

Homes for Life Housing Partnership
inspection report

MAY 2007



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1. Introduction

About this inspection

1.1 Communities Scotland carried out this inspection under section 69 of the Housing (Scotland) Act 2001 on behalf of Scottish Ministers. Our purpose in inspection is to provide an independent external assessment of the effectiveness of housing service delivery and make recommendations to help improvement. Inspections are conducted within a published framework of Performance Standards*.

How we assessed performance

1.2 Our inspectors asked two key questions:

- How good are the services we have inspected?
- How well are these services being managed for improvement?

1.3 In order to answer these questions inspectors:

- spoke to tenants, staff and members of the governing body;
- asked other partner organisations for their views;
- visited homes and local areas;
- saw and tested first hand how well services were being delivered;
- examined key policies, publications, information and the organisation's self-assessment submitted for this inspection; and
- analysed published performance and financial information.

1.4 We have awarded grades for housing management and property maintenance.

This is what our grades mean:

A	Excellent	Major strengths.
B	Good	Many strengths and some areas where improvement is needed.
C	Fair	Some strengths, but with many areas where improvement is required or with a small number of significant weaknesses.
D	Poor	Major areas where improvement is needed or where a number of very significant weaknesses are found.

* see glossary

The inspection team

1.5 The inspection was managed by Paul Milligan, (Inspection Manager), supported by Mark Gibson (Inspector) and Murray Smith (Financial Analyst). We were on site between 11 December 2006 and 21 December 2006. We would like to thank everyone involved in the inspection for their time and co-operation.

Responding to this inspection

1.6 We expect all inspected bodies to make the summary of this report available to anyone that wants it, report our findings to tenants and other stakeholders* and respond to the issues raised in this report.

* see glossary

2. Context

About the organisation

- 2.1 Communities Scotland registered Homes for Life Housing Partnership in 2003. It is constituted as a company limited by guarantee and has charitable status. East Lothian Council (ELC), in partnership with East Lothian Housing Association (ELHA), established Homes for Life in 1998 as part of a successful New Housing Partnership (NHP) funding bid. The Partnership's main aim was to build new homes in line with East Lothian's Local Housing Strategy. This is the Partnership's first inspection.
- 2.2 The Partnership's office is in Haddington. At the time of our inspection it owned 304 houses spread across 22 settlements in East Lothian. It acquired 27 properties from ELC as part of a of trickle transfer* process. It built the remainder of its stock, 277 houses, over the last seven years.
- 2.3 A Board of up to 14 Directors governs the Partnership. The majority of these come from the two founding member organisation, ELC and ELHA. Both of these organisations appoint up to four Directors each. The remaining Board places have up to four Directors elected by tenant members and up to two Directors elected by ordinary members. It currently has 11 people on the Board, three of whom are tenants.
- 2.4 Immediately prior to the inspection, the Partnership was advised by its key funding partner, ELC, that it would not be providing grant funding for any future developments. The Partnership will therefore not be building any further houses. This decision brought to an end a prolonged period of uncertainty for the Partnership about its future role in building new houses in East Lothian. It also brought to an end a period of significant work for the Partnership's staff in discussing and negotiating on these matters. Due to this fundamental change in the organisations purpose it will be reviewing its staffing and governance arrangements, and its future options.

* see glossary

- 2.5 At registration, the Partnership entered into a negotiated agreement to use the Council's direct labour organisation for its property maintenance service. It also gave the Council 100% nomination rights for its empty properties. The Partnership has reviewed these arrangements and recently ended the 100% nominations agreement with ELC. It now allocates its empty houses through choice-based lettings (CBL), in partnership with ELHA. The Partnership is also due to put its responsive repairs contract out to tender, early in 2007.
- 2.6 The Annual Performance and Statistical Return (APSR)^{*} asks Registered Social Landlords (RSLs)^{*} to select a peer group^{*} which best describes their organisation. Homes for Life selected peer group six, described as larger rural RSLs. This is the group we use to compare the Partnership's performance.

Key facts

- 2.7 The table below presents summary information about the Partnership and shows trends over the last three years.

	2003-2004	2004-2005	2005-2006
Houses owned	152	212	276
Employees	5	4	6
Annual turnover (£'000)	£434	£604	£1,328
Total possible rental income (£'000)	£470	£535	£816
Rental income from housing benefit	56.2%	41.7%	32.7%
Average weekly rent	£52.03	£54.54	£57.11
Average rent increase	3.9%	3.9%	3.2%
Houses re-let	17	11	17
Responsive repairs carried out	99	296	282
Maintenance spend per house	£128.49	£141.59	£138.89
Right To Buy [*] sales	0	0	0

Source: Annual Performance and Statistical Return/Annual accounts.

^{*} see glossary

3. Housing management

3.1 The grade awarded for housing management is:

B	Good	Many strengths and some areas where improvement is needed.
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We explain at the end of this section how the assessments and judgements we have made result in this grade.

How good is the service?

Access

Social landlords should provide open, fair and equal access to their housing lists and should work with partners to simplify and maximise access to housing.

- 3.2 Homes for Life Housing Partnership does not maintain a housing list^{*}. Prior to September 2006, the Partnership allocated its housing through a 100% nominations agreement with East Lothian Council (ELC). However, it was experiencing difficulties with this agreement. Since September 2006, the Partnership has been allocating its houses through a choice based letting^{*} (CBL) process, in partnership with East Lothian Housing Association (ELHA). Homes for Life has also recently agreed a combined nominations / section 5^{*} protocol with ELC.
- 3.3 The Partnership and ELHA have a draft service agreement that details each organisation's responsibility in relation to the delivery of CBL. ELHA is responsible for the registration and assessment of applicants' priority status. It also provides the Partnership with a list of all applicants who are interested in an available property. The Partnership selects, contacts, and signs-up successful applicants. At the time of our inspection it had effectively let 23 properties under the new system.
- 3.4 Prior to implementing CBL, the Partnership made a reasonable effort to consult tenants and raise awareness of the new system. Consultation involved writing to

^{*} see glossary

all tenants seeking views on the proposed changes. It also held a tenants' meeting and took out an advert in the local press. However, the Partnership did not consult more widely with user groups. In particular, it did not consult with individuals or representative groups for those who may struggle with the new allocation process.

