate balance between planned and responsive repairs with planned work adjusted in response to repairs failures. Satisfaction with the programme is high. Knowledge about the location of asbestos in properties is thorough.
- 74 The asset management strategy is detailed, combining stock and market assessments with social and economic indicators. Stock condition information informs a sustainability matrix with investment properly resourced in the association's 30-year business plan. Until 'master planning' is complete across all areas of operation the asset management strategy cannot be specific over the medium term, hence it is currently updated annually. The strategy explains the organisation's commitments to property, places and people and enables appropriate financial and business planning.
- 75 Major works programmes have been thoughtfully developed. Up to date stock condition information has informed a 'traffic lights' evaluation of needs and local sustainability. A strategic partnership delivery model is in place to ensure close control of the programme. This includes Estate Scheme Panels, Area Partnerships and Local Management Committees (x5), a Strategic Partnership, and separate Core Group, all of which are overseen by the main Board of Management. The extent and timing of major programmes was agreed by the Local Management Committees (LMCs) who receive ongoing reports on progress and satisfaction. Tenants have been involved at every level ranging from contractor selection to component choices and there is appropriate control of and accountability for the programme.

- 76 Consultation with tenants has fundamentally influenced the major repairs programme. The transfer promise made to tenants was to achieve decent homes compliance by 2010 and to improve properties to an enhanced 'Wakefield Standard' by 2015. Consultation feedback from tenants has indicated that they would prefer to have all work undertaken to their homes in one programme as opposed to a series of improvements, firstly to comply with the decent homes standard and later to attain the Wakefield Standard. The programme has therefore been accelerated and, with the consent of the Housing Corporation, the targets for achieving both standards has been agreed as 2012, three years ahead of the original promise. WDH is considering the wider needs of its customers in addition to compliance with national standards, as a result there will be fewer disturbances for tenants and they will benefit from high standards of refurbishment.
- 77 The delivery of major repairs works is centred on good communication and consultation. Prior to works commencing 'choice events' and exhibitions are held where tenants and residents can meet contractors and discuss their individual needs and preferences. Dedicated liaison officers from the strategic partners work alongside WDH staff to provide effective contacts for those affected. Tenants and residents needs are well addressed.
- 78 A 30 point customer care standard for major repairs work has been introduced following consultation with tenants whose homes had been refurbished. The achievement of the standard is monitored closely and results discussed at weekly meetings with contractors. Following completion a tenant post scheme evaluation panel is held to consider improvements that can be made. Improvements to date include the introduction of a vulnerable persons' decoration scheme and a 'here to help' team that provides practical assistance such as packing or taking down or rehung curtains. Overall satisfaction with the improvement programme has increased from 74 per cent on the first schemes to over 94 per cent 18 months later. Customers' needs are prioritised and high standards are emphasised.
- 79 All customer facing staff are well informed about major programmes of work. OneCALL and direct operatives receive regular briefings reinforced at team meetings and updated on the intranet to keep them informed about the order of improvement works. This assists staff to respond to customers' queries promptly and accurately.
- 80 Cyclical maintenance programmes are in place and are effectively delivered. The scope of cyclical maintenance is narrow because many elements are carried out through the major works programme. Cyclical maintenance is focused on external painting, some fencing and interim replacements. The association has programmes for the servicing of adaptations, lifts, door entry and water storage systems. Items that require planned replacements are identified at team and tenant focus group meetings enabling the planned programmes to be updated accordingly and to respond to failures. Routine maintenance is thorough.

- 81 WDH effectively manages the balance between planned and responsive repairs. In September 2007, 63 per cent of revenue work was planned and 37 per cent responsive. There are effective performance management arrangements in place at team levels supplemented by routine monthly budget management challenge. The improving emphasis on planned work reflects improving value and a reduction in disruption and inconvenience for tenants.
- 82 Arrangements for assessing the location of asbestos in properties are detailed, and both tenants and contractors are well informed of hazards. Information has recently been collated into one system where previously it was held in several databases. Approximately a third of all properties have been surveyed with the intention to complete 100 per cent surveys in advance of major works and when properties become void. Some cloning of information by property types may be a more cost effective way to proceed however. Asbestos risks are assessed and appropriately managed.
- 83 Elements of planned and cyclical maintenance have not been procured in line with the association's procurement policy. Currently, the in-house team do the majority of painting works with no painting work tendered competitively. It is intended to use strategic partners to undertake some painting work in the future although plans are not advanced. The association cannot show that it has fully explored the market to examine whether it has secured the greatest efficiency for these contracts.

#### **Responsive repairs**

- 84 There is a balance of strengths and weaknesses in this area. The service is tailored to the needs of customers with good information provided and flexible appointments offered, including where necessary during evenings and weekends. The number of appointments made and kept is high and a developing practice of texting customers in advance of repairs visits improves customer focus and reduces abortive calls. There are positive signs that value is being improved with more work being undertaken, substantial savings in component costs and increasing customer satisfaction. However, performance against target timescales is inconsistent, controls to limit variations to work orders need to be strengthened and measures of jobs completed at the first visit are not reliable.
- 85 Repairs are carried out effectively by the in-house repairs team. Repairs staff are empowered to work flexibly in response to customer needs. Most (67 per cent) technical services staff are multi-skilled, reducing the need for multiple visits for a single job and increasing the likelihood of two jobs for separate trades being done on one appointment. Pre and post inspections are reasonably undertaken. This contributes to high levels of customer satisfaction.

- 86 The service is largely available when customers want it. Appointments are offered at the first point of contact. Morning or afternoon appointments are offered as well as recently introduced evening appointments. The take-up of evening appointments has been very low however. The majority of appointments made are kept (98 per cent in 2006/07) and customers can rely upon promises of appointments being honoured. A recent enhancement has introduced text messaging customers a day in advance of their repair appointment. This is a customer focused approach that is reflected in high levels of customer satisfaction.
- 87 A high quality repairs handbook is provided to all tenants that clearly sets out both the landlord's and tenant's repairing obligations. The handbook includes diagnostic diagrams which are also used by call centre staff. This helps repairs to be accurately ordered and increases the likelihood of repairs being completed 'right first time'.
- 88 The proportion of repairs carried out on an emergency or urgent basis is broadly in line with good practice. At the time of inspection, proportions of emergency, urgent and routine repairs were 15, 20 and 65 per cent respectively. A slight increase in emergency work is due to recent and severe local flooding. The association monitors this performance on a monthly basis and this helps ensure the resources of its in-house team are used effectively.
- 89 WDH is sensitive to the needs of older and vulnerable tenants. For example, emergency repairs can be carried out within four hours where appropriate. Recent service additions are the 'care with repair' scheme, essentially a handyman type scheme, and the vulnerable tenants decorating service. Both are proving very successful. Customers benefit from assistance and services that are well designed to meet their needs.
- 90 There have been some attempts to improve the value for money of the in-house repairs team. WDH use the National Housing Federation schedule of rates which has been benchmarked for competitiveness. Since transfer the productivity of the team has improved with turnover increasing from £16 to £21 million while also improving the range of services available for customers. Efficiency targets are set out in the service's business plan with annual targets met or exceeded and repair budgets for day to day repairs reduced by £2 million. Through component and supply chain management it is estimated that savings in the region of 20 per cent have been realised. It is disappointing that a full market test of the service is only planned for 2009/10 which is some five years after transfer. The repair and maintenance service is improving value for customers and this is reflected in improving customer satisfaction.
- 91 Customer satisfaction is high. The responsive repair service has reacted well to customer feedback. Customer satisfaction over the year to March 2007 as measured by response repairs satisfaction slips was 91.4 per cent against a target of 90 per cent. The service has responded well to the needs of customers.

- 92 Salary structures have been revised to encourage high standards of performance. Bonus structures have been renegotiated and direct operatives are now salaried with incentives linked to 13-week reviews of performance that include a measure of customer satisfaction with work carried out. This structure incentivises a focus on customers.
- 93 Response repairs performance is weak. As shown below in 2005/06, performance in repair categories A, B and C compared unfavourably with other similar organisations. At the end of 2006/07, performance shows overall improvement in completing urgent and routine repairs (categories B and C) but a worsening of performance in completing emergency repairs (category A). Although performance is generally improving, some tenants will experience longer waits for completion of repairs than they should reasonably expect.

