

Inspection report

Whiteinch & Scotstoun Housing Association

August 2005

Contents

	Summary	
1.	Introduction	1
2.	Context	3
3.	Housing management	6
4.	Property maintenance	23
5.	Governance and financial management	33
6.	Areas for improvement action	41
7.	Next steps	43
Appendix 1	Sources of evidence	
Appendix 2	Glossary	

Whiteinch & Scotstoun Housing Association Inspection 2005 – Summary

This inspection was carried out by Communities Scotland 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. The inspection of Whiteinch & Scotstoun Housing Association took place during March 2005.

We awarded Whiteinch & Scotstoun the following grades:

Housing management	D	Poor	Major areas where improvement is needed or where a number of very significant weaknesses are found.
Property maintenance	C	Fair	Some strengths, but with many areas where improvement is required or with a small number of significant weaknesses.

Inspection Findings

The Association owns 932 houses in the Whiteinch and Scotstoun areas of Glasgow, west of the city centre. All of its houses are situated in close proximity to its office.

The Association has undergone major changes to its business in the last two years, including a change of Chief Executive, at the same time as preparing to manage local houses on behalf of Glasgow Housing Association. It is aware that it has many areas of improvement to address. The Association lost momentum in the management of its housing services during this period and is only now beginning to address this in a planned way.

Whiteinch & Scotstoun is run by a Management Committee comprising six of the Association's tenants, four general members and one co-opted member. It recognises that weaknesses in strategic planning and performance management restrict the Committee's ability to guide and control its activities and services effectively. To improve its performance, it needs to develop a more robust and detailed information and performance management framework. Whiteinch & Scotstoun is financially viable in the medium term and it has a good financial management framework.

The Association is developing a range of ways for tenants to influence how its services are delivered, but it needs to improve the effectiveness of these measures. Its housing management and property maintenance services have some strengths that it will be able to build on in future.

Key strengths in Whiteinch & Scotstoun's services are:

- its houses are in good condition;
- it lets its houses to people in housing need;
- it maintains good quality neighbourhoods; and
- most tenants are satisfied with its major repairs and improvement work on their homes.

Key areas for improvement in its services are:

- transparency in its housing allocations;
- the management and quality control of its responsive repairs;
- the management of gas safety in its houses;
- the provision of equal access to its houses for all applicants;
- the management of rent arrears; and
- the management of empty houses.

Next steps

We require Whiteinch & Scotstoun to give this summary of the inspection report to all its tenants. Whiteinch & Scotstoun should produce an improvement plan to show how it intends to respond to our findings. The plan will be agreed with us.

How to get more information and contact details

If you would like to see Whiteinch & Scotstoun's improvement plan you should contact:

Whiteinch & Scotstoun Housing Association Ltd
1040 Dumbarton Road
Glasgow G14 9UL

TELEPHONE: 0141 954 0204

EMAIL: imorrison@wsha.org.uk

WEBSITE: www.wsha.org.uk

The full report is on our website at www.communitiesscotland.gov.uk.

This Summary can also be made available on tape, in Braille, large print and community languages. For information please contact Janette Campbell on 0131 479 5163 or email: janette.campbell@communitiesscotland.gsi.gov.uk.

اپنی کمیونٹی میں بولی جانے والی زبان میں اس دستاویز کے ترجمے کے بارے میں معلومات کیلئے برائے مہربانی
جینٹ کیمبل Janette Campbell کو 0131 479 5162 پر فون کریں یا اس پتے پر ای میل کریں

janette.campbell@communitiesscotland.gsi.gov.uk

如果索取這文件的翻譯版本，請致電 **Janette Campbell**
0131 479 5162，或電郵以下地址
janette.campbell@communitiesscotland.gsi.gov.uk

আপনার সম্প্রদায়ের ভাষায় এই দলিলপত্রের অনুবাদের জন্য জ্যানিট ক্যাম্বেল-কে 0131 479 5162 নম্বরে
ফোন করবেন অথবা janette.campbell@communitiesscotland.gsi.gov.uk ঠিকানায় ই-মেইল
করবেন।

لمزيد من المعلومات عن ترجمة هذا المسند الى لغة جاليتكم، الرجاء الإتصال بـ:
Janette Campbell على رقم الهاتف 0131 479 5162. أو عن طريق البريد الإلكتروني على
التالي: janette.campbell@communitiesscotland.gsi.gov.uk

1. Introduction

About this inspection

- 1.1 This inspection was carried out by Communities Scotland 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.

The inspection team

1.5 The Whiteinch & Scotstoun inspection was managed by Chris Thirkettle (Inspection Manager). The lead Inspector was David Love who was supported by Louise Irving (Inspection Officer), Morag Macleod (Inspection Officer) and Murray Smith (Financial Analyst). We were on site between 1 and 16 March 2005. We would like to thank everyone involved in the inspection, particularly the governing body, staff and tenants 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. We require that the summary of this report is issued to all tenants.