- 3.5 The Partnership advertises empty properties in its offices, weekly in the local press, on a website and in the Council's offices. These adverts include details on how to register for housing and how to apply for specific properties. Registering and applying for housing is straightforward for applicants. Overall, the Partnership is good at publicising access to its housing.
- 3.6 In order to help potentially vulnerable applicants, ELHA issues a list of available properties, to the Council's homelessness and social work teams. It also issues this list to a range of other support providers. This is in line with the agreement between ELHA and the Partnership. Information is available in different formats and alternative languages, if requested.
- 3.7 During the inspection we identified that some applicants were in an allocation category called 'on hold' which effectively suspended them from bidding for properties. The Partnership was unaware of the reasons why applicants were on hold. It was therefore unable to confirm that any restrictions to access, if being applied, were fair and met with statutory requirements.
- 3.8 In summary, Homes for Life provides good access to its housing. The change to choice based lettings was an appropriate response to problems the Partnership was experiencing with the previous allocation system. It effectively publicises how to access its houses.

Meeting need and maximising choice

Social landlords should meet housing need through lettings and should maximise choice for applicants.

- 3.9 The Partnership allocates its properties in a way that prioritises a range of housing needs. These priorities reflect the statutory reasonable preference

- categories^{*}. Applicants can apply for one of three priority passes – gold, silver or bronze – depending on their level of need. It awards homeless people a gold pass, the highest priority for housing. Choice is maximised as tenants can apply for as many houses, in as many areas, as they wish.
- 3.10 The Partnership has set a target to let 50% of advertised properties to statutory homeless applicants. This is a positive commitment to help reduce homelessness. However, it does not have a clear procedure that demonstrates how it will achieve this target.
- 3.11 We found some minor inconsistencies in the Partnership's recently revised allocation policy. There is also no reference to domestic abuse, which is a significant omission. When we raised these with the Partnership, it took action to review the policy.
- 3.12 In 2005/06, under its previous allocation system, the Partnership allocated 83 houses. Of these, 22.9% were to homeless people nominated by ELC and 71.1% were to other ELC nominations. It allocated 4.8% to its tenants. All of the allocations we reviewed were to people with one or more of the needs identified in legislation.
- 3.13 Our case reviews showed that there was a clear audit trail that identified how the Partnership allocated its houses. It was clear why applicants were housed or why they had been bypassed. The Partnership's Board receives quarterly reports that provide information on all allocations.
- 3.14 Despite the move to CBL, the Partnership maintained an internal transfer list. Of the 13 relets^{*} between June 2006 and November 2006, five were to the Partnership's tenants. Our case reviews showed that the Partnership takes account of housing need when allocating homes to transfer applicants. However, the process is not transparent. When we raised this with the Partnership it agreed to review its approach. It will now ask transfer applicants to register with,

^{*} see glossary

and apply for housing, in the same way as other applicants. This will ensure greater transparency in the way it offers transfer applicants houses.

- 3.15 In summary, the Partnership is making a good contribution to alleviating homelessness in East Lothian. It is achieving good outcomes in meeting housing need and it is offering applicants' choice. It has encountered some minor procedural issues with the new allocation system, but it is dealing with these.

Sustaining tenancies and preventing homelessness

Social landlords should maximise security of tenure for all residents of their accommodation, and should work to sustain tenancies and prevent homelessness through their delivery of housing management services.

- 3.16 The Partnership has signed up all of its tenants to Scottish Secure Tenancy* (SST) agreements. None of its tenants are on a Short SST. The Partnership currently leases 34 of its properties to East Lothian Council for use as temporary accommodation for homeless people.
- 3.17 The provision of good information and access to support are important ways in which landlords can help to sustain tenancies. The Partnership provides a wide range of relevant and appropriate information to tenants in its tenants' handbook. It also gives good information to tenants at the tenancy sign-up and during post allocation visits. In the latest tenant satisfaction survey, 90% of tenants who responded stated that the Partnership had given them good information on their tenancy agreement.
- 3.18 The Partnership undertakes post allocation visits for all new tenants. At these visits it provides tenants with good information about their tenancies and the Partnership. The Partnership also uses this opportunity to identify any support the tenant may require. It will also refer tenants to other support providers where appropriate.
- 3.19 All the legal action that the Partnership takes to recover possession of its houses is due to rent arrears. In 2005/06, Homes for Life issued 27 Notice of

* see glossary

- Proceedings* and initiated court action against four of its tenants. When cases proceed to Court, the Partnership informs both ELC's social work department and the homelessness section. In the cases we reviewed, we found that the Partnership uses Notices appropriately and effectively.
- 3.20 The Partnership works well to minimise evictions. It has evicted two tenants in the last three years. Rent arrears cases we reviewed showed that the Partnership's rent arrears procedures are good and that it clearly works towards reducing the need to take legal action.
- 3.21 The Partnership has low levels of tenancy turnover*, with only 54 terminations between April 2003 and August 2006. The Partnership has had only two abandoned properties in the previous three years.
- 3.22 In summary, the Partnership provides good information to tenants. It works well to help tenants access support, and clearly aims to prevent the eviction of tenants. The Partnership's approach to assisting tenants to sustain their tenancies is a strength.

Quality of neighbourhoods

Social landlords should deliver services to ensure that neighbourhoods are attractive, well maintained and safe places to live. They should deal appropriately with antisocial behaviour.

- 3.23 The Partnership has built around 90% of its homes in the last seven years. It purchased the remainder from the Council, under a trickle transfer* process. The Partnership's homes are located in 22 settlements across East Lothian. The areas we visited during the inspection were free from problems such as graffiti or vandalism and the general environment was attractive. We witnessed some good examples of integrated, mixed tenure housing. However, in the latest Tenant Satisfaction Survey, only 77% of tenants were satisfied with their neighbourhood. The Partnership will be analysing the survey results further.

* see glossary

- 3.24 The Partnership does not consider antisocial behaviour a serious problem on its estates. It has recently introduced a policy and procedure which clarifies how it will deal with antisocial behaviour. When it receives a report of antisocial behaviour it considers a variety of methods to resolve the problem. It will use East Lothian Mediation Service if appropriate, and liaise with the Police and Social Work department when necessary. The Partnership gives tenants good information on the policy and procedures in the tenants' handbook and through its Newsletter.
- 3.25 There were eight antisocial behaviour cases in 2004/05. This increased to 17 cases during 2005/06. All reported cases were minor in nature. Our case reviews showed that:
- the Partnership was not completing cases until well outwith the target timescales;
 - there was no record of it keeping individuals up to date on how complaints were progressing; and
 - it had not recorded all complaints in the antisocial complaints register.
- 3.26 In summary, the Partnership provides homes in attractive, well-maintained neighbourhoods. However, it does not as yet understand the reasons why a significant percentage of tenants indicated they were not satisfied with their neighbourhood, although it will be examining this further. It has a fair approach in dealing with antisocial behaviour, although it needs to address some issues in the way it administers cases.

Responsiveness to tenants

Social landlords should place the people they serve at the heart of their work, treat them with respect and be responsive to their views and priorities. They should ensure that tenants are informed of and involved in decisions that affect the service they receive.