**Table 1 Repair performance (% repairs completed on time)**

Period Category	2005/06	2006/07 (March 2007)	Quartile position compared with others nationally (2005/06)
(A) Emergency	97.1%	91%	2
(B) Urgent	85.1%	92%	4
(C) Routine	85.1%	97%	4

*Source: Housing Corporation Performance Indicators/WDH performance reports*

- 94 The level of cost variations to response repairs orders is quite high. At the time of inspection they accounted for approximately 11 per cent of all repairs by volume. There is a clear intention to empower staff to deliver customer focused services, to avoid delays and return journeys where small scale additional works are required. Controls in this area are however limited, and although it is understood that no response repair should vary by more than one hour, there is no stated guidance to this effect.
- 95 WDH does not know how many jobs are completed in one visit. Although a pilot is underway in one area to establish this, no accurate data is currently kept for all repairs. This is a case of information systems lagging behind practice as tenants that we spoke to commented positively about the ability of operatives to complete work required in one visit. Nonetheless, it is an important indicator of the effectiveness of the repairs service that is currently missing.

### **Empty home (void) repairs**

- 96 Strengths outweigh weaknesses. The void standard is high, has been agreed with customers, and adherence to it is consistent. Processes have been improved ensuring that void standards are the same as refurbished standards. Improvements also in decorations allowance provision have targeted benefits for customers. The performance in re-letting homes compares unfavourably with other providers and the average cost of void repairs appears high.
- 97 The standard of properties available to let is high. WDH has adopted a stretching standard, the 'Wakefield Lettings Standard' for ready-to-let properties in conjunction with customers. Items that need replacing are to the standard fitted in the major works programme. Customers' satisfaction with the standard of property is 96 per cent. The in-house team is clear on the standard to be achieved and customers' needs are met.
- 98 Decorations for voids properties are thoughtfully provided. A partnership with a major paints and decorations manufacturer providing a range of wallpapers, paint and tools is in place. Customers are provided with vouchers which allow them to save up to 40 per cent on retail prices and waiting times for provision of allowances have been reduced from five weeks to nil. This approach brings immediate benefits for tenants.
- 99 Voids management performance is variable. At March 2007 it took 44 days on average to re-let properties. Some increase in re-let times occurred as the association introduced choice based lettings from 1 February 2007. The cumulative re-let time for the year to March 2007 was 33 days. The average cost of void repairs is high at £2,000 per property. However, additional costs are incurred by meeting the Wakefield Lettings Standard, making comparisons with regional benchmarks difficult. This standard was agreed with tenants. WDH recognise that further improvement is needed. An action plan is in place, but has yet to realise sustained improvement in performance.
- 100 Some void practices are inefficient. For example, all void properties are both pre and post inspected by technical staff. Given that there is a clear letting standard which is well understood; that accompanied viewings take place and that new tenant satisfaction is surveyed, the need for 100 per cent post inspections is questionable. This builds in additional time to re-let properties and incurs some unnecessary costs.

### **Gas servicing**

- 101 Strengths significantly outweigh weaknesses. Gas servicing practices are thorough with few properties where servicing is outstanding. WDH ensures that service arrangements are convenient for tenants with options for evening or Saturday morning appointments. Prompt and appropriate action is taken where there are access difficulties.

- 102** Gas servicing is well organised, ensuring that landlord's responsibilities are met. WDH has an in-house team who undertake all gas servicing work. The team work on a 49-week planning cycle so that appointments are made in advance of expiry of the current certificate. At the time of inspection only eight homes were overdue by three to six months with none overdue for more than six months. In all overdue cases firm action is taken in-line with the procedure. Results show that tenants' safety is prioritised.
- 103** The gas service has been inspected by CORGI who found all systems satisfactory. Several practices were highlighted for possible improvement and these were incorporated into a gas safety service review. Improvements have been made to written procedures and no access practices. These improvements have contributed to improved performance in completing gas servicing.
- 104** Gas servicing for new tenancies is routinely carried out. Initial checks are undertaken during the void period and the gas supplies capped. When customers take up their tenancy they are required to contact the gas team to have their supply turned on and appliances serviced. Follow up letters are sent to those who do not contact but no risk exists during this initial period as the supply is capped. Tenants' safety is ensured.
- 105** WDH compares its arrangements for gas servicing with other organisations and uses this to improve its service. Good practice comparisons have been made with Kirklees Council, with strategic partners and with British Gas. Positive changes have resulted including utilising the new IT system to include an outstanding service flag so that at any contact point staff can remind tenants of the need to have their service completed. Such practices increase the likelihood of services being successfully completed within planned cycles.
- 106** Quality assurance is robust. Processes are in accordance with CORGI advice. Five percent of all gas servicing work is subject to a full strip down and retest to ensure that high standards are maintained. WDH was the first Registered Social Landlord (RSL) in the UK to attain CCL (Corgi Certification Limited) status having already become certified with the CORGI scheme for registered gas installers. The certification recognises the robust approach that WDH has to ensuring gas safety.
- 107** The in-house gas servicing function has not been market tested. Although the service review calculated servicing costs and compared these with competitors, a full market test has not been undertaken. The whole repairs and maintenance function including gas servicing is scheduled for market testing in 2009/10 but this will be five years after transfer and although efficiencies and improvements have been made during this time, further savings and enhancements may be possible.
- 108** Incentives have not been introduced to encourage a prompt response to requests for access. At present 77.7 per cent of customers give access for servicing at the first attempt but there is still the need to have two staff dedicated to working on properties where access is problematic. It is not known what level of improvement and increased value might be achieved by having an incentive scheme.

## Adaptations

- 109 Strengths outweigh weaknesses. WDH inherited a large backlog of outstanding adaptation requests from the Council, which it has cleared. In addition to meeting direct requests, tenants' needs for adaptations are gathered at the survey stage of improvement works and adaptations provided as necessary. An in-house occupational therapist team provides professional and prompt assessments. Budgets are sufficient to meet known needs, however, there has been no work undertaken to predict future needs and to align resources. Although tenant satisfaction is high, some improvement in value may be possible through competitive tendering of the service. Targets for each stage of the process are not in place and those that have been set have not been achieved.
- 110 The adaptations service is appropriately resourced and well coordinated with major repairs work. The budget for 2007/08 has been increased from £2.2 million to £3.5 million. This reflects a protocol with the local authority that obliges WDH to undertake all work to a value of £25,000. Additionally, many bathroom adaptations are carried out at the same time as major works when tenants' needs are proactively assessed. Procuring adaptations through the major repairs partners brings cost efficiencies and reduces disruption for tenants. This is a sound approach that ensures that both outstanding requests and future needs are met.
- 111 The previously failing service has been improved and now deals with adaptation requests effectively. All adaptations were completed in the last financial year including a considerable backlog of around 480 requests. At present there is no waiting list and expenditure against budget is in-line with year to date forecasts. In a recent satisfaction survey 98.5 per cent per cent of customers responding were satisfied with the service provided. Waiting times are still however, in excess of targets. The adaptations service provides services that customers' value.
- 112 WDH advertises the adaptations service reasonably. A plain English leaflet which describes the service and how applications can be made is available in all offices including council offices and information is also available on the website. The leaflet is currently being revised and improved. Customers will be aware of the adaptations service and be able to access the assistance they require.
- 113 WDH ensures that customers who require aids or adaptations are promptly and professionally assessed. The association employs its own in-house Occupational Therapy Team which assesses all applications. Requests for minor works with an estimated expenditure of under £1,000 can be assessed over the telephone with work orders generated on the same day. Assessments requiring a visit are usually completed within 28 days. This is a responsive assessment service.

- 114** There are limited performance targets, and aids and adaptations work is not completed in line with those that do exist. Headline targets state an intention that no one should wait more than six months for completion of agreed work. Performance in the last year showed that on average those waiting for a major adaptation waited around eight months and minor adaptations took on average two months. Although these figures may be distorted by the inherited backlog, performance in the current year shows little improvement. The further lack of targets for each stage of the process makes it difficult to tell where delays happen and improvement is needed. Tenants face lengthy waiting times to have their adaptations completed.
- 115** WDH cannot demonstrate value for money in undertaking adaptations. All work is undertaken by the in-house team whose service has not been subject to market testing although costs have been benchmarked against others. There may be potential for goods and services to be more imaginatively procured and for value to be improved.
- 116** Future needs for adaptations have not been robustly assessed and used to forward plan. The major repairs programme includes provision of adaptations identified during local consultation events which is positive. However, no work has been done to predict future adaptations requirements by using for example tenant and area information on age and health profiles. This is an area where the primary care trust (PCT) has been encouraged to contribute to the achievement of Local Area Agreement objectives. Given the scale of the work that WDH undertakes and that it owns and manages one in four of all homes in Wakefield, the lack of this type of forward planning is a weakness that can affect appropriate planning of future services.