2. Context

About the organisation

- 2.1 Whiteinch & Scotstoun Housing Association was registered with Scottish Homes (now Communities Scotland) in 1978. The Association operates with a Committee of Management currently comprising 10 elected members, six of whom are tenants, with one co-opted member. There is a mix of newer members and others who have been in place for some time.
- 2.2 The Association has undergone major changes to its business in the last 2 years. In June 2003 its Chief Executive retired after 25 years in post, and a successor did not take up his position until February 2004. During this time the Association had achieved Local Housing Organisation status with Glasgow Housing Association (GHA). Preparations for this role largely dominated activities for about 18 months, including the first 9-10 months of the new Chief Executive's tenure. These involved finalising a management agreement with GHA, setting up a dedicated LHO office for its seconded staff and consultation with local GHA tenants regarding the management of their houses.
- 2.3 The Association also believes that service delivery has been adversely affected during the last few years by being under-staffed until very recently, due to a combinations of staff restructuring and sickness absence. It recognises that it has many areas of improvement to address.

The locality

- 2.4 Whiteinch & Scotstoun provides housing and other services in two long-established communities on the north bank of the Clyde, three miles west of Glasgow city centre. Unemployment rates for the city centre area, at 5.5%, are 1.5% higher than the Scottish average. The Scottish parliamentary constituency which covers the Whiteinch & Scotstoun areas has a much higher proportion of one person households (35%) than the Scottish average, and the median age for

the resident population, at 31 years, is considerably lower than the national median. The area has a higher than average proportion of residential properties lacking basic amenities; there is a much lower proportion of residents who have central heating and sole use of a bath/shower and toilet than in Scotland as a whole (81% against a national average of 92%).

- 2.5 The Association currently has a rented housing stock of 932 units. Most of these (737) are modernised pre-1919 tenements and there are 2 pre-1919 houses. The remainder are post-1982 new build properties, 114 of which are tenements or flats, with 30 sheltered housing units and 20 amenity flats. The tenement stock was acquired through the Housing Action Area programme, involving purchase from individual owners, while the sheltered housing stock was acquired through a transfer from Scottish Homes.
- 2.6 The Association is relocating to new offices at a site in the centre of Whiteinch. The office accommodation constitutes one component of a larger development by the Association which will include a neighbourhood centre for use by the local community, 23 new build flats for rent and four workspaces.
- 2.7 The table below provides summary information for Whiteinch & Scotstoun, showing trends over the last three financial years.

Key statistics

	2001-2002	2002-2003	2003-2004
Houses owned	909	961	932
Employees	22	22	24
Annual turnover (£000)	N/A	2,236	2,445
Total possible rental income (£000)	2178	2173	2150
Rental income from housing benefit	55.1%	59.8%	53.3%
Average weekly rent	N/A	£42.39	£44.08
Average rent increase	4.3%	3.2%	5%
Houses re-let	89	126	90
Responsive repairs carried out	2784	2880	3104
Maintenance spend per house	N/A	£169.69	£191.00
Right To Buy sales	5	12	10

Source: APSR and Annual Accounts 2001 – 2004

2.8 Whiteinch & Scotstoun selected Peer Group 4 (pre 1919, urban areas, more than 250 units) as its most appropriate peer group, and throughout this report information on Whiteinch & Scotstoun's performance is given alongside comparative information for that peer group.

3. Housing management

3.1 The grade awarded for housing management is:

D	Poor	Major areas where improvement is needed or where a number of very significant weaknesses are found.
---	------	---

We explain at the end of this section how the assessments 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 maximise access to housing.

3.2 We found that Whiteinch & Scotstoun operates an open housing list, and people aged 16 and over can apply at any time. The Association promotes its housing list well in a range of locations: the local library, its own office reception area, newsletters and on its website. It is dealing positively with equalities issues around access by translating information on its posters into community languages, and plans to do the same with its website. Whiteinch & Scotstoun provides supplies of its application forms to local agencies such as Women's Aid and the local authority social services. The information for applicants in its application pack includes contact details for alternative housing providers in the Glasgow city area. We found that staff also offer applicants helpful information verbally on the application process.

3.3 The Association carried out a review of its housing list immediately prior to our inspection which resulted in a reduction in the number of applicants on its list from 1425 to around 300. The removal of out of date information will enable offers to be made more quickly to the right applicants but the Association had not been carrying out reviews regularly prior to this, due to a lack of staff resources.

- 3.4 The Association has a target of 20 working days for processing housing applications, but has only begun monitoring its performance in the current year. In the period up to the end of December 2004, it took an average of 26 days from receipt of an application to it being processed and the applicant advised by letter of the outcome. This timescale is not particularly challenging when dealing with people in housing need.
- 3.5 Whiteinch & Scotstoun has a good approach to minimising suspensions from its housing list. Over the last three years it has suspended only one applicant, and this was in line with the requirements of the Housing (Scotland) Act 2001. It provided the applicant with clear information about the reasons for the suspension, and the length of time it would remain in force.
- 3.6 The Association collects a wide range of equalities information on its applicants as part of the application process, and achieved a 100% response rate in the current year to date. It reports this information regularly to the Committee.
- 3.7 Overall Whiteinch & Scotstoun has a good approach to ensuring applicants are provided with open, fair and equal access to its housing list.

Meeting need and maximising choice

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

- 3.8 With the qualifications made below, Whiteinch & Scotstoun is making a positive contribution to meeting housing need in Glasgow. We reviewed a sample of allocations, and found that all were made to people in one or more of the statutory reasonable preference categories. Whiteinch & Scotstoun performs well in letting a substantial proportion of its houses to homeless applicants through referrals from the local council under section 5 of the Housing (Scotland) Act 2001. At the time of inspection it had let 39% of its houses in the current year to homeless applicants through this arrangement and the number of such referrals is increasing. The Association is working with the council to develop a formal referral protocol, and the absence of one has not prevented informal

arrangements from working well. The Association has housed all households referred to it except when it had no suitable housing available and no referrals have gone to arbitration.