- 3.27 Homes for Life Housing Partnership is required by the Housing (Scotland) Act 2001 to publish a tenant participation strategy. The Act requires landlords to inform and consult tenants about changes to its services. It also requires landlords to take tenants views into account when making decisions that will affect them. The Partnership has met its statutory obligation to publish a strategy.

We looked at the Partnership's approach to consulting tenants on proposed policy and service changes. We found that it has attempted to involve tenants by seeking their views on changes to the allocation policy and on the annual rent increase. It also regularly seeks tenants' views on satisfaction. However, its failure to involve tenants in some policy reviews, including the review of the rent arrears policy, is a weakness. There are no Registered Tenants Organisations (RTOs) specifically for Homes for Life tenants. The Partnerships tenants can, however, participate in RTOs on the shared register maintained by the three local social landlords working in East Lothian, which includes Homes for Life.

- 3.28 The Partnership is aware that its approach to tenant participation is underdeveloped. It intends to develop a more formal consultative body, such as a tenants' panel or tenants' forum, during 2007.
- 3.29 The Partnership completed its third tenant satisfaction survey in July 2006. This postal survey achieved a response rate of 34%, or 84 out of 249 tenants. Of the tenants who responded, 90% were satisfied with the overall service provided by Homes for Life. The survey also showed that 18% of those responding were interested in becoming more involved in the work of the Partnership. The Partnership will be following-up on these results.
- 3.30 The Partnership has recently revised its complaints policy and this effectively sets out how it will deal with service delivery complaints. It advises tenants at the tenancy sign-up how to make a complaint and it gives the tenant a copy of the complaints policy. The complaints we reviewed showed that the Partnership deals effectively with complaints. In general, it meets timescales, keeps tenants informed and maintains good records.
- 3.31 In summary, the Partnership's responsiveness to tenants is fair. It has made attempts to understand the views and priorities of its tenants. However, it has not followed up on the satisfaction information it has received. It is aware that its approach to tenant participation is underdeveloped and consultation with tenants has been limited. In general, the Partnership has not used tenant feedback in a meaningful way to improve its services.

Is the service managed for improvement?

Resource management and efficiency

Social landlords should maximise their income in a way that is fair to service users, and manage costs effectively.

- 3.32 Homes for Life tenants can pay their rent at the post office and at local shops using a swipe card. In the most recent tenant satisfaction survey, 98% of tenants who responded found the methods of rent payment convenient.
- 3.33 The Partnership's total arrears as a percentage of its total rental income decreased from 3.3% in 2004/05 to 3.1% in 2005/06. The 2005/06 figure was the fourth lowest of the 17 RSLs in its peer group*.
- 3.34 The Partnership's current non technical arrears* have also shown an improvement. These have reduced from 1.9% in 2004/05, to 1.7% in 2005/06. This figure was the sixth lowest in the Partnership's peer group.
- 3.35 The proportion of the Partnership's tenants owing more than 13 weeks rent is significantly below peer and national levels. Former tenant arrears increased between 2004/05 and 2005/06, although this is still below peer and national figures.
- 3.36 The Partnership's good performance in minimising arrears has continued during the first seven months of the financial year 2006/07.

* see glossary

3.37 The table below summarises Homes for Life's reported performance in collecting rent.

	At March 2005	At March 2006			Apr-Nov 2006
	Homes for Life	Homes for Life	Peer group	National median	Homes for Life
Total arrears as % of total gross rental income	3.3%	3.1%	4.9%	5.2%	2%
Total current arrears as % of total gross rental income	2.6%	2.3%	3.5%	4%	2%
Current arrears (non technical) as % of total gross rental income	1.9%	1.7%	2.5%	2.8%	1.4%
Current arrears (technical) as % of total gross rental income	0.7%	0.6%	1%	0.8%	0.6%
% of current tenants in serious arrears	1.1%	1.2%	4.3%	3.9%	1.5%
Total former tenant arrears	£3,649	£6,455	-	-	£752
As % of total gross rental income	0.6%	0.8%	1.4%	1%	0.1%
Rent arrears written off	£1,399	£1,958	-	-	£0

Source: APSR/inspection submission

3.38 The Partnership's approach to minimising rent arrears, as assessed through our case reviews, is a strength. We found it:

- makes early and sustained contact with tenants in arrears;
- uses a good range of contact techniques, including home visits and text messaging;
- clearly records progress on each case;
- offers appropriate advice about agencies, such as welfare rights and the Citizens Advice Bureau;
- makes sustainable arrangements to repay arrears that are based on income and expenditure assessments; and
- reports appropriate information to the governing body.

* see glossary

3.39 The table below summarises Homes for Life's reported performance in letting houses that have become empty:

	2004-05	2005-06			Apr-Aug 2006
	Homes for Life	Homes for Life	Peer Group	National Median	Homes for Life
Rental income lost due to empty houses	£862	£6,735	-	-	£2,218
As % of total rental income	0.2%	0.8%	1.1%	0.8%	0.6%
Total no. of re-lets	11	17	-	-	7
% re-let in <2 weeks	54.5%	29.4%	38.6%	36.5%	57.1%
% re-let in 2-4 weeks	9.1%	35.3%	25.4%	27%	0%
% re-let in >4 weeks	36.4%	35.3%	36%	37.1%	42.9%
Average time to relet (days)	34	27	37	24	40**

Source: APSR

** As at end Nov 06

3.40 In 2005/06 the Partnership lost 0.8% of its total rental income because of empty houses. This is an increase on the previous year, but in line with the peer group figure and the national median*.

3.41 The Partnership's performance in minimising the length of time a property is empty is comparable with the rest of the sector. The average* relet time for 2005/06 of 27 days was better than the peer group average of 37 days, but worse than the national median of 24 days. In the financial year to November 2006, the time taken to relet vacant properties had increased significantly to 40 days.

3.42 The Partnership believes this dip in performance is due to failures with the nominations process and general problems with its maintenance contractor. It is confident that the new allocation process will reduce the length of time properties are empty. The Partnership is also considering tendering void maintenance separately from responsive repairs, should contractor problems not be resolved. At the time of our inspection, it was too early to determine the impact these changes will have on performance.

* see glossary

- 3.43 The Partnership's performance in letting newly built houses was better than the peer group figure. During 2005/06 it let all but one of its 66 newly built houses within two weeks.
- 3.44 Homes for Life's costs for delivering its housing management services decreased from £924 per house in 2004/05 to £642 in 2005/06. This is slightly higher than the peer group average for 2004/05 of £599.
- 3.45 In summary, the Partnership is good at maximising its income. Its approach to, and performance in minimising arrears, is a strength. There has been a recent decline in performance in re-letting empty houses. However, the Partnership is confident that its new allocation process will improve performance.