## Regeneration

- 117** This is an area of significant strength. WDH has established a comprehensive vision to extend the benefits of its investment beyond building refurbishment to lasting and measurable improvements for communities and neighbourhoods across Wakefield. This builds on extensive area knowledge, aligns with the local area agreement priorities and seeks to tackle pressing issues of employment, economic disadvantage, business growth and investment. Two years into the association's programme there is already impressive evidence of improvements in community capacity and confidence.
- 118** Regeneration activity is central to the association's strategy and vision to 2020. Several stakeholders commented that WDH is enthusiastically developing and refining initiatives and building these into 'blueprints' that specify estate priorities for the future. It is clear that WDH seeks longer term gains for communities and that partners reflect certainty about this commitment.
- 119** Regeneration activities are clearly set out and follow a well structured methodology. The key objectives stated in 'Vision 2020' are evident throughout consistent corporate branding and in the culture of staff at all levels. The corporate vision has been refined into five local visions based on the five management areas. It is easy to understand the aims and commitments of WDH to community regeneration in Wakefield.

- 120** WDH has a six stage community regeneration model that is being enacted. The model which is the result of close working with all stakeholders and specialist regeneration partners follows a clear path: developing capacity, producing local visions, drilling down to estate priorities, delivering physical improvements, changing the place and developing role models. This is a comprehensive model that is keeping activity well focused.
- 121** WDH is translating its vision to create confident communities into action. Considerable work has been undertaken to engage all groups in the community, particularly young people in a range of ways including in all secondary schools and in some cases encouraging their involvement in estate improvements such as fencing designs. Over £20,000 has been invested in sponsorship of local clubs and societies. This work is central to creating lasting change that is valued in local communities.
- 122** The development of local 'visions' for areas has emphasised the needs of all parts of the community. The framework for developing them encourages good connections to be made with diverse communities. These will be further drilled down with community contacts to ensure all sections of the community benefit. This approach is equitable and increases the likelihood of initiatives benefiting all local people.
- 123** WDH has challenged itself to assess its own progress and delivery. Vision 2020 'One year on' communicates positive progress made in: Supporting community leadership; promoting high quality design; reinforcing local pride, community engagement and citizenship; introducing community mentors and offering training. This adds substance to the organisation's commitments and encourages confidence in stakeholders that the organisation can deliver change.
- 124** Corporate action planning and delivery is well structured. As well as the new build programme which is at an early stage of its £10 million programme, all action planning is supported by established project management techniques and supportive technology. This is adding certainty of delivery through appropriate financial appraisals, risk assessment and project controls.
- 125** WDH actively seeks community involvement. Regeneration activity is underpinned by tenancy support, engagement activities, financial inclusion measures as well as efforts to promote social enterprise. One example saw the creation of a local tenants and residents association to take a stand against crime, with the association going on to win a national Respect award. WDH's resources have been added to by securing employment and deprived area funding totalling £910,000. Communities are being strengthened by these approaches.

- 126** Engagement of partners is extensive resulting in gains for tenants and wider communities. The range of stakeholders that WDH work with is extensive including Wakefield local authority, all the local high schools, the police, seven of whom are directly funded by the association, the Groundwork Trust, Tenant Participation Advisory Service, major repairs partners and Job Centre Plus. Those that we met were routinely and effectively engaged, all could point to significant improvements, for example challenging targets have been exceeded for bringing trainees who previously had been unemployed for six months or more into permanent employment. Regeneration efforts are engaging partner agencies well and increasing the likelihood of success.
- 127** Partnership working is highly effective reflecting the association's commitments to people, property and places. Initiatives aim at tackling issues that need improving such as crime, employment, positive role models, social and financial inclusion as well as improvement in property standards and availability. For example, all secondary schools in the area have signed up to the Community Leadership Programme. One hundred and eighty young people have benefited so far and over the next five years up to 1,000 will have the opportunity to participate. Informal comments from schools' partners point to improved educational attainment, behaviour and effort.
- 128** Some work is done to ensure that positive effects can be measured. WDH has commissioned research with Sheffield University to assess the impact of regeneration activities on a particular estate with the intention to establish what activities create the greatest benefits. The association is also undertaking a pilot to measure the social return on investment which has estimated that for every £3 invested, £6 will be realised in potential improved outcomes. There is an improving focus on what value is added by regeneration activity.
- 129** Considerable emphasis is focused on improving opportunities and prospects for young people in the Wakefield district aligning plans with the local area agreement. Initiatives including Homebuilder, Junior Homebuilder<sup>6</sup>, the Community Leadership programme and Motive8<sup>7</sup> are developing opportunities and raising community capacity. The Homebuilder project has assisted 85 young and long-term unemployed people through training and brought them into permanent work. One hundred people are undertaking National Vocational Qualifications (NVQs). WDH also works with Wakefield Theatre and Foundation to communicate health and lifestyle messages. Benefits from such activities are by their nature likely to be longer term.
- 130** Initiatives are aimed at communities that include all tenures. Equity release and loan schemes are being developed as well as schemes enabling owner occupiers to benefit from WDH's procurement strength. At present there is low take-up of these opportunities but they demonstrate a willingness to extend regeneration benefits across tenures.

---

<sup>6</sup> Homebuilder and Junior Homebuilder projects are construction skills initiatives delivered through partnerships with major works partners

<sup>7</sup> The Community Leadership Programme and Motive8 are personal development initiatives aimed at younger people in communities and supported by a wide range of local stakeholders

- 131** WDH is developing a range of initiatives to help maximise people's income to contribute to its vision to create confident communities. Tenants will be able to open bank accounts with the Royal Bank of Scotland and talks are progressing with the district council to set up a debt amnesty for homeless people. A draft financial inclusion strategy clearly sets out how WDH will assist. This includes creating a hardship fund and providing money management skills training. A supporting action plan sets out actions to help people get cheaper fuel and undertake support campaigns. It sets out a number of key indicators including numbers on direct debit; level of fuel poverty and satisfaction with debt advice. It does not however, set a target for obtaining additional income from benefits. These continuing developments demonstrate that effective leadership is maintaining focus on key priorities.
- 132** Some aspects of communication with communities about regeneration could be improved. A lot of work is being done to regenerate areas by improving local capacity, improving property and environments. Some of this will be unknown to residents who face difficult circumstances daily and who may grow impatient with the pace of change. WDH keeps residents informed where there are proposals to consider but is less effective at general awareness raising which may lead to some dissatisfaction.

### **Housing income management**

- 133** Strengths outweigh weaknesses. Tenants are provided with a wide range of ways to pay their rent, are well informed about their rent charges and responsibilities and are assisted by sensitive arrangements and helpful staff. WDH staff are well trained and liaise routinely with housing benefit staff. Promotion of cost effective payment methods has been successful and has improved convenience for tenants. Tenants have been consulted on arrears processes, payment and advice options, including the new website targeted to reduce debt through provision of advice. Collection of rent and some additional charges is strong but collection of repair recharges is weak. Welfare and benefits advice although improving is under-developed and collection of outstanding debt is below target. Some service charges are still pooled.
- 134** A range of useful information is available to tenants about rents. Positive information is provided about ways to pay rent, how rents are calculated and benefit options. Tenants receive quarterly rent statements that include advice about housing benefit (HB) and other benefits. Rent increase letters and a rent information card provide a detailed breakdown of service charges. This ensures tenants understand what they are paying for and what assistance is available to them.