- 3.9 Letting outcomes are good despite a lack of transparency in Whiteinch & Scotstoun's allocations policy and procedures. It agreed a reviewed allocation and lettings policy this year (February 2005). Up until that time the Association had been operating a policy approved prior to the Housing (Scotland) Act 2001, and since the Act's implementation, it took account of the main provisions of the Act on an informal basis to 'guide' its decisions. The Association did not publicise this temporary revised approach to allocations so, for a number of years, applicants were not provided with comprehensive information in a published policy about how their needs would be assessed.
- 3.10 When the policy was reviewed this year, the Association aimed to address the statutory requirements of the Act and incorporate good practice guidance. However, the old policy included weaknesses which have been transferred largely unchanged to the new policy
- 3.11 One of the weaknesses is that the policy is not clearly designed to achieve its objectives. The Association allocates its houses across a range of six applicant groups. Its policy determines target quotas of different percentages of allocations to each of these groups, but it does not explain or justify why particular applicant groups are to receive more allocations, and therefore higher priority, than others – other than by stating a general objective of achieving a balanced community.
- 3.12 Also, the policy does not mention this, but Whiteinch & Scotstoun is not providing all categories of applicants with equal access to the full range of property types and locations. In some respects the Association does seek to maximise choice for applicants. It does not place unduly restrictive limits on the number of offers applicants can refuse or on the number of local areas for which people can apply. However, the matching of applicant categories to specific houses is at the discretion of staff, without any written guidance. The result is that particular

categories of applicant may be more likely to receive offers for some house types, in some areas of stock, than others. For example, good practice requires that homeless applicants should be dealt with no less favourably than other applicants, but out of 12 allocations made to section 5 homeless applicants referred this year, 11 were in the same street, in one of the Association's less popular areas.

- 3.13 The Association's allocation policy has other aspects and anomalies which it does not explain. Whiteinch & Scotstoun's own transfer tenants are awarded higher levels of points for the same level of need as applicants in other categories. Consequently, transfer applicants are likely to receive advantage over other applicants for particular houses. On the other hand, Association tenants seeking a transfer are required to have held their tenancy for a specified number of years before they will be considered for rehousing, which is in breach of the Housing (Scotland) Act 2001. Not having an allocations policy which contains all the rules being applied in practice by staff, and which justifies the differences in access to housing for different applicant categories means that Whiteinch & Scotstoun's approach to meeting need and maximising choice is not transparent and accountable.
- 3.14 The Association gives applicants basic information on their housing options and the right to appeal when they request an application pack. Once it has processed the application, the Association confirms applicants' overall point levels, the individual points elements that contribute to this, and provides an indication on the likelihood of being housed. However, the relevant letter does not follow good practice in referring to the applicants' right to appeal, or in providing useful guidance on alternative housing options.
- 3.15 Two members of staff check each allocation and an applicant's circumstances are verified before they receive an offer. There is, however, no routine quality assurance monitoring of this process. When we looked at a range of allocations decisions, we found that Whiteinch & Scotstoun does not keep a record of why it has allocated properties to individual applicants.

- 3.16 Overall, Whiteinch & Scotstoun has a fair approach to meeting need and maximising choice. It is housing people in need and making a positive contribution to addressing homelessness, although choice for applicants is somewhat restricted by a mixture of unexplained policy and informal practices. Given the lack of a clear explanation of the current policy, the lack of written guidance to staff, the resulting high level of discretion allowed to staff, and the other anomalies described above, the fact that the Association does not have a transparent rationale for individual allocations decisions is a significant weakness.

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.

- 3.17 Whiteinch & Scotstoun has signed-up over 97% of its tenants to the Scottish Secure Tenancy (SST) agreement, and is taking steps to sign up the remaining tenants. To date it has not been relevant to offer any tenants the Short SST, but the Association is prepared to use this type of tenancy agreement in appropriate circumstances.
- 3.18 The Association leases 21 properties to other agencies for the provision of supported accommodation. All of the leases, under review at the time of inspection, were occupancy agreements and had been in place for some time. The Association identified that occupancy agreements would be the most secure form of tenure after considering the alternatives.
- 3.19 The provision of good information and access to appropriate support are important ways in which landlords can help sustain tenancies. Whiteinch & Scotstoun has a good approach here. It ensures tenants are given clear information and advice at sign-up, employing a checklist to ensure that key points are covered. New tenants are provided with a tenants' handbook which contains useful material in an easy to update, loose leaf format. All tenants are offered a settling-in visit between 4-6 weeks after taking up their tenancy, which most

accept, and they are also offered an appointment with the Association's Welfare Rights Officer.