Performance management

Social landlords should have clear objectives, standards and targets for housing management services, should monitor achievement of those and should work to continuously improve services.

- 3.46 The Partnership does not yet have an effective planning framework for its housing management service. It does not have a robust process that identifies aims, objectives and priorities. The lack of any documented service plans or action plans is a weakness. The Partnership recognises that it needs to improve in this area and aims to develop an Internal Management Plan* in 2007. It also recognises the need to move towards a more formal setting of SMART* objectives and generally to develop its approach to performance management.
- 3.47 The Partnership has a comprehensive range of housing management policies that take account of legislation and good practice. However, most have had limited tenant input and there has been slippage against the timetable set for reviewing the policies.
- 3.48 In summary, the Partnership is fair at managing the performance of its housing management services. It has demonstrated a good awareness of its strengths and weaknesses. However, there is an absence of strategic and operational

* see glossary

plans. We did see evidence that the Partnership was taking action to improve service delivery.

Grade and overall assessment of housing management

3.49 Our overall assessment is that Homes for Life's housing management service is good. It has many strengths and some areas where improvement is needed. The Partnership has a good understanding of its strengths and weaknesses, and we saw that it has the ability to tackle its weaknesses. We set out below the key factors we have taken into account in coming to our overall assessment.

3.50 The Partnership's key strengths are:

- meeting housing need through allocations;
- maximising choice for applicants;
- the information and support given to tenants to help them to sustain their tenancies; and,
- its performance in minimising rent arrears.

3.51 The Partnership has a small number of weaknesses. The Partnership does not always consult with tenants during service reviews that may have a significant impact on them. Generally, tenant participation is not well developed. The Partnership also needs to develop its approach to performance management.

3.52 The Partnership does not yet have an effective planning framework for its housing management service. It has, however, demonstrated that it has taken action to change the service and introduce improvements where problems have arisen.

4. Property maintenance

4.1 The grade awarded for property maintenance is:

C	Fair	Some strengths, but with many areas where improvement is required or with a small number of significant weaknesses.
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4.2 We explain at the end of this section how the assessments and judgements we have made result in this grade.

Access to the repairs service

Social landlords should have arrangements in place that make it easy for tenants to report repairs and to have them carried out.

- 4.3 Tenants report repairs by telephoning or e-mailing a call centre operated by the Partnership's maintenance contractor. The call centre provides a text messaging service for those with hearing difficulties.
- 4.4 The Partnership does not receive any information on how effectively the call centre deals with tenants' calls. The Partnership also does not ask tenants in its satisfaction surveys how easy it is to report repairs. Overall, the Partnership does not have information to demonstrate how easily tenants can access the repairs service.
- 4.5 Tenants can make morning or afternoon appointments to have urgent and routine repairs undertaken. Performance information for 2005/06 shows that 93 out of 95 appointments were carried out on time.
- 4.6 The Partnership provides tenants with good information about the repairs service in its tenants' handbook. However, it does not advise tenants that they can contact the call centre by e-mail or through the text messaging service.
- 4.7 In summary, access to the repairs service is fair, although the Partnership does not fully understand how easy it is for tenants to access the service.

Speed and quality of response repairs service

Social landlords should set challenging targets for completing repairs, strive to achieve them and ensure repairs are completed to a high quality.

4.8 The Partnership's targets for completing repairs are 24 hours for emergencies, four days for urgent repairs, nine days for priority repairs and 23 days for routine repairs. For emergency, urgent and routine repairs the Partnership's targets are not as challenging as the national medians*. The Partnership also reports to the Board, tenants and Communities Scotland on target response times which can be different from target completion times. This can be confusing in determining actual performance against published targets. The table below details reported performance against target response times as detailed in the Partnership's Annual Performance and Statistical Return (APSR).

	Partnership's target response time	Performance				
		Partnership's performance			National median 2005/06	RSL peer group 2005/6
		2003/04	2004/05	2005/06		
Emergency Repairs	24 hours	63.6%	91.7%	98.5%	98.8%	92.9%
Urgent Repairs	3 days	13.7%	33.6%	90.0%**	95.7%	89.7%
Routine Repairs	21 days	90.8%	76.9%	81.9%	95.5%	88.3%

Source: Annual performance and statistical return (APSR)

** Based on response time of 6 days (APSR 2005/2006)

4.9 The Partnership's performance in completing emergency and urgent repairs has improved each year since 2003/04. In 2005/06 it ranked eleventh out of 17 RSLs in its peer group* for completing emergency repairs. Its performance was in line with the national median. Its performance for completing urgent and routine repairs is poorer than the national median. In its peer group it ranks tenth for urgent repairs and fourteenth for routine repairs. In summary, its reported performance for completing repairs against targets is good for emergency repairs but poorer for urgent and routine repairs.

4.10 We found weaknesses in the repairs process whereby the Partnership cannot be confident that the performance information it receives is accurate. It delegates significant control of the repairs process to its maintenance contractor and it

* see glossary

relies on the accuracy of its contractor's recording methods to measure performance.

- 4.11 The Partnership also demonstrates a lack of control in other areas. It only receives information from the Contractor fortnightly on repairs ordered through the Call Centre. The Partnership does not receive information from its contractor on completed jobs until the contractor submits invoices. This occurs at least two months after tenants report repairs. Its knowledge of repairs issues, between tenants reporting repairs and invoicing is poor. The Partnership also does not have a procedure in place that notifies it of emergency repairs undertaken outwith office hours. This is a further weakness as the Partnership will not be able to quickly follow-up on this type of work if it needs to.
- 4.12 Pre and post-inspections* are important tools for ensuring repairs are targeted accurately and carried out to a high standard. The Partnership does not carry out pre-inspections* as this is the responsibility of the contractor. It does not receive any information in relation to jobs that have been pre-inspected or the results of such inspections.
- 4.13 The Partnership post-inspects 10% of jobs. From our review of reporting arrangements it was evident that it was carrying out some post-inspections up to four months after repairs were completed. The Partnership's lack of control in this area is a further weakness.
- 4.14 Tenant satisfaction with the repairs service is fair. From the satisfaction survey undertaken in July 2006, 75.4% of tenants responding thought that the speed with which work was completed was fairly or very good. A higher percentage of tenants, 81.2%, thought that the quality of repair work was fairly or very good. These responses show that there is a significant level of dissatisfaction with both the speed and the quality of the service. Furthermore the Partnership's postal survey shows higher levels of dissatisfaction in comparison to previous postal surveys. The Partnership is to review its July satisfaction survey in order to analyse the results in more detail.