- 135** Tenants have a wide range of options for paying rent and staff are available outside traditional working hours. Payment options include telephone (24-hour through OneCALL), Direct Debit, swipecard, cash kiosks, the internet and Payzone. Additionally, staff work flexibly to recover rent arrears. OneCALL staff contact tenants outside normal office hours and other staff work flexibly including evenings or Saturdays. In March 2007 OneCALL made 345 payment agreements and 61 direct debit arrangements. Low level arrears cases have reduced by 10 per cent and targeting persistent arrears cases in a pilot Saturday evening scheme reduced arrears by over £7,000. Making it easy to pay rent encourages payments to be made on time and helps tenants to avoid falling into arrears.
- 136** WDH understands the transaction costs of different rent payment methods and encourages payment by the most cost effective route. There are incentives (prize draw vouchers) for tenants to pay by the lowest cost method; direct debit. The number of tenants paying by direct debit increased by 2,659 to just under 7,000 in 2006/07, with a target of 10,000 paying by direct debit by 2009. WDH has reduced the average transaction cost from 47 pence to 44 pence between 2005 and 2007, reducing overall costs by 11 per cent from 2005/06 to 2006/07. This improves the value for money of rent collection.
- 137** Rent arrears recovery procedures are strong. Rent arrears procedures have recently been reviewed with tenants, and provide more focus on early action with preventative advice given about payment options, housing benefit assessments and other benefit advice for new tenants. Standard letters and required action are automatically prompted by the IT system. System flags alert staff to any known vulnerabilities or access requirements for tenants, so that they can make contact appropriately, in line with tenants' wishes. Audit trails ensure that reasons for over-riding required action are checked through managers' exception reports. Procedures support a consistent approach to arrears management.
- 138** A high proportion of rent due is collected. At the end of 2006/07, 99.5 per cent of rent was collected, improving from 97 per cent in 2005/06. Regular performance meetings with managers ensure there is an appropriate balance between offering advice to help sustain tenancies and firm action to maximise debt recovery. Rent collection is effective and helps to reduce tenant debt.
- 139** Arrears collection performance is strong. Current tenant rent arrears amounted to 3.1 per cent of the rent due at the end of March 2006 which compared well with the top performing associations nationally. Internal performance reports show that collection has remained largely static since 2006. Former tenant arrears (FTA) of £3 million were purchased from the Council and WDH has made steady progress in collection; £467,000 has been collected and the debt currently stands at £2.533m. Given challenging economic circumstances with over 83 per cent of tenants with incomes of less than £10,399, performance collecting arrears and therefore in reducing tenant debt is positive.

- 140 WDH staff are trained to assess tenants' entitlement to housing benefit (HB) and other welfare benefits. Basic advice is given as part of new tenant sign-up procedures. Sign-up procedures also identify debt management problems and other housing support needs. Staff refer tenants to partner agencies for help, and, in future, to the new debt team that will concentrate on more complex arrears cases. WDH helps to maximise incomes and agree realistic repayment arrangements where there are arrears.
- 141 WDH has regular liaison with the Council's HB section to help ensure payments are made promptly to tenants. WDH staff can verify documents to speed up claims. WDH also challenge weekly repayment requirements for overpaid HB on behalf of tenants where they are unrealistic. Regular liaison meetings monitor performance and identify current issues. Current performance show new claims are assessed in 26 days and change of circumstances in 14 days. Joint working, under agreed protocols, maximises incomes to tenants and prevent rent arrears.
- 142 Performance in collecting other charges is strong. Leaseholder service charges, charges to the Council, Care Link charges from private householders, water rates and commercial rents collection is effective. The collection rate for leaseholder charges was 97 per cent in 2005/06 and 91 per cent in 2006/07. The income generated from collecting water charges exceeds the costs of collection. Robust performance maximises income.
- 143 Tenants are involved in a service review group improving income management services. They have reviewed the suitability of information included in rent statements to ensure it is accessible, and agreed service standards to ensure they reflect tenant priorities. Statements include a guide to understanding rent statements, give advice about HB and also promote payment by direct debit. Services and information is improved to meet tenants' needs.
- 144 A new website 'www.askted.org.uk' helps tackle financial exclusion and debt. The site was launched by WDH during inspection and it is too soon to measure its impact. The site is easy to use and signposts people to a range of agencies that provide help and a wide range of advice. This can help to minimise debt.
- 145 Service charges have not been fully de-pooled to ensure all charges relate to the actual cost of services. Service charges in sheltered housing do not fully cover the cost of services. There is a clear plan to review services, with tenants, and ensure individual services are charged according to cost of provision in line with the five-year rent re-structuring plan. Other services charges, for example caretaking will be de-pooled by 2008/09. Without clearly identified charges tenants do not know exactly what they are paying for and cannot make well informed choices about whether or not they wish to retain a service.
- 146 The 2007/08 rent collection target of 99 per cent is not challenging, being less than the outturn figure of 99.5 per cent for 2006/07. The target is the second year of a three-year target that was not reviewed following the positive outturn for 2006/07. This does not reflect a focus on continuous improvement.

- 147** Systems for monitoring and recovering sundry debts are not fully effective. Repair recharges are held on a separate module to the one for rent arrears. Performance collecting repair recharges is not routinely reported and is weak. The amount collected in 2005/06 was only 37 per cent and reduced in 2006/07 to, 14 per cent. The collection rate for 2007/08 year to date has improved to 78 per cent. At the time of inspection £138,000 was outstanding from £200,000 raised since transfer. WDH is not maximising income collection from sundry charges.
- 148** WDH does not effectively promote welfare benefits. It does not monitor, measure and report the impact of providing benefit advice. Benefit take-up campaigns have been limited and WDH does not routinely measure the success and impact of initiatives. Profiles of tenants in arrears have not been used to target specific take-up campaigns towards particular groups of tenants. This helps to ensure that vulnerable people are helped to maximise their income and reduce debts.

### **Tenancy and estate management**

- 149** This is an area of significant strength. The priorities of tenants and wider communities have been focused upon. Approaches balance rights with responsibilities through enforcement action and preventative and supportive activity. Work with a wide range of local stakeholders is strong and resources such as funding for additional uniformed Police and Police Community Support Officers provide resource where it can lead to positive outcomes. Target hardening and domestic violence responses demonstrate that WDH is committed to assisting people in difficult circumstances. Teams are supported by ICT to monitor and report upon anti-social behaviour. Measurement of outcomes from initiatives that combat anti-social behaviour is relatively weaker as is information for tenants and communities about successes.
- 150** WDH has responded to tenants' concerns and treats anti-social behaviour (ASB) with significant priority. The area faces significant challenges, and in 2006/07 WDH received 2,629 complaints of nuisance and ASB. The Community Safety Strategy 2006-2010 demonstrates a thorough and coordinated approach aimed at reducing crime and improving confidence in communities. Board and local member champions for ASB help to keep the focus on these aims and to question whether improved outcomes are achieved. A wider area approach is achieved by close partnership working with the Wakefield and District Community Safety Partnership. As a result of WDH's strong approach 80 per cent of tenants are satisfied with their local neighbourhood as a place to live.
- 151** Good information helps to ensure tenants understand their rights and responsibilities. Sign-up procedures including new tenancy visits at one, three and seven months are supported by comprehensive information in a new, revised tenant handbook, tenancy agreement and other information. Tenants can report ASB 24 hours a day, seven days a week through the OneCALL centre and a small team provides out-of-hours support for serious cases. Tenants will have realistic expectations and can access support and assistance when needed.