- 3.20 Through its welfare rights service, Whiteinch & Scotstoun works well to provide tenants with rents and benefits advice, and it monitors and reports to Committee on the levels of income secured for tenants through this work. It also works well with agencies, such as the local council's social services, when individual tenants are at risk of losing their tenancy.
- 3.21 Whiteinch & Scotstoun has a low level of abandonments, with none reported in the year to the end of December 2004. This is a marked reduction from the 18 tenants who abandoned their houses in 2003/04, which was higher than the Association's peer group average.
- 3.22 All the legal action that Whiteinch & Scotstoun has taken to recover possession of its houses has been in response to rent arrears. In considering how arrears are managed, with a view to sustaining tenancies, we looked at the following background figures. In 2003/04 the Association issued notice of proceedings for recovery of possession to 46 of its tenants and initiated court action in 41 of those cases. However, in the year to date it has issued almost the same number of notices (45), but initiated court action against only 16 of those tenants.
- 3.23 In 2003/04 the Association obtained 11 orders for recovery of possession and obtained vacant possession of 9 properties, or 0.97% of its houses. This figure is around three times the average level of recovery of vacant possession of Whiteinch & Scotstoun's peer group. In three of the above cases the tenants abandoned their homes after decree was granted but before the Association recovered vacant possession; this was 0.32% of its tenants, consistent with the average for its peer group. For the first nine months of 2004/05, out of 16 court actions initiated it obtained 12 orders for recovery of possession, and had achieved vacant possession of less than half of them (5).
- 3.24 The Association's staff told us that it aims to work with tenants to reduce outstanding arrears to keep them in their homes, even after it has obtained

decree, and we saw examples where this had been the case. The Association also told us it believes that the recent decrease in the number of court actions is a result of greater success in securing arrangements to pay. However, we also found a number of significant weaknesses in the Association's use of legal action and how it manages occupation after it has obtained a court decree, giving permission to evict:

- it provides staff with no specific guidance on the use of legal action leading to eviction;
- consequently, it does not treat tenants in arrears in a consistent way when deciding whether to take legal action;
- rent accounts remain open after decree has been granted;
- it does not consistently notify the local authority when it initiates legal action, and does not always refer tenants to debt or welfare advice agencies; and
- weak record-keeping and monitoring of actions.

3.25 Whiteinch & Scotstoun is clearly committed to maximising security of tenure for residents of its houses. It is effective in providing information and support to help people maintain their tenancies but, while these are reducing, it still has a relatively high level of evictions. This is an area where performance is being adversely affected by a lack of performance management, to which we refer more fully later.

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.

3.26 Whiteinch & Scotstoun has not carried out a recent survey of its tenants' levels of satisfaction with their neighbourhoods and communal areas. Consequently, it does not know how happy or unhappy its tenants are about the quality of their neighbourhoods and the level of anti-social behaviour. It plans to conduct a tenant satisfaction survey later this year and is starting to develop other ways to collect regular feedback from tenants.

- 3.27 The neighbourhoods we saw had little litter or vandalism and appeared well maintained. The Association uses the services of a local community environmental business, Westworks, to provide services such as back court cleaning, and bulk uplifts of rubbish to keep standards high.
- 3.28 The Association's staff are able to visit all the estates within their "patches" easily on a regular basis, due to the close position of the office to all the properties. However it has not yet developed a framework for monitoring the regularity of visits, their outcomes and actions taken.
- 3.29 Whiteinch & Scotstoun told us that its housing areas do not have high levels of antisocial behaviour. However, before this year it was not recording or monitoring the number and range of reported neighbour complaints. Whilst registers of complaints are now being maintained, these have been developed by individual staff members, and there are no set guidelines or targets for responding to complaints. We looked at some neighbour complaints dealt with by the Association, but found that the case files were incomplete, without clear records of actions taken or contact with parties involved in the cases. The Association's general approach is outlined in its estate management policy, but this was approved in 1997, and it has not been updated to reflect the requirements of the 2001 Act or to provide policy guidelines on new available measures such as Anti Social Behaviour Orders. Whiteinch & Scotstoun plans to review its estate management policy in the Spring of 2005.
- 3.30 The Association is developing positive working relationships with partner organisations including community police officers, the local fire service, and mediation services, but it was too early at the time of the inspection for us to evaluate the impact of this work.
- 3.31 Whiteinch & Scotstoun maintains good quality neighbourhoods, but there are some significant gaps in its approach to managing antisocial behaviour. It lacks a structured approach to maintaining estates but is aware of its weaknesses in collecting tenants' views on their neighbourhoods.

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.

- 3.32 Whiteinch & Scotstoun acknowledges that it has not been collecting tenants' views on services on a continuous basis. Beyond sending open questionnaires to tenants with its quarterly newsletter and with its annual report, it does not routinely collect users' views on the housing management service. It is currently considering how it can approach the collection of regular feedback.
- 3.33 It has begun to survey new applicants to its housing list on their views of the application process, and intends to analyse the results to inform service improvements. It is not yet surveying existing applicants on their views. It is also now developing a customer satisfaction questionnaire to collect views from those calling at the office, or by phone, on service users' experience of how the Association handles enquiries.
- 3.34 Whiteinch & Scotstoun has a positive approach to tenant participation, but this needs further development. It has a tenant participation strategy in place, but acknowledges that this has not yet been fully implemented. It has established a residents' forum to engage directly with service users, but to date only one poorly attended meeting of the forum has taken place. It has established a consultation register for tenants & residents, in order to ensure interested service users can have an input into the development of Association policies. It used the register, along with articles in its newsletter, to consult on its reviews of the allocations and arrears policies. It also plans to develop its estate management policy with the assistance of the register. However response rates have been low, with only one tenant submitting comments on the allocation and arrears policies. When reviewing rent levels the Association consults tenants through its newsletter, though it provides limited useful information, and again response rates have been very low. The Association accepts that the methods it currently uses to encourage participation should be reviewed and plans to ask service users how they would wish to be involved later in 2005.