* see glossary

- 4.15 The Partnership points to a clear improvement in satisfaction levels when tenants began to telephone repairs directly to the contractor's call centre, in November 2005. It advised that previous problems and delays occurred due to the practice of faxing repairs to the Contractor. The Partnership also notes that it was difficult to arrange appointments on behalf of tenants. The Partnership, however, did not fully consider all the reasonable options available to it to improve the service and demonstrate control.
- 4.16 The Partnership gives tenants good information in relation to the Right to Repair* scheme. However, the scheme has not been in full operation as the contractor's IT system does not identify a repair as a Right to Repair. The Partnership believes that the contractor has therefore not given tenants correct information when they report this type of repair. The Partnership was unable to provide figures on the number of Right to Repairs that tenants reported. It advises that its contractor's IT problems will be resolved soon.
- 4.17 There are major weaknesses in the way the Partnership delivers its responsive repairs service. This mainly stems from the lack of control it has over the delivery of the service. The Partnership is generally unaware of how its contractor delivers the service on a day-to-day basis. It also does not know enough about the way its contractor collates performance information to be confident that it is receiving accurate information.

Physical quality of houses

Social landlords should have good information about the condition of their houses and should deliver effective maintenance programmes that take account of housing quality and home safety needs.

- 4.18 Scottish Ministers have set a target that all social landlords' houses should meet the new Scottish Housing Quality Standard* (SHQS) by 2015. Social landlords were required to prepare a plan by April 2005 showing how they will achieve this. The Partnership submitted a self-assessment within the timescale. Communities

* see glossary

Scotland has reviewed this and following discussions with the Partnership has no concerns over its ability to meet the requirements of the SHQS by 2015.

4.19 The Partnership has built 277 new homes and has 27 properties that it acquired from the Council under a trickle transfer* process. It has carried out a full stock condition survey of the 27 trickle transfer properties. It also has life cycle costing* information for all its new build properties. Overall the Partnership has good information in relation to the future maintenance requirements of all of its stock. It has put in place appropriate costed plans for its future planned and cyclical maintenance programmes. In summary, the Partnership knows how much it needs to spend, and when, in order to effectively maintain its houses.

4.20 The Partnership aims to meet high standards of design in all its new build properties. All of its new build properties must meet, as a minimal requirement, the SHQS. Other standards it aims to achieve includes designing the properties, where possible, to comply with:

- housing for varying needs design guide;
- Secure by Design standards; and
- national energy efficiency standards.

4.21 All the Partnership's new build properties have hard wired smoke detectors and carbon dioxide detectors. Its 27 trickle transfer properties have battery operated detectors. Properties subject to the annual gas servicing contract have their detectors inspected annually. Properties without gas have their detectors inspected as part of a five-yearly electrical safety test.

4.22 None of the Partnership's properties have lead mains.

4.23 Social landlords are required to carry out gas safety checks every 12 months on all gas appliances and flues they provide for tenants' use. The table below summarises the Partnership's performance in this area.

* see glossary

	March 2005	
	Number of houses	%
Houses with gas appliances	180	100%
Houses with current gas safety certificates	180	100%
Houses where safety check was carried out within 12 months of previous check	150	83.3%
Houses where safety check was up to 1 month late	15	8.3%
Houses where safety check was between 1 and 3 months late	2	1.1%
Houses where safety check was more than 3 months late	13	7.2%

Source: Inspection submission.

- 4.24 During 2005, the Partnership was concerned about the poor level of service and the overall performance of its gas maintenance contractor. The Partnership tendered the gas servicing and maintenance contract in 2005 and performance has improved significantly since the appointment of a new contractor. At the time of our inspection, all properties with gas appliances had a valid gas safety certificate. There are a number of properties where it had not undertaken the inspection within the previous 12 months.
- 4.25 Our case reviews showed that the Partnership has a good system in place to monitor and administer gas servicing. The cases we sampled mirrored the information provided by the Partnership in its inspection submission*.
- 4.26 Social landlords have a statutory duty to manage asbestos in the common areas of their properties. The Partnership has 15 new build properties with common access and it did not use asbestos in their construction.
- 4.27 The Partnership has a relet standard that ensures it lets properties at a minimum standard. The standard ensures that new tenants receive properties that are clean and tidy and free from the need for significant repairs. It post inspects all void properties following repair work. No applicant has refused a property on the grounds of its condition.

* see glossary

4.28 The Partnership's houses are in good condition and it has appropriate plans in place to it maintain its stock in the future. It has effective procedures in place to deal with safety issues. Although it has not always fully met its responsibilities in relation to gas servicing it has taken effective steps to deal with this.

Responsiveness to tenants

Social landlords should place the people they serve at the heart of their work, treat them with respect and be responsive to their views and priorities.

4.29 The Partnership seeks tenants' views about the repairs service through its comprehensive satisfaction survey. It also issues a postal survey for all tenants who report repairs. It follows these up with telephone surveys when there is a low response.

4.30 The Partnership's last full tenants satisfaction survey was carried out in July 2006. The results showed that 82% of tenants that responded to the survey were very or fairly satisfied with the Partnership's repairs service. When asked if the service needed to be improved, 33 tenants out of 77 responding (42%) thought there could be improvements to the service. Due to staff shortages, the Partnership has not yet fully considered the implications of the survey results. It intends to do this in the near future and will put in place action plans where necessary.

4.31 Results from the postal surveys show that satisfaction in 2005 was good. Quarterly surveys since 2005 show that between 93% and 96% of tenants were satisfied with the way the Partnership carried out repairs. Satisfaction with the time it took to complete the repairs was more variable. Between 83% and 92% of tenants were satisfied with how quickly repairs were completed. Satisfaction has significantly reduced during 2006. For the quarter June 2006 to September 2006, 40% of tenants responding were not satisfied with the repair undertaken and 54% were not satisfied with the time it took to undertake the repair. The Partnership is discussing these issues with the contractor.

4.32 The Partnership does not have a formal process in place that analyses satisfaction returns. It does not have any action plans or service objectives that

demonstrate it uses satisfaction information to improve the delivery of the service.

- 4.33 The Partnership does not have a clear structure through which tenants can routinely participate in the work of the organisation. The Partnership did, however, consult tenants when it was considering changing the repair reporting procedures. It received 20 responses to the consultation and a majority of tenants agreed with the proposals.
- 4.34 The Partnership has received very few formal complaints about the repairs service. We reviewed one complaint and found that it had dealt with it appropriately.
- 4.35 In summary, the Partnership's methods of engaging with its tenants are underdeveloped. It seeks views on satisfaction. However, it carries out postal surveys a long time after a tenant has had a repair completed. It has consulted on a major change to the service. However, apart from this one instance it is not possible to identify other areas where tenants have, or can, influence the delivery of the service.

Is the service managed for improvement?

Resource management and efficiency

Social landlords should manage the cost of their services effectively and procure repairs and maintenance services in a way that takes account of quality.