- 152 WDH embraces the government's Respect Agenda. It has signed up to the Respect Standard and a detailed action plan ensures it addresses key areas. This addresses government priorities and helps to reduce problems of ASB.
- 153 WDH have put in place effective teams that can respond to tenants' concerns. Estate officers have a generic role, and deal with low level nuisance complaints. They are supported by specialists in the Community Safety Team. This team links with the local authority ASB team, the in-house legal team and the tenancy support team. The five Police Officers in the Community Safety Team are jointly funded by WDH and West Yorkshire Police, and are shortly to be joined by a further seven Police Community Support Officers (PCSOs) funded solely by WDH. They help provide uniformed presence on estates and, where necessary, to act as professional witnesses. Through fortnightly meetings all agencies combine their resources, identify local 'hotspot' areas as well as individuals responsible for nuisance behaviour and then coordinate enforcement action.
- 154 A target hardening team provides valuable support to victims to ensure their safety and confidence to sustain tenancies. The service consists of repair work to make homes more secure and 66 homes have been linked to WDH's 24-hour Care Link emergency call service. Silent alarms and tape recording facilities help give reassurance to residents and also provide evidence to help take action against perpetrators. Some 371 households have benefited from target hardening of which 94 per cent have had no repeat crime. Measures taken are effective both in supporting victims and reducing repeat crimes.
- 155 Victims and perpetrators of ASB are given appropriate support. Police Officers, seconded as Tenancy Support Officers, provide direct support, and staff also refer victims to support agencies such as West Yorkshire Victim Support, Safe at Home and Wakefield Families First intervention project. Other support is provided through an out-of-hours team, target hardening and installing CCTV cameras. Community alarms, monitored through Care Link, provide support for tenants. Perpetrators are supported to help them change their behaviour. A range of tenancy support is given to vulnerable people. Support for victims and perpetrators helps to improve the sustainability of neighbourhoods.
- 156 WDH takes a full and active part in multi-agency partnerships to combat ASB. These include being a key stakeholder in the Wakefield District Community Safety Partnership. It has effective partnerships with council departments, statutory and other agencies, to tackle ASB and nuisance. Partners are extremely positive about WDH's contribution, which has a real impact on the security of neighbourhoods, supporting victims, rehabilitating perpetrators and providing positive diversionary activities for young people.
- 157 Joint working is very effective. Protocols allow information to be shared with a wide range of partners, including the Police. This helps prolific offenders to be identified and supported to reduce the risk of re-offending, or, where appropriate, prosecuted. Joint working makes effective use of combined resources to improve neighbourhoods.

- 158** Preventative and diversionary work provides a good balance to enforcement activity. WDH works with the Council's Youth Offending Team which has, for example, helped 13 young people with a history of problems to take part in diversionary activity on the Lupset Estate. A youth intervention support programme on one estate run by NACRO and jointly funded by WDH has reduced school truancy by 75 per cent amongst those taking part. This helps people to reform nuisance behaviour and to make positive contributions to their communities.
- 159** WDH takes a wide range of enforcement action to deal with ASB. Over the last two years it has issued 203 acceptable behaviour contracts (ABCs); obtained 23 anti-social behaviour orders (ASBOs), six injunctions; closed eight 'crack houses' and terminated 18 tenancies. Taking appropriate action demonstrates its commitment to making estates safer and better places to live.
- 160** Prompt legal action is taken to resolve tenancy problems. Accelerated action to recover possession for starter tenancies is taken where appropriate. To date 26 tenancies have been terminated, including two on management grounds. This gives a positive message that anti-social behaviour is not tolerated and protects existing neighbourhoods.
- 161** Action to tackle ASB is having a positive impact. All incidents are recorded and mapped on a GIS system to identify trends and to focus action. Following action, reported incidents in an ASB hotspot (Warwick Estate) have reduced from 71 April-August 2006 to 61 in the same period 2007. A high profile uniformed presence in one area led to 25 per cent reduction in criminal damage during the campaign. WDH is successfully tackling ASB.
- 162** The IT system records all incidents of ASB, prompts required action and allows appropriate access to information for all staff to deal with enquiries. ASB cases are regularly reviewed internally, and where appropriate, with partners. This ensures procedures are followed and appropriate action is agreed. Complainants are informed of decisions and kept advised of progress. This provides a good basis for effective and consistent tenancy enforcement.
- 163** WDH routinely reports on new tenant satisfaction through a survey at the first visit. Returns were completed for 93 per cent of new tenants during June/July 2007. Ninety seven per cent were satisfied or very satisfied. Data is analysed and reported by local area, stages of the letting procedure, repairs and perceptions of the area. Only 64 per cent were satisfied with conditions on estates. WDH conclude that the condition of estates needs further exploration and will be considered at a future tenant challenge day. WDH is learning from tenant feedback to continually improve services.
- 164** Better use could be made of publicity to actively promote the success WDH and partners are having in tackling ASB and making estates more sustainable. Individual cases are reported but a broader message would help to influence residents' perception of crime and ASB.

- 165 WDH recognises more needs to be done to agree standards and performance with the Council's grounds maintenance service. Performance is not routinely measured and reported against standards agreed with local residents. Existing contracts with the Council continued following stock transfer. Land ownership is currently being confirmed prior to re-tendering in 2007/08. WDH recognise that a high standard of grounds maintenance helps to minimise ASB and improve popularity.
- 166 WDH is not making best use of data to measure the impact and outcomes of ASB enforcement procedures. It does not robustly measure the impact of work to deal with ASB. Benchmarking clubs do not measure the success and outcomes of ASB enforcement and prevention activity. WDH does not routinely record the number residents to whom it has provided support, which would help to analyse trends as well as measure the success and impact of initiatives.

## Is the service delivering value for money?

- 167 Strengths significantly outweigh weaknesses. Operating costs are among the lowest nationally. Strategy and processes are well aligned to realise efficiencies for reinvestment in customer facing services. There are many examples of value improvements leading to increasing satisfaction of customers. The approach to procurement is delivering substantial savings and partnership working is increasing investment for customers. Some services do not have specific targets for value improvement however, and the timing and order of the service review programme has had only limited contribution from customers.

## How do costs compare?

- 168 Operating costs are low when compared with others. According to the Housing Corporation's Operating Cost Index (OCI), WDH has one of the lowest operating costs nationally. Actual operating costs in 2005/06 were nearly £6 million lower than predicted at the time of transfer.
- 169 WDH's weekly operating cost per general needs property in 2005/06 was £27.52, which places the association among the best performing organisations nationally. Operating costs as a percentage of turnover are 57 per cent, placing WDH among the best performing associations nationally.
- 170 A detailed understanding of the costs of providing individual services is not consistently evident. Although headline costs of services are known, detailed examination of activity-based costs is only at an early stage. Overall costs can mask individual inefficiencies.

## How is value for money managed?

- 171** The association has focused on value for money and outcomes for customers and delivered a number of improvements.
- The Decent Homes extension has redirected £25 million, which has contributed towards accelerating the Wakefield Standard improvement works by three years.
  - Technical services have increased the volume of their work by £2 million without increasing resources.
  - The technical services team achieved a 19 per cent saving on the agreed maximum price for the first completed (major) improvement scheme.
  - Decoration vouchers have been introduced giving tenants 30 to 40 per cent extra spending power on decorating products at no extra cost to WDH.
  - In an independent benchmarking exercise that focused upon financial functions in large, medium and local registered social landlords for the financial year 2005/06, WDH achieved the second highest efficiencies per unit and planned efficiencies for 2006/07 were the highest.
  - Implemented 14 bright ideas originating from staff generating £97,583 in efficiencies, that included introducing revised postal procedures and streamlining the flexible working scheme.
  - Seventy nine per cent of tenants believe that their rent provides value for money, an increase of 7 per cent from the 2005 Survey.
- 172** The value for money strategy is comprehensive. The strategy is specific about the factors that contribute to value; economy, efficiency, effectiveness and equity and specific targets are set for key business areas, for example technical services and human resources. Although the strategy clearly confirms much activity that is ongoing, it is a recent document with mostly forward plans and is yet to deliver the full range of intended benefits. Nonetheless, there is clear evidence of a comprehensive and structured approach that is being taken to deliver value services.
- 173** The WDH procurement strategy is comprehensive and supported by a challenging action plan. The association has a procurement specialist to lead its procurement team and to enhance awareness of procurement opportunities across the business. Several examples demonstrate the benefits realised; £3.3 million has been saved in respect of major components, £195,000 in the cyclical programme and £993,000 through improving processes. Smaller scale but equally important benefits have also been realised, for example, in response to sheltered tenants' views, the contract for washing machine servicing and repair was procured bringing improved response times and a saving of £130,000 on the previous arrangements. The approach to procurement realises savings and brings benefits to tenants.