- 3.35 The Association has a fair approach to dealing with complaints. It has a clear formal complaints process, which includes a two stage hearing process at Chief Executive and Committee levels. It has reported to Committee that no complaints about the housing management service have entered the formal complaints process during the last year. But since the Association aims to resolve complaints informally wherever possible, and does not monitor or analyse complaints that do not reach the formal stages outlined above, we could not obtain a picture of the overall level of complaint about services, or whether it is resolving complaints satisfactorily. Nor could we see that the Association is using feedback from complaints to improve services.
- 3.36 Whiteinch & Scotstoun is committed to responding to the different needs of service users with equal access to its housing management services, though there are some gaps in its current approach. There are arrangements to provide information in Braille where required, and translation services are also available. It has produced translations of information on access to the housing list in community languages. Its current office accommodation is not fully accessible to people with physical disabilities, but the Association is developing a new office building due to be opened in 2006.
- 3.37 Whiteinch & Scotstoun is striving to be a responsive landlord, but its approach is under-developed. It employs a number of methods to encourage and promote service user involvement, but recognises that continuing low response rates point to the need for a comprehensive review of its approach. It is not yet sufficiently proactive in collecting users' views on its services, systematic in analysing this information and proactive in using it to make improvements to the housing management service.

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.

- 3.38 Whiteinch & Scotstoun offers tenants two methods by which they can pay their rent - through its rent payment card, which can be used in post offices and local shops, and through standing order. Its analysis in December 2004 showed that 78% of tenants who paid rent did so through the rent payment card, and 22% by standing order.
- 3.39 The Association's total arrears as a percentage of its total rental income have decreased slightly over the last three years, and were lower than its peer level in 2002/03 and 2003/04. At March 2004 it was in the third quartile of all Scottish RSLs for total arrears.
- 3.40 However, Whiteinch & Scotstoun's current non-technical arrears level is high compared to its peer group level, and it has increased as a proportion of its total rent income in each of the three years since 2002/03. The proportion of the Association's tenants with serious levels of arrears was significantly above its peer group level in 2002/03 and 2003/04, and has risen again in 2004/05. Former tenant arrears have increased but are below peer group levels, though Whiteinch & Scotstoun has written off over £66,000 of its former tenant arrears over the last two years.
- 3.41 The table below summarises Whiteinch & Scotstoun's performance in collecting rent.

	At March 2003	At March 2004			At February 2005
	WSHA	WSHA	Peer Average	National Median	WSHA
Total arrears as % of total gross rental income	7.24%	7.11%	8.23%	6.2%	7.0%
Total current arrears as % of total gross rental income	6.9%	6.5%	5.73%	4.4%	6.2%
Current arrears (non technical) as % of total gross rental income	4.2%	5.8%	3.65%	3.0%	6.0%
Current arrears (technical) as % of total gross rental income	2.7%	0.7%	2.08%	1.4%	0.2%
% of current tenants in serious arrears	7.6%	9.0%	7.0%	N/A	9.5%
Total former tenant arrears	£8,300	£13,081	N/A	N/A	£11,472
As % of total gross rental income	0.38%	0.61%	2.50%	1.1%	0.8%
Rent arrears written off	£13,222	£46,494	N/A	N/A	£20,256

Source: APSR & Landlord

3.42 Whiteinch & Scotstoun's arrears management has some strengths. Its technical arrears level is significantly lower than its peer level. Just over 42% of the Association's tenants currently receive full Housing Benefit. The Association's Welfare Rights service makes an important contribution by assisting tenants to secure their benefit entitlements, and this is having a positive impact on technical arrears. We also saw officers giving full and appropriate information and advice to tenants in arrears during home visits.

3.43 Whiteinch & Scotstoun's management of rent arrears also has some key weaknesses:

- it is not taking early action or making early contact with tenants in arrears in a consistent way;
- its letters to tenants in arrears do not give clear or consistent information on the implications of their arrears;

- it does not maintain clear records of actions taken in individual arrears cases; and
- its overall approach to recording, monitoring and analysing rent arrears activity is weak.

The Association recognises it has weaknesses in information management and plans to introduce a computerised system to assist with this towards the end of 2005.

3.44 The table below summarises Whiteinch & Scotstoun's performance in letting houses that have become empty.

	2002-03	2003-04		2004-05*	
	WSHA	WSHA	Peer Group	National Median	WSHA
Rental income lost due to empty houses	£90,710	£39,095	N/A	N/A	£7,878
As % of total rental income	4.2%	1.8%	1.6%	0.9%	0.47%
Total no. of re-lets	123	90	N/A	N/A	29
% re-let in <2 weeks	34.1%	12.2%	40.0%	27.0%	13.8%
% re-let in 2-4 weeks	9.8%	24.4%	22.5%	27.3%	20.7%
% re-let in >4 weeks	56.1%	63.3%	37.4%	45.7%	65.5%
Average time to re-let (days)	28	21	30	34	18.8

* For the period April to December 2004

Source: APSR & Landlord

3.45 In 2003/04 Whiteinch & Scotstoun lost 1.8% of its total rental income because of houses lying empty. This is the 6th highest figure of rental income loss of the 32 RSLs in its peer group which reported their performance. Its performance is in the third quartile nationally and is below the national median rent loss figure. The performance in 2003/04 was a major improvement over the previous financial year and the Association reports that it has further reduced the level of lost rental income in the first three quarters of 2004/05.