- 4.36 The Partnership's management costs for delivering its property maintenance service in 2004/05 were £8.85 for each of its houses. This has reduced to £3.47 per house for 2005/06. The costs in 2004/05 were significantly below the peer group figure of £210.08 and the national figure of £234.21. The key reason for such low costs is that the Partnership delegates much of the management of the responsive repairs service to its contractor. The costs also reflect the fact that most of the Partnership's properties are new build and consequently have a low level of responsive and planned maintenance* needs.

* see glossary

- 4.37 When the Partnership acquired its first properties, it entered into a negotiated contract with the Council's direct labour organisation for the provision of the responsive repairs service. The Partnership identified this as the most cost effective way of carrying out repairs in its early years. It is to tender the contract in 2007.
- 4.38 The Partnership is confident that it is achieving good value for money. The key factors it identifies, that demonstrate this, are:
- average repairs cost per property is £70.00;
 - charges are made in line with the Council's own Schedule of Rates*;
 - it has access to a 24 hour call centre at no additional cost;
 - it has access to a specialist pre-inspection service at no additional cost; and
 - there are no additional costs for the provision of emergency cover.
- 4.39 The above factors and general costs indicate that the Partnership is achieving value for money for its repairs service. However, there are general weaknesses with monitoring and control. As noted in paragraph 4.10 and 4.11, the Partnership has delegated significant control of the responsive repairs service to the contractor. The contractor has delegated authority to carry out any repairs up to the value of £250.00. It also pre-inspects repairs and orders the work. We also saw evidence of significant time delays between tenants reporting repairs, the Partnership receiving invoices and the Partnership making payments.
- 4.40 The Partnership has effective procedures in place to recover rechargeable repairs*. It raised £978.16 in 2005/06 and recovered £737.21 (75%). For 2006/07 it has to date raised £779.13 and recovered £481.20 (62%).
- 4.41 The Partnership's maintenance costs are low. This is primarily due to the fact that it has passed significant control and administration of the service to its contractor. It also reflects the fact the Partnership's properties are primarily new build and repair needs are minimal. In summary, however, the Partnership does not demonstrate effective control over the responsive repairs service.

* see glossary

Performance management

Social landlords should have clear objectives, standards and targets for property maintenance services, should monitor achievement of these, and should work to continuously improve services.

- 4.42 The Partnership does not have an effective planning framework for its property maintenance service. Its approach to strategic planning is weak and it does not have a clear framework for delivering improvements to the service.
- 4.43 The Partnership's performance management framework is underdeveloped. It has not developed a useful set of service standards and does not set indicators or targets beyond a basic level. It also does not review and adjust indicators and targets in light of performance and as a method of encouraging improvement. The Partnership is aware of the weaknesses in its performance management framework and it is planning to address these.

Grade and overall assessment of property maintenance

- 4.44 Our overall assessment is that Homes for Life Housing Partnership's property maintenance service is fair. We found some strengths but with many areas where improvement is required.
- 4.45 In coming to our overall assessment we have taken account of the balance of strengths and the areas that it needs to improve across the service. The Partnership's houses are in good condition. It has made good provisions for the future maintenance of the stock and responsive repairs costs are low. The Partnership is also aware of weaknesses in its service and is committed to making improvements.
- 4.46 We found areas of significant weaknesses where the Partnership needs to make improvements. Critically, the Partnership demonstrates a lack of control over the delivery of the responsive repairs service and reporting arrangements between the Partnership and its contractor are poor. The Partnership also demonstrates a lack of knowledge of how its contractor runs the service, particularly in relation to the call centre and pre and post-inspections. It is also not fully complying with the

requirements of the Right to Repair and has an underdeveloped performance management framework.

5. Governance and financial management

Leadership and direction

A clear vision or purpose and an inclusive, well-informed planning process are key to effectively delivering the services that tenants want.

- 5.1 The Partnership's key objective, since its formation, was to construct new homes and assist the Council in meeting the aims of the Local Housing Strategy in East Lothian. The Partnership recently failed to secure funding to continue the construction of new homes. This is a fundamental change in the purpose that the organisation was set up for, and consequently, it will be examining its future role and direction.
- 5.2 The Partnership's main strategic document is its business plan. The key objectives of the plan were to review strategic options for viability and to secure funding from the Council for at least one viable new build option. The plan does not contain any detail in relation to how it will deliver its services. It has no operational objectives or targets.
- 5.3 The Partnership held a strategic planning workshop in 2004. The purpose of this workshop was to start to develop the aims and objectives of the organisation. It looked at the organisation's strengths and weaknesses and reviewed the indicators and targets necessary to measure its performance in delivering services. The Partnership does not have any robust document, such as an Internal Management Plan* (IMP), that achieves this. This is a significant weakness.
- 5.4 The Partnership is aware that the lack of an IMP is a weakness and it intends to put one in place during 2007.

* see glossary

Clear functions and proper control

Social landlords should be clear about the functions of the governing body, and take informed, transparent decisions within a framework of controls.

- 5.5 The Partnership's Board meets ten times each year and deals with most of the organisation's business. When necessary, an audit sub-committee and a health and safety sub-committee support the Board. These committees have clearly defined roles and meet between two and four times per year. The Partnership advises that the current structure is appropriate for the needs of the organisation.
- 5.6 The Board receives a significant quantity of reports at its monthly meeting. It also receives quarterly performance reports for housing management and maintenance. The Partnership has not reviewed the level, quality or quantity of information the Board receives to ensure that it is appropriate and relevant.

Developing capacity

Social landlords should ensure their governing bodies have the skills and experience they need to perform well, develop their capacity and evaluate their performance.

- 5.7 The Board of Directors is experienced and knowledgeable. The Partnership keeps good records on the training the Directors undertake. However, since March 2004, apart from attendance at conferences, there have been few training courses attended. This is despite Directors identifying the need for training, or refresher courses, during a training needs survey in July 2005.
- 5.8 The Partnership has effective induction arrangements in place for new Board Directors. New Directors receive an induction pack, visit the office and receive briefings from key members of staff. Where appropriate, new members attend relevant external training courses.

Accountability

Engaging stakeholders, public reporting and making accountability real.

- 5.9 A strong membership and good levels of participation at Annual General Meetings (AGMs) are important ways for landlords to demonstrate accountability. The Partnership encourages new tenants to become members of the Partnership

at tenancy sign-up and at post allocation visits. It has been relatively successful and by November 2006 it had 66 members.