- 174 Monthly finance meetings and performance challenge events strengthen the focus on delivery of strategic objectives and commitments. Each budget holder meets every month with a finance team member to examine financial performance and resource requirements. The decisions made inform monthly performance challenge events where Assistant Directors are held accountable for the services they provide and for delivery of objectives. External challenge is added by the association's external auditor. This is a high quality approach that contributes to value for money.
- 175 Service reviews are focused on value improvement. Reviews are used to examine existing approaches and outcomes with a VfM toolkit assisting review team members to consider value closely. There are several examples of reviews leading to significant improvements, for example the repairs and maintenance stores review leading to outsourcing of stores provision improving availability of materials. The gas servicing review improved effectiveness, ensuring greater success in completing services on time and also confirmed the competitive pricing of the service. Service reviews are mapped out until 2010 and have improved value for money in key areas of service.
- 176 Targets for value improvements are detailed. There is an overall target for efficiency of 5 per cent which was exceeded in 2006/07. The headline target is refined by targets set for quality and for contributions to the local economy. The delivery of these sub-targets is developing and although actual performance against them has been lower than expected their use promotes a clear focus on improving value as well as reducing costs.
- 177 Staff demonstrate a high level of awareness of value for money objectives and how they can contribute to them. Briefing meetings and development opportunities concentrate on key corporate objectives which include cross cutting KLOE themes. These sessions are tailored to particular levels of staff to help them to deliver service improvements. Staff can access up to date and highly relevant information on a range of issues including value for money through the WDH intranet. As a result staff can show that in a range of practical ways they act to improve value in their day to day roles.
- 178 There is an improving awareness of costs of service provision. Detailed management accounts are routinely produced and scrutinised. Financial performance is examined monthly at structured meetings between finance staff and budget holders. To enhance cost awareness and to better inform service reviews, the association is starting to examine systems thinking to better gauge its transactional costs. This work although better developed in some areas, for example, repairs and maintenance, is at an early stage but provides a clear indication of continuing development in the area of value.

- 179** WDH works effectively with partners to improve joint outcomes and to maximise the investment for tenants. Over £3 million in energy efficiency grants has been secured contributing to efforts to reduce fuel poverty in the district, including £1.2 million from Scottish Power, to carry out cavity wall insulation work. The Community Leadership Programme has benefited from financial support from many partners including the Royal Bank of Scotland who have donated £100,000 towards the scheme. This increases the ability to build capacity within communities.
- 180** Some important activities do not have specific targets for value improvement. Service areas such as responsive repairs have clear value expectations stated, others for example support services such as finance and customer engagement have no stated expectations or commitments to value. In these instances challenges to ways of working and value improvement are likely to be inconsistent and there may be areas where improvements in value are necessary but are not being actively sought.
- 181** Customers have had only limited influence on the range and timing of service reviews. There has been a keen focus on improving business performance to deliver transfer promises which has dictated the programme of reviews in the early years. It is accepted that greater customer influence on the programme of reviews will enhance their appropriateness in the future.

## What are the prospects for improvement to the service?

### What is the service track record in delivering improvement?

- 182** Drivers for improvement significantly outweigh barriers. WDH is delivering on the transfer promises it has made to tenants. In just over two years of operation the extent of improvement is impressive and matched by rising customer satisfaction across the range of services. Improvement is not limited to the transfer promises, and WDH demonstrates a keen emphasis on continuing improvement and achieving the best value for customers. External challenge supported by strengthened internal processes has helped to deliver change effectively. Some improvements still need to be bed in, so that consistent improvement in outcomes is evident although this is to be expected in an organisation that is two and a half years old. Responsive repairs is a clear example. Although value is improving in key areas of business, the repairs and maintenance service has still not been fully market tested despite a previous recommendation in the 2004 Audit Commission inspection to do so.
- 183** WDH has effectively improved services. Sixty two per cent of the properties inherited in March 2005 failed the decent homes standard. This reduced to 40 per cent by July 2007 with delivery of the improved 'Wakefield Standard' currently three years ahead of schedule. The promises made to customers at the time of the transfer have been either met or exceeded. In total there were 26 promises and 38 commitments contained in the offer document. Of these 21 promises (81 per cent) and 29 commitments (76 per cent) have been delivered in the first two years of operation. WDH has introduced noticeable improvements in services.
- 184** WDH has acted upon the recommendations of the previous repairs and maintenance inspection. Of 20 key recommendations 19 have been completed with improvements made in the one area that remains outstanding. Although timescales for delivery slipped in several instances it is relevant to note that the transfer to WDH took place a year after the previous inspection. WDH has effectively managed change. It is clear that recommendations have been prioritised and that they have led to much improved services for tenants.
- 185** Service improvements have focused on areas that customers will value. Since transfer WDH has:
- improved 8,407 properties beyond the Decent Homes Standard;
  - launched Homesearch, the choice based lettings service;
  - transformed the OneCALL service;
  - achieved Investors in People, Tenant Participation Advisory Service and Charter Mark accreditations;
  - launched 'Homebuilder' and created 387 new jobs;

- introduced 'Repair With Care' and Vulnerable Painting and Decorating Service;
  - opened two new service access points with a further two planned;
  - launched the community leadership programme; and
  - increased satisfaction across all areas of service.
- 186** WDH has challenged itself to improve. A 'mock inspection' was undertaken by external consultants six months after transfer. This helped to enhance a developing improvement agenda and responses to its findings have been thorough. The resulting plans address national, regional and corporate priorities as well as key weaknesses in the service. Customers have benefited from this structured and challenging approach.
- 187** Customers are closely involved in service review groups and play a key part in shaping improvements. WDH routinely focuses on improvements customers want following consultation and customer feedback. Key examples include developing the Wakefield Standard, introducing Homesearch and tackling anti-social behaviour. Residents we met confirm that services have significantly improved since stock transfer was established. Staff are also positive about the organisation and confirm services are improving. Improvements are clearly customer focused.
- 188** WDH has reviewed and is changing the way that stock for responsive repairs is ordered and stored with clear expectations of improving value. WDH can expect a reduction of six per cent in material costs, equating to £360,000 per annum plus further improvements including reducing creditor payments through reducing the number of suppliers, saving on salaries of stores staff, reduced down time and travelling costs and increased buying power. Although the changes are recent and not fully implemented they are likely to improve the service that customers receive.
- 189** Key performance indicators reveal a variable picture. As shown in Appendix 1, of 19 general needs key indicators actual performance is in quartiles one and two for nine indicators and in quartiles three and four for a further eight when compared with similar organisations nationally. In particular performance for response repairs emergency, urgent and routine categories is in quartiles three, four and four respectively. Considerable caution is needed however, as published national information available at the time of inspection relates only to the year 2005/06 which was the first full year of operation for WDH. Internal performance reports indicate some improvement but a consistent improvement trend cannot be seen across all areas as yet. Some areas of service require further improvement.

## **46 Housing Management Services | What are the prospects for improvement to the service?**

- 190** WDH does not routinely measure the impact of changes, and in other areas it is too soon to identify improved outcomes for customers. For example, the impact of a wide range of initiatives to improve the sustainability of estates is not routinely measured, collated and reported. Furthermore, it is too soon for several new strategies and improvements to have made an impact. For example, equality and diversity strategies; work with hard to reach groups and tailoring services to meet needs identified through the tenant census.

### **How well does the service manage performance?**

- 191** Drivers for improvement outweigh barriers. WDH has established a vibrant and engaging vision which drives all activity. Staff are well engaged with the vision and understand their role in delivery. Strong leadership has created direction and has driven the momentum for change. Performance monitoring measures the things which matter and ensures delivery. Performance challenge is an evident feature used to encourage improvement. Customers' views are actively sought and used to inform improvements. Service improvement planning is routine and is directed at improvements that customers will experience. Some weaker areas exist including some targets that need to be revised, and some areas where effective use of resources has not been robustly tested.
- 192** The organisation's priorities are very clearly at the root of all activity. The clarity provided by the 'strategic staircase', well structured vision and strategy and corporate branding that reinforces the vision at every opportunity is outstanding. A 'golden thread' helps to ensure that objectives are integrated with the overall 'vision 2020' through the strategic staircase, service delivery plans and team plans to personal targets. This means staff understand what is expected of them and how they contribute to overall aims.
- 193** WDH works closely with the Council and strategic partners in helping to deliver local housing strategies and community safety objectives. Senior staff are involved in local strategic groups including the Local Strategic Partnership which helps to coordinate initiatives within a vision for improving the quality of life for people who live and work in Wakefield. WDH plays a leading role in wider area regeneration.
- 194** The leadership of WDH is visible and accessible. There is an explicit open door policy at all levels and staff perceive senior managers as willing to listen to and engage with them. Formal briefing, one-to-one meetings, team meetings, staff 'bright ideas' schemes and annual staff conferences complement informal networks. The positive staff culture is palpable. There is an evident shared purpose and leaders have put in place mechanisms to help staff to understand priorities and to deliver improvements.