3.46 In 2003/04 the Association's 21-day average relet time placed it 12th best of the 32 RSLs in its peer group. This performance is in the second quartile nationally but three days quicker than the national median figure. However the proportion

- of its houses that take four weeks or more to relet is high and increasing. The average relet time for 2004/05 to date, reported as 18.8 days, excludes information on difficult to let properties and houses undergoing major repair. Taking these into account, the Association's own performance information showed that the year to date relet average time was, in fact, 35 days, a considerable deterioration in performance, and consistent with the poor performance shown by the time to relet figures.
- 3.47 However Whiteinch & Scotstoun's performance in letting new houses has improved. In 2002/03 it let 33.3% of new houses within 2 weeks of completion; in the first 9 months of 2004/05 this had risen to 95.7%.
- 3.48 The Association considers that most of its houses are fairly easy to let because they are either in new developments or have been modernised with new kitchens and heating systems. It recognises that a small number of properties do require major repairs, or are difficult to let, but it does not report progress on these properties to committee. Nor does it currently have clear plans to address the reasons for properties being difficult to let, and relies on identifying applicants who are willing to consider such properties from its housing list.
- 3.49 The following weaknesses reduce the Association's ability to manage empty houses efficiently:
- As the Association is aware, separate management, recording and monitoring of voids activity between the Service Delivery and Projects services, using manual systems, increases potential for errors and delays;
 - the existence of targets and timescales for completing void repair work, but none for the lettings element of voids management.
- 3.50 Whiteinch & Scotstoun's costs for delivering its housing management services were £717 for each of its houses in 2003/04. This is a slight reduction on the figure for 2002/03. The 2002/03 figure was 36% higher than the average of its peer group. The Association's high costs for the management of this service include an element relating to the management of responsive repairs, which is partly counterbalanced by a lower cost figure for its property maintenance

service. Under its current structure response repairs is the responsibility of the Service Delivery department, which also acts as the Association's housing management service. Combined management and maintenance costs are, therefore, above the peer group average.

- 3.51 Whiteinch & Scotstoun has had limited success in maximising its rental income. Its performance in recovering and managing rent arrears, and in minimising income lost through empty houses, is poor. As in service delivery, resource management is hindered by the lack of a robust framework of performance management.

Performance management

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

- 3.52 A prominent theme in this report is that Whiteinch & Scotstoun's approach to performance management is under developed. This applies particularly to housing management. The Internal Management Plan (IMP) provides overall objectives for the Association, but while it contains some key targets for housing management activity, there is no definition of the basic standards to be delivered by the service.
- 3.53 The Association has some awareness of the strengths and weaknesses of the housing management service. Its internal audit activity has identified areas for improvement in voids management and arrears, and it has developed action plans to address shortcomings highlighted through audit. However, these areas for improvement activity are not linked to a clear plan for the overall service.
- 3.54 Weaknesses and gaps in the detail and range of policies and procedures mean that there is a limited framework to guide housing management activity. There are particular weaknesses in guidance for allocations, arrears, void properties, and antisocial complaints. Whiteinch & Scotstoun has relied on the experience and awareness of staff in carrying out these activities, but gaps in guidance and

control are adversely affecting the Association's housing management performance.

- 3.55 Regular reports to the Committee give a fair range of performance information, but there are key gaps. For example, allocations activity is only reported in terms of equal opportunities information; void property performance is reported in terms of average days taken to relet houses, not separately identifying performance between the repairs and letting elements. For estate management, no reports on performance are provided to Committee.
- 3.56 Whiteinch & Scotstoun has a poor under-developed approach to performance management in housing management.

Grade and overall assessment of housing management

- 3.57 Our overall assessment is that Whiteinch & Scotstoun's housing management service is poor. This assessment balances a fair performance in services to tenants and applicants, with a poor performance in managing the service for improvement. There are some areas of strong performance, and particularly some good outcomes for people in housing need. However, there are major areas where improvement is needed that significantly undermine the management of the service and the Association's ability to sustain the good outcomes it currently has.
- 3.58 The Association recognises that these weaknesses in management have arisen due to a loss of momentum and a change of focus during a period of change. However, it has not taken a sufficiently managed approach to the changes it has faced in the last few years. It is now in a position where it does not accurately describe its current performance or the standards it seeks to deliver in housing management, collect and take account of its users' views in improving these services or empower its staff to deliver high standards with the policies and procedures they need. A lack of robust performance information and monitoring in some areas meant that there was insufficient evidence for us to be able to come to a judgement about all service outcomes. The service will not improve

until these weaknesses are tackled. We set out below the key factors we have taken into account in coming to our assessment.

3.59 The Association has some strengths in its housing management service:

- It provides open access to its housing list and manages suspensions well;
- Its houses are let to people in housing need and it makes a good contribution to housing people who are homeless;
- it seeks to maximise security of tenure for its tenants;
- it provides helpful information to tenants on their rights and responsibilities, and the services available to them; and
- it maintains good quality neighbourhoods

3.60 The major areas for improvement are:

- An open and transparent approach to letting its houses, including a clearly articulated policy which provides equitable access to housing for applicants in different needs categories;
- Procedures to support staff in implementing the allocations policy and records to demonstrate how letting decisions have been made;
- Clearly defined standards for the service, linked to plans for improvement;
- A performance management framework which allows the monitoring and management of improvement; and
- the management and control of rent arrears;

Other key areas for improvement are;

- the management of empty houses; and
- the approach to tenant involvement and use of tenant feedback in service improvements.