- 5.10 However, attendance at the AGM is poor and only 7.6% of members attended the last meeting. The Partnership is aware that it needs to do more to encourage attendance at its AGM.
- 5.11 The Partnership's Board of Directors consists of up to four directors nominated from the Council and up to four Directors nominated from ELHA. In other categories tenants elect up to four Directors and ordinary members elect up to two Directors. It is not clear if this type of constitutional arrangement best serves the Partnership. This is particularly relevant now that the role of the Partnership in delivering new build housing in East Lothian has ended. The Partnership noted in its inspection submission that it would review its governance arrangements this year.
- 5.12 Social landlords should place the people they serve at the heart of their work and be responsive to their views and priorities. The Partnership does not have a clear structure through which tenants can routinely participate in the work of the organisation. It does not have any tenants groups and there is little evidence of any meaningful attempts to have participative structures put in place. In its July 2006 satisfaction survey 18% of tenants responding were interested in becoming more involved in the management of their homes. The Partnership is to follow-up on the results of this survey.
- 5.13 The Partnership is good at seeking tenants' views on satisfaction with their service. However, there is little evidence that these views have led to changes in the services provided. The Partnership is aware that it needs to develop its approach to tenant participation. It intends to introduce a tenants' forum or tenants' panel in 2007.

5.14 Social landlords should give stakeholders* the information that they need about the organisation and its plans, services and performance. The Partnership provides its tenants and partners with a summary annual report. This report details the organisation's performance across key indicators for the year. It also provides tenants with an informative newsletter on a quarterly basis. The Partnership plans to develop a website in 2007.

Ethical Standards

Staff and governing body members should promote values that underpin good governance and should act with honesty and integrity, focusing on the best interests of the organisation and its service users.

5.15 The Partnership is fully aware of the need for Directors to maintain the highest of ethical standards. It has adopted a comprehensive Code of Governance and Directors annually declare any potential conflicts of interest. By the nature of the Partnership's work and its Board membership structure, there is an increased likelihood that conflicts of interest will arise. This particularly affects the founding member organisations; ELC and ELHA.

5.16 The Partnership asks Directors to declare conflicts of interest at the beginning of every meeting and to be aware of conflicts that may arise during meetings. When a conflict of interest has arisen, the Partnership has allowed Directors with the conflict to remain in attendance at meetings. These Directors have taken part in discussions, although, they did not vote when a decision was required. The Partnership has not fully followed its Code of Governance in relation to this matter and consequently the decision making process is not as transparent as it should be. The Partnership has agreed to review its policy and practice on this, taking account of the new Regulatory Code of Governance and supplementary guidance recently issued by Communities Scotland.

5.17 The Partnership is fully aware of the requirements of Part 1 of Schedule 7 of the Housing (Scotland) Act 2001*. To date it has had no Schedule 7 issues to deal with.

* see glossary

Managing risk

Social landlords should be aware of all the risks they face and put in place robust arrangements to minimise these risks and to deal with them if they do occur.

- 5.18 The Partnership put in place a risk management strategy in 2003. The strategy was due for review in 2005, although this is still outstanding. It does not cover the full range of risks that the Partnership faces and particularly does not identify or rate risks associated with housing management.
- 5.19 The Partnership has had a rolling programme of internal audit in place since 2004. The internal audit process has been effective in reducing the possibility of risk materialising. It has raised important recommendations for the Partnership to deal with. The Partnership had put in place an action plan by the time of our inspection, for the audit undertaken in October 2006.
- 5.20 The Partnership showed a good approach to dealing with development risk in its Business Plan in March 2006. The Business plan identified six possible future scenarios that could occur depending on development funding outcomes. Each of the scenarios identified costs and the likely impact on the Partnership.
- 5.21 In summary, the Partnership's governance of the organisation is poor. From a strategic perspective the lack of an Internal Management Plan is a significant weakness. It has no planning framework for the delivery of services. The structure of the Board leads to significant conflicts of interests and it has not reviewed this structure since it was established. The Partnership has not reviewed its risk management strategy since 2003 despite it having a review date of 2005. The Partnership's fundamental purpose, to develop new houses, no longer applies, and the organisation needs to robustly address what its future role will be.

Financial viability and management

Social landlords should be financially viable in the medium term and sustainable in the longer term and should have a robust financial management framework.

5.22 Homes for Life Housing Partnership has a good approach to financial management. Its financial projections demonstrate medium term viability. It has some exposure to financial risk that arises from the original stock transfer and its general funding structure. Overall, in the medium term, financial risk is low

5.23 The Partnership delivers a satisfactory financial performance. It has generated surpluses over the last three years and anticipates that this trend will continue over the next five years. At the most recent financial year end, cash balances were in excess of £1 million. The table below summarises key financial information over the last three years.

Financial performance	2003/04 (Actual)	2004/05 (Actual)	2005/06 (Actual)	2006/07 (Budget)
Turnover - £'000s	434	604	1,328	894
Operating Surplus/ (Deficit) - %	25.4	39.7	58.4	42.4
Net Surplus/ (Deficit) - %	25.4	26.1	35.7	100.3*

* The net surplus is higher than the operating surplus due to the Partnership selling land back to ELC

5.24 The Partnership has appropriate procedures in place to set its annual budget. The procedures indicate that it will review budgets mid-year. It ensures that timescale allow for consultation with staff and tenants. The Board discuss and agree the budget in advance of the new financial year. The Partnership advised us that they had encountered minor difficulties in fully implementing the procedures, but that it has now resolved these difficulties.

5.25 The Partnership reviews its actual performance against its budget through its quarterly management accounts. The review covers performance in relation to income and expenditure. Variance reporting does not extend to the balance sheet. The management accounts have a brief commentary that discusses the

five largest variances. The Partnership also prepares a report on key performance indicators, and this incorporates comparisons with its peer group's performance. In summary, the Partnership approach to monitoring its budget is generally good.

- 5.26 The Partnership's 30-year financial plans include up to date lifecycle costing information. These plans include the necessary costs to comply with the SHQS and for the future maintenance of the stock. It reviews its plans as part of the annual business planning review.
- 5.27 The Partnership has recently revised its medium and long term financial projections as it will no longer be building new houses. Despite this major change in its role the Partnership continues to demonstrate medium term viability. The Partnership's financial health is satisfactory, and in some respects will strengthen as it reduces its borrowing, and the costs associated with servicing that debt.

6. Areas for Improvement Action

These are the key areas that the Partnership needs to target for improvement action. They are broadly in order of priority within each of the key service areas.

In governance and financial management, the Partnership should:

- review the organisation's purpose following the fundamental change to its future direction;
- review its governance arrangements to ensure that they are relevant in relation to the strategic changes that have taken place;
- introduce an internal management plan that identifies strategic and operational priorities and how these will be delivered and monitored;
- strengthen its approach to risk management based on an up to date assessment of all the risks it faces;
- review the level, quantity and quality of information presented to the Board; and
- develop a strategy to improve attendance at the Partnership's AGM.