- 195** WDH use appropriate measures to assess the satisfaction of their customers and to prompt change where required. A STATUS survey is completed on a three-year cycle and is due to be refreshed late in 2007. The findings have been complemented by routine annual surveying of a large (7,500) sample of customers. The annual survey is used to ask tailored questions about services and customer aspirations. In addition there is continuous monitoring of repairs satisfaction and individual surveys for example, relating to the improvements programme, the income management service, sheltered housing tenants and leaseholders. Several changes have resulted including improving choices in the improvements programme, introducing better money advice services and initiatives such as the stores project to improve the number of repairs completed at the first visit and cost effectiveness. Customer intelligence is used effectively to improve services that matter most.
- 196** Mystery shopping is used thoughtfully and has led to improved services. The initiative was developed with the Wakefield Tenants Federation and undertaken by tenants who were trained to undertake the role. Resulting from these exercises, three local offices have been relocated to be more convenient for tenants and local staff have been better trained and assisted by guides to provide a more consistent service. Induction training for new staff and routine customer service training have been amended to improve staff responses. Tenants receive better services tailored to their needs, provided by staff that are trained and supported to respond well.
- 197** Inspections led by tenants are used to test the quality of services. Although the first inspections were only undertaken recently, they demonstrate continuing development in service improvement planning and build on the mystery shopping approach. This improves the input of a range of tenants into ongoing assessment of services.
- 198** Service improvement planning is well structured and is aimed at the things that matter most to tenants. The cycle of improvement planning is in reality continuous, but has particular milestones: the process commencing in October and including consultation with tenants at area and at Board levels as well as with local authority citizen panels. Objectives include corporate priorities as listed in the 'strategic staircase', tenants' priorities as gathered from the range of feedback routes and initiatives to drive performance improvements. Improvement plans are structured in common formats by departments and are managed and monitored by the performance planning team. This approach is thorough and managed to improve prospects of delivery.
- 199** Service reviews are forward planned over five years. The reviews use best value principles and are managed using sound project management disciplines. Some reviews, for example the stores provision review resulted in fundamental change with the outsourcing of the service. The reviews are well structured and can be easily understood by staff and customers.

## 48 Housing Management Services | What are the prospects for improvement to the service?

- 200 Delivery of promises, commitments and agreed actions is thoroughly planned. WDH has an ambitious change agenda spanning all services. The 'strategic staircase' translates corporate commitments into a high level work programme over five years. The programming and delivery of these is managed using established project management software and practices such as monthly finance meetings with budget holders to create consistency and improve certainty that actions will be delivered. This is reflected in the delivery of transfer promises and commitments. In the last year there were a total of 482 agreed actions across the business, of which 467 were delivered on time and those that were not were robustly reappraised.
- 201 Challenge is actively encouraged. There is evident willingness to have approaches and performance tested, for example 'Tenant Challenge' events are held six monthly and internal performance challenge meetings are held with assistant directors monthly. Numerous examples of change were evidenced including changes in the programming of the investment programme to ensure delivery of the 'Wakefield Standard' as well as extending refurbishment options. Alternative opinions are considered with a firm intention to improve and tenants can see that their views are acted upon.
- 202 A service review tool kit requires that service review groups' benchmark to learn from good practice elsewhere, and also fully evaluate the value for money (VfM) implications of options. Final reports to executive management team check that these issues have been thoroughly addressed. This helps to ensure that improvements provide VFM and make the best use of resources.
- 203 Performance management arrangements for tenancy enforcement, ASB, harassment and hate crime are improving through new IT systems, but are not yet fully effective. A range of activity measures and local performance indicators are developing, as part of the community safety strategy, but are not yet fully operational. WDH only reports on a few local indicators which do not comprehensively measure neighbourhood sustainability. Measures could include the percentage of new tenancies lasting less than six months. Systematic collation, analysis and reporting of agreed measures are needed to evaluate the success of services and initiatives.
- 204 WDH has not made best use of benchmarking to develop new processes and initiatives. Equality Impact Assessments are not well advanced and have been developed internally, when valuable experience could be gained from organisations that have already seen benefits following implementation. It has not learnt from others how to best tackle under-representation in a direct labour organisation workforce. Lessons from others can be used more effectively to improve performance.
- 205 Some targets are not ambitious. For example, the target set for 'OneCALL' calls answered is 65 per cent. The general needs income target for this year is 98 per cent against a performance last year in excess of 99 per cent. The complaints handling target is 80 per cent to be handled within stated timescales. Several performance targets have reduced from the previous year which may reflect more difficult operating circumstances but are at odds with the generally strong emphasis on continuous improvement.

- 206** Feedback from all sources is not always systematically collated and analysed. Feedback from repair post inspections is used locally but is informal, and is not routinely analysed to learn from good practice across the organisation. New tenant led inspections will provide a more robust way of using feedback. Best use is not being made of some information to identify good and weak practice and to ensure services are improved consistently.
- 207** Service delivery plans, and other plans are generally SMART<sup>8</sup>, but often lack measurable outcomes. Although individual actions are measured, plans lack overall outcomes that measure the impact of targets and objectives to customers and the organisation. For example the draft disability equality scheme lacks measurable targets. ASB initiatives have numerous activity measures, but more limited outcomes measures by which success in making areas places people want to live can be measured.
- 208** The cost of the performance management framework is not challenged. The framework is detailed and its robustness is audited, however, total costs including staff time invested has not been compared with outcomes or alternative approaches. This type of evaluation can assist WDH to use resources more effectively.

### **Does the service have the capacity to improve?**

- 209** This is a significant area of strength. The Board and local committees are well engaged contributing well in their decision making and scrutiny roles. They are supported to undertake their functions by comprehensive training and development opportunities. Staff are professional, highly motivated and customer focused and leadership is both directional and engaging at all levels. Procurement approaches improve efficiencies and release resource and inward investment in community initiatives is impressive. Medium term planning is too recent to fully evaluate but shows encouraging signs.
- 210** The Board is ambitious and gives clear strategic direction to improve services. It has a good understanding of priorities and has taken difficult decisions to help achieve its objectives. It has challenged the Wakefield Standard to provide a higher level of home improvements, extending the length of the improvement programme. It has recently directed the organisation's response to ensure tenants were assisted following recent and severe flooding. Board members are committed and demonstrate a good knowledge of the business and key issues.
- 211** Information to the Board and local committees enables better understanding and challenge. Performance information for Board is comprehensive, clear and informative and the reports to local management committees are well targeted, largely free of jargon and interesting. Traffic lighted information and narratives based on exceptions are used appropriately and minutes of meetings demonstrate appropriate scrutiny and informed debate. This encourages effective accountability including to those who receive services.

---

<sup>8</sup> SMART - Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Realistic and Time-bound

## 50 Housing Management Services | What are the prospects for improvement to the service?

- 212 The Board and local management committees (LMCs) receive positive support from officers. Annual appraisal of Board and LMC members are used to develop training plans. In the last 18 months there have been 27 separate developmental events, ranging from 'visioning away days' to personal interaction training. In the main these events have been well attended. A range of board member training helps develop skills and the ability to effectively manage the business.
- 213 Staff appreciate the visible leadership provided. The Chief Executive meets all new staff and, with other directors, regularly visits area teams. Routine 'back-to-the-floor' exercise ensure that staff feel recognised, listened to, and involved in developing services. WDH leadership has promoted a very positive culture of performance.
- 214 Staff are professional, motivated, enthusiastic and clear about their responsibilities to help achieve organisational objectives. Staff communication is effective. Staff are well-informed through, for example, regular briefing, team meetings, a communication hour (each Thursday) and a comprehensive intranet. Additional help is provided for dispersed staff to ensure they are not excluded. Well informed and motivated staff are well placed to deliver customer focused services.
- 215 Training and development opportunities enhance the skills of staff. The events which can be structured training, briefings or facilitated discussion are tailored to be most helpful to staff at their level. For example separate sessions are organised for the executive team, assistant directors and for third and fourth tier managers. Collectively known as the leadership development programme the aim is to release staff potential, to encourage improved skills and to plan for succession. Positive and performance focused staff demonstrate the benefits of the programme.
- 216 ICT is planned to assist the business. The ICT strategy is comprehensive and actions are planned to deliver benefits to customers and to assist staff to undertake their roles. A new, visually pleasing, well managed intranet site has been recently launched with articles that keep staff very well informed as well as encouraging them to submit their 'bright ideas' or to develop their skills and knowledge further. Customers now benefit from on-line rent account viewing and repairs reporting and can make electronic rent payments. Systems downtime is well managed to support service delivery. Taken together the approach to ICT has contributed to rising customer satisfaction.
- 217 High levels of absenteeism have been recognised and appropriately responded to. Some longer term issues were inherited at transfer; positive change has followed, and old ways of working have been questioned. Some increases in absenteeism have resulted. WDH has focused attention in this area and introduced important controls as well as initiatives to assist staff such as access to occupational therapy services and physiotherapy as well as more flexible arrangements, for example reducing working hours for temporary periods to respond sensitively to staff. Overall absenteeism has reduced from an average of 13.5 days per employee at transfer to the current level of approximately ten days. WDH actively seeks to address absenteeism which can limit staff resources.