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.
---	------	---

We explain at the end of this section how the assessments we have made result in this grade.

HOW GOOD IS THE SERVICE?

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.

4.2 Whiteinch & Scotstoun's tenants can report repairs by telephone, in writing, or in person at the office. It publicises arrangements for reporting repairs in its tenants' handbook, newsletter, in the office reception area and on its new website. There is a hearing induction loop in the reception for people with hearing difficulties, and we found that the Association's staff are responsive when dealing with people with particular needs.

4.3 The Association uses a single multi-trades contractor for the majority of out-of-hours repairs, along with a separate gas central heating contractor. It gives tenants direct out-of-hours telephone numbers for these contractors, and uses an answering machine message to advise tenants who call the office when it is closed. However, the Association does not monitor tenant satisfaction with access to the repairs service.

4.4 Whiteinch & Scotstoun generates copies of all repair orders for tenants who report repairs during office hours, and these are provided to the tenant by the contractor when they carry out the work. These contain useful information

confirming the work required, who the contractor is and the target timescale for the work. This information is also provided verbally when a tenant reports a repair by phone. The Association operates a basic appointment system for responsive repairs, where tenants can arrange a particular morning or afternoon for the contractor to call, and more specific appointments can be made if required.

- 4.5 The accessibility of Whiteinch & Scotstoun’s repair service is a positive aspect of its property maintenance 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.

- 4.6 The targets Whiteinch & Scotstoun sets itself for completing emergency and urgent repairs are in line with the national RSL median, but due to limitations in its computer software, it is unable to accurately monitor whether it is meeting its 6-hour target for emergency repairs. Instead it measures these against a 24-hour target timescale, as shown in the table below. Its target for routine repairs (15 days) is not as challenging as the national median of 10 days. The table below summarises Whiteinch & Scotstoun’s reported performance against its targets over the last three years:

	Landlord’s target response time	Performance				
		Whiteinch & Scotstoun			National median 2003/04	RSL peer group 2003/04
		2001/02	2002/03	2003/04		
Emergency Repairs	24 hours	100%	100%	100%	99.2%	97.5%
Urgent Repairs	3 days	98.0%	98.0%	99.0%	96.0%	92.5%
Routine Repairs	15 days	98.0%	98.0%	96.0%	95.7%	95.4%

Source: inspection submission / APSR data

- 4.7 Whiteinch & Scotstoun has maintained its reported 100% performance in completing emergency repairs against its effective target of 24 hours, but can

- provide no evidence of how it is performing against its publicly declared target of 6 hours. Its performance in completing urgent repairs improved in 2003/04 and has been consistently better than its peer group and national levels. However, its performance in completing routine repairs deteriorated during that time. The Association's reported performance for routine repairs ranks 13th out of the 32 RSLs in its peer group, and its target response timescale for this type of repair is less ambitious than for most of its peers, at 28th out of 32 RSLs.
- 4.8 Whiteinch & Scotstoun's approach to inspecting repairs is weak. Inspections are not systematically targeted, and there are no procedures to guide staff on selecting repairs to be inspected. It does not have target levels for pre or post-inspections nor does it analyse the outcome of these inspections. This is a poor approach which means that the Association cannot properly assess whether repairs are being carried out to required standards or make improvements to the service based on an analysis of inspection feedback. However, Whiteinch & Scotstoun is aware of this and was drafting a new repairs inspection procedure at the time of inspection, with plans to introduce it and appoint a new member of staff with this responsibility, in the early part of 2005.
- 4.9 The Association was slow to provide tenants with their statutory Right to Repair and, despite the official deadline of September 2002, did not introduce the scheme until 2003/04. Whiteinch & Scotstoun includes details of the scheme in its tenants' handbook, but only since November 2004 has it provided tenants reporting qualifying repairs with a letter confirming what action can be taken if such repairs are not carried out within the target timescale.
- 4.10 During the course of the inspection we spoke directly to a small number of tenants who had received repairs to their houses recently and they all said they were happy with the service and the quality of the work done.
- 4.11 Whiteinch & Scotstoun's own approach to collecting tenants' views on the repairs service is under-developed and it does not systematically monitor satisfaction levels. Tenants who report a repair are provided by the contractor with a copy work order/confirmation slip which they are asked to sign, confirming that the

repair has been completed satisfactorily. The contractor should then return the slip to the Association. However this method does not enable detailed or accurate information on the quality of repairs to be gathered since the tenant is expected to sign the slip in the presence of the contractor and in many cases the slips are not returned to the Association. Whilst it shows a willingness to act on individual complaints regarding the repairs service, the Association does not collate or analyse general satisfaction information systematically. This is an important weakness.

- 4.12 Whiteinch & Scotstoun's performance in completing repairs on time is good, although its effective and actual targets for emergency and routine repairs are less challenging than its peers. It is now actively providing tenants with the right to repair, although it has been slow to fully implement this. It recognises weaknesses in its framework for controlling the quality and cost of repairs, and plans to address these during this year. Meanwhile, its current approach to quality control is weak and is not providing the necessary information to secure continuous improvement of the response repairs service.

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.