In housing management, the Partnership should:

- demonstrate effective planning in the development of the service; and
- improve the administration of antisocial behaviour cases;

In property maintenance, the Partnership should:

- improve its control of the responsive repairs service;
- better understand how easy it is for its tenants to access the repairs service;
- put in place better reporting arrangements between the Partnership and its contractor; and
- ensure it is meeting its obligations in relation to Right to Repair.

Across all of its activities, Homes for Life should:

- introduce an effective approach to strategic and operational planning;
- develop its performance management framework and introduce SMART objectives and appropriate targets;
- develop appropriate structures that provide tenants with better opportunities to be involved in the work of the Partnership;

7. Next Steps

- 7.1 This report highlights our findings following the inspection. We expect all organisations to respond effectively to our recommendations using their own improvement planning processes. We ask organisations that receive fair or poor assessments overall in their housing management, property maintenance or governance and financial management to submit an improvement plan to us within eight weeks of the publication of this report. The plan should show how the organisation intends to respond to our findings.
- 7.2 Homes for Life should submit an improvement plan to us that shows how the Partnership intends to respond to our findings in governance and property management. We will agree the plan with the Partnership and we will follow it up at regular intervals.
- 7.3 If you would like to see Homes for Life improvement plan you should contact:

Homes for Life Housing Partnership
57 Market Street
Haddington
EH41 3JG
Telephone: 01620 829300
E-mail: <mailto:info@homesforlife.co.uk>

Sources of Evidence

Groups and third parties consulted

- Communities Scotland Area Team
- East Lothian Council
- Lothian and Borders Police
- Aberlour Childcare Trust
- Shelter
- Ark Community Networks
- East Lothian Housing Association
- Citizens Advice Bureau

Interviews/meetings/discussions

- Members of the Partnership's Board of Directors
- Business Manager
- Customer Services Manager
- Customer Services Assistant
- Housing Officer

Reality checks

- Review of antisocial behaviour complaints
- Review of arrears cases
- Review of complaints
- Review of gas safety documents
- Review of housing applications and allocations
- Review of information for applicants and tenants
- Review of legal actions against tenants
- Review of responsive repairs
- Review of Section 5 referrals
- Review of void management records
- Estate visit
- Shadowing* of staff
- Observation of Board meeting

Key documents reviewed

- Inspection submission
- Annual Accounts for year ending 2005/06
- Business Plan
- Arrears policy and procedures
- Allocations policy
- Complaints Policy
- Antisocial Behaviour policy

* see glossary

- Estates management policy
- Newsletters
- Code of governance
- Risk management strategy
- Tenant participation strategy
- Tenant satisfaction survey
- Performance monitoring reports for rent arrears, allocations, complaints, antisocial behaviour, void management, and responsive repairs
- Responsive repairs policy and procedures
- Tenants' Handbook
- Void policy and procedures

Glossary

Annual Performance and Statistical Return (APSR)	Annual questionnaire completed by RSLs and sent to Communities Scotland. Used to keep the Register of Social Landlords up to date and to track the performance of RSLs.
Choice based lettings (CBL)	A lettings scheme which allows people to apply for advertised vacancies. The successful applicant is the person with the highest priority for the property which they have bid for.
Average	The arithmetic mean – the sum of all the values divided by the number of values.
Housing list	A list of applicants for housing which is used by the RSL to allocate its housing stock.
Inspection submission	Documents submitted by the landlord at the start of the inspection to provide information on its performance, context and how it is structured.
Internal Management Plan (IMP)	Strategic plan which sets out what the organisation aims and objectives are, as well as outlining how it will achieve them.
Life cycle costs	A method of calculating the cost and timing of the repairs to, and replacement of, major building components.
National median	The central value of the ordered performance of all Scottish RSLs.
Non Technical Arrears	Rental charges owed to a landlord after any outstanding Housing Benefit claims or payments have been taken account of.
Notice of proceedings (NOP)	Documentation required to be served by a landlord advising the tenant(s) of the landlord's intention to raise an action in the courts to end the tenancy.
Peer group	A group of organisations facing similar tasks and challenges with which comparisons can be made. RSLs choose which peer group they belong to when they submit their APSR.
Performance Standards	Housing standards for all social landlords in Scotland.
Planned maintenance	The planned renewal or maintenance of key property components.
Post-inspection	Inspection by a member of the landlords staff to check the on the quality or deal with a complaint concerning a

	response repair.
Pre-inspection	Inspection by a member of the landlords staff to check on the exact nature of the work required before ordering a response repair.
Rechargeable repairs	Work that is the responsibility of the tenant but has been done by the landlord.
Registered social landlord (RSL)	A landlord providing social rented housing that is registered and regulated by Communities Scotland.
Re-lets	Lets made to the second or subsequent tenant. Distinguished from new lets that are made when the property is first built or modernised.
Right to Buy	Many Scottish secure tenants have the right to buy their property at a discounted price subject to length of tenancy.
Right to Repair	Statutory scheme which sets out timescales for some repairs and actions which can be taken if timescales are exceeded.
Schedule of Rates	List of costs for repair items, usually organised by trade.
Scottish Housing Quality Standard (SHQS)	Was brought in to ensure minimum quality standards across all of Scotland's homes and is to be achieved by 2015.
Scottish Secure Tenancy (SST)	The Housing (Scotland) Act 2001 establishes the SST as the tenancy for all tenants of social landlords in Scotland.
Short Scottish Secure Tenancy (SSST)	Section 34 and schedule 6 of the Housing (Scotland) Act 2001 establish the basic conditions when a Short Scottish Secure Tenancy can apply to some tenants of social landlords in Scotland in place of a full SST.
Schedule 7 of the Housing (Scotland) Act 2001	Defines how those involved with RSLs (governing body members and staff) do not benefit in an inappropriate fashion.
Section 5 referral	Under Section 5 of the Housing (Scotland) Act 2001 a local authority can request a registered social landlord which has accommodation in its area to provide accommodation to homeless people. This request is known as a Section 5 referral.
Serious arrears	Where a tenant owes more than 13 weeks rent payments and this is more than £250.
Shadowing	An inspection technique that involves accompanying and

observing staff while they carried out their day-to-day tasks.

SMART

Performance management acronym for: Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Relevant and Timebound.

Stakeholder(s)

Any person or organisation who obtains a service from the landlord or is effected by the landlord's actions.

Statutory reasonable preference categories

People who have one of these housing needs: homelessness, overcrowding, large families, living in below tolerable standard housing or unsatisfactory living conditions.

Trickle Transfer

A method of changing ownership of houses from one landlord to another, as houses become empty

Turnover (empty houses)

The number of houses that are vacated in a year expressed as a percentage of the landlords housing stock.

Regulation & Inspection

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SCOTTISH EXECUTIVE