- 218** WDH has a robust, modern procurement strategy in place. A range of procurement techniques aimed at delivering Value for Money has been used, including partnering and framework contracts for improvement works. Supply chain savings achieved an estimated 20 per cent reduction on purchasing components for the major improvements programme. Savings of £3.3 million in respect of boilers, windows, external doors, kitchens, tiling and flooring were achieved and by changing paint supplier WDH saved £195,000. WDH has engaged in strategic partnering with evidence of notable improvements.
- 219** WDH has maximised investment in the communities it serves. Almost £4 million has been levered in to contribute to service priorities. Major contributions include £1.2 million from a utility provider to promote energy efficiency, 'homebuilder' investment of £1 million and access to deprived area funding of over £900,000. Such arrangements extend the benefits that can be delivered and also increase the shared commitment of partners.
- 220** Well targeted schemes are improving local capacity. Through 'Homebuilder' and 'Junior Homebuilder' schemes 85 long term unemployed and young people have been trained in construction skills. Targets for permanent employment have been exceeded. The Community Leadership Programme is a popular initiative aimed at developing positive role models among the area's younger people. All 18 secondary schools in the area are signed up and have each sent 10 students on the programme which can lead to a recognised qualification in personal effectiveness.
- 221** The staff appraisal framework works well. Individual training and development needs are identified and personal targets are linked to corporate objectives. This ensures staff understand how they contribute to organisational objectives.
- 222** A Medium Term Financial Plan has recently been developed but it is too recent to thoroughly evaluate its impact. Agreed in January 2007 the plan is comprehensive in setting the context for medium term planning and establishing linkage with corporate objectives and therefore the priorities for investment. The signs are encouraging, although further development is needed to link human resource planning to the delivery of medium term aims.
- 223** WDH does not routinely link efficiency measures to training requiring requests to identify a return on investment. It has done this for the social return on investment pilot. This ensures that training resources are targeted effectively.

## Appendix 1 – Performance indicators

Performance Indicator	2003/04	2004/05	2005/06	2005/06 National Mean	2005/06 National Median	2005/06 Quartile Position
Current Compliance Status	-	Non-compliant	-	-	-	-
<b>General needs rent</b>						
<a href="#">Average GN weekly gross rent</a>	-	£44.61	£47.73	£66.23	£66.76	1
<b>General needs voids and lettings</b>						
<a href="#">GN re-let time</a>	-	-	44 days	40 days	35 days	3
<a href="#">Vacant and available GN (self-cont'd) stock</a>	-	1.0%	0.6%	0.8%	0.6%	2
<a href="#">Vacant and not available GN (self-cont'd) stock</a>	-	0.9%	0.7%	1.2%	0.4%	3
<a href="#">GN lettings to BME tenants</a>	-	-	1.9%	14.9%	8.7%	-
<b>Asset condition</b>						
<a href="#">Average SAP rating</a>	-	55	56	69	68	4
<a href="#">Failing decent homes standard</a>	-	70.1%	55.7%	15.5%	7.7%	4
<b>Repairs performance</b>						
<a href="#">Emergency repairs completed in target</a>	-	-	97.4%	95.4%	97.0%	2
<a href="#">Urgent repairs completed in target</a>	-	-	85.1%	92.7%	94.2%	4
<a href="#">Routine repairs completed in target</a>	-	-	85.1%	93.7%	95.3%	4
<a href="#">Appointments made that were kept</a>	-	-	98.6%	93.8%	97.0%	2

Performance Indicator	2003/04	2004/05	2005/06	2005/06 National Mean	2005/06 National Median	2005/06 Quartile Position
<b>Service to tenants</b>						
<a href="#">Tenant satisfaction overall</a>	-	-	78%	79%	81%	3
<a href="#">Tenant satisfaction with participation</a>	-	-	68%	62%	62%	2
<b>General needs FPI</b>						
<a href="#">Weekly Operating Cost per GN unit</a>	-	-	£27.52	£54.49	£50.85	1
<a href="#">GN Operating Cost as a percentage of Turnover</a>	-	-	57.1%	81.7%	74.3%	1
<a href="#">Weekly investment per GN unit</a>	-	-	£46.51	£39.12	£30.46	-
<a href="#">Rent Collected for GN</a>	-	-	97.0%	98.8%	99.4%	4
<a href="#">Rent lost due to GN Voids</a>	-	-	1.2%	1.6%	1.2%	2
<a href="#">Current tenant rent arrears at year end for GN</a>	-	-	3.1%	5.1%	4.9%	1
<b>Supported and/or Housing for Older People Rent</b>						
<a href="#">Average SH weekly gross rent</a>	-	£47.35	£50.07	£68.54	£68.74	1
<b>Supported and/or Housing for Older People PIs</b>						
<a href="#">Letting time (SH)</a>	-	-	55 days	43 days	35 days	4
<b>Supported and/or Housing for Older People FPI</b>						
<a href="#">Weekly Operating Cost per SH unit</a>	-	-	£52.61	£93.26	£74.58	1
<a href="#">SH Operating Cost as a percentage of Turnover</a>	-	-	101.6%	88.9%	90.7%	4
<a href="#">Weekly investment per SH unit</a>	-	-	£15.56	£27.94	£22.32	-
<a href="#">Rent Collected for SH</a>	-	-	104.0%	98.2%	99.3%	1
<a href="#">Rent lost due to SH Voids</a>	-	-	4.5%	3.6%	3.3%	3
<a href="#">Current tenant SH rent arrears at year end</a>	-	-	3.1%	3.8%	3.3%	2

Performance Indicator	2003/04	2004/05	2005/06	2005/06 National Mean	2005/06 National Median	2005/06 Quartile Position
<b>Operating Cost Index</b>						
OCI (1) Residual/unit	-	-	-£744	-	-	-
OCI (2) Residual/unit (exc major repairs)	-	-	-£182	-	-	-

*The national figures relate to all associations providing PI data that own and/or manage 250 or more dwellings. For shared ownership, only associations owning 100 or more of these dwellings are included.*

*It is Housing Corporation convention to number those performing at least as well as the top quartile level as being in quartile 1, and below the bottom quartile as in quartile 4.*

## Appendix 2 – Positive practice

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

### **Text messaging re repairs appointments**

- 1 The association has recently introduced automatic text prompting in advance of responsive repairs appointments and gas servicing. This enhancement maintains contact with customers and has clear potential to reduce the number of missed appointments or no access situations. Texting recognises changes in how many people prefer to be communicated with. It is relatively low cost and is immediate.

### **In-house occupational therapy**

- 2 By employing an in-house occupational therapy team, the association has made access to assessments immediate in many cases. There is good reason to take this approach because of the volume of adaptations requests that are received and the service level agreement that exists with the Council. Customers receive prompt and professional assessments.

### **Reducing staff absenteeism**

- 3 Absenteeism is being reduced by straightforward assistance for staff. For example, managers are able to agree short-term arrangements, such as reducing hours, that assist those with childcare difficulties. Common workplace complaints have been analysed and have led to the introduction of fast access (within two days) to free physiotherapy, for example to deal with back and neck complaints.

### **Funding for increased police presence**

- 4 WDH recognise that confidence in some areas is improved by having a visible Police or Police Community Support Officer (PCSO) presence. By part-funding the employment of five Police officers, and solely funding a further seven PCSOs customers can see positive change, and benefit from their presence on estates and in their communities. This helps to reduce crime and gives a positive message that residents' rights to quiet enjoyment are important enough to invest in.