- 4.13 Scottish Ministers have set a target that all social landlords' houses should meet the new Scottish Housing Quality Standard (SHQS) by 2015. Landlords are expected to prepare a plan showing how they will achieve this, by April 2005. As the Association had not completed its plan at the time of our inspection, we could not assess how it will be implemented. Whiteinch & Scotstoun has begun considering the implications of the SHQS.
- 4.14 At the time of inspection Whiteinch & Scotstoun was in the process of completing a full stock condition survey through an external surveyor, to update information from its last full survey in 1997. The Association included the assessment of its stock in comparison to the requirements of the SHQS as a key element of the

- survey. It believes that the majority of its stock should meet the standard by 2015, although it has identified that it may need to bring forward plans to replace electric heating systems in a number of houses. Early indications from its consultant surveyor confirm the Association's self-assessment.
- 4.15 The Association acknowledges that, prior to completion of the current stock condition survey, it has not held comprehensive up to date condition information on all its properties. Its 1997 survey was based on a 10% sample of its houses, and lifecycle cost information was subsequently updated through information collected by technical staff during ad hoc property inspections.
- 4.16 Whiteinch & Scotstoun's life cycle costing information feeds into its 30-year planned maintenance plan. It currently has a three year programme in place which commenced in 2004, but it reviews this programme annually. It uses its annual budget setting process to confirm the work it will undertake each year and how it will be funded. It has recognised that its computerised maintenance planning system requires to be replaced and this will be included as part of the upgrading of its software later this year.
- 4.17 All the Association's houses have hard-wired smoke detectors; all common entries for flats have door entry systems and there are no lead pipes in any of its improved houses. The Association has not determined whether any of its 24 unimproved houses, three of which are occupied, have lead pipes.
- 4.18 Whiteinch & Scotstoun has achieved good standards in its newly built houses. In its most recent development its houses:
- were built to Secure by Design standards to create safe homes and minimise the risk of crime and anti social behaviour;
 - are flexible enough to accommodate the range of housing needs that people may have through their lifetime; and
 - have good levels of energy efficiency.
- 4.19 Whiteinch & Scotstoun is required to carry out safety checks every 12 months for all gas appliances and flues provided for its tenants' use. This necessitates

access to carry out checks at a minimum interval of 12 months. In the 9 months to the end of December 2004, the Association had not carried out gas safety checks within one year of the previous check for 18.4% of the 692 houses which have gas appliances and flues and 6.5% of checks were not completed until more than three months after the date required, due to difficulties with tenants not providing timely access to their homes.

4.20 We reviewed information for 38 of its houses, and found that one of these properties did not have continuous safety cover. In that particular case the Association was taking appropriate and necessary steps to ensure the tenant provided access to enable the safety check to take place. Whilst the Association is taking measures to improve performance, for example by reducing the time taken to begin safety inspections to within a 12-month cycle, its failure to complete all necessary safety checks within the statutory deadline does represent a risk to the Association and its tenants. The table below summarises Whiteinch & Scotstoun's performance.

	December 2004	
	Number of houses	% of houses
Houses with gas appliances	692	-
Houses with current gas safety certificates	683	98.7
Houses where safety check was carried out within 12 months of previous check	565	82.7
Houses where safety check was up to 1 month late	70	10.2
Houses where safety check was between 1 and 3 months late	3	0.4
Houses where safety check was more than 3 months late	45	6.6

Source: inspection submission

4.21 From April 2004 social landlords have had a statutory duty to manage asbestos in the common areas of their properties. Whiteinch & Scotstoun has carried out visual surveys in some of its common areas and advises contractors where it knows or thinks asbestos may be present. It has commissioned surveyors to carry out asbestos surveys for individual planned projects and at the time of the inspection it was carrying out a survey of the common areas of its properties, due

to be complete by the end of March 2005. However, it has not yet prepared an asbestos management plan, which is part of its statutory duty, and it acknowledged that it does not at present have full information on which properties contain asbestos.

- 4.22 Whiteinch & Scotstoun does not have a formal standard on the minimum condition it expects its houses to be in when re-let. The Association does not ask new tenants of re-let houses for their views on the condition of their new homes. However, it does analyse information from people who have refused an offer of a house to identify whether physical condition is a factor in such refusals.
- 4.23 Whiteinch & Scotstoun's houses are in good condition. The Association has a good approach to planning and funding its future maintenance needs. However, it is not currently meeting its statutory duties on gas safety and asbestos management, which is poor.

Responsiveness to tenants in repairs and maintenance

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.

- 4.24 Whiteinch & Scotstoun recognises the value of ensuring that its property maintenance service is responsive and open to tenants' influence. Whilst it takes a positive approach, its framework for tenant involvement is under-developed, and does not demonstrate that the Association is systematically using feedback to improve the service.
- 4.25 We saw some examples of where the Association uses tenants' views in developing and improving the service:
- it collects feedback from tenants receiving planned improvements to their homes, and uses this in monitoring contractor performance through monthly reports to Committee;
 - it gives tenants receiving new kitchens the opportunity to influence the design and layout of the kitchen, and also a range of choices of units and worktops; and

- it collects tenant feedback on responsive and planned repairs as part of its post-inspections.

4.26 This positive approach is undermined by weaknesses in the framework for tenant involvement. We found that:

- the information on reactive repairs collected from the response slips is limited, the need to complete the slip and return it to the contractor may be inhibiting, and not all slips are returned by the contractor to the office;
- the Association does not systematically monitor or report on its performance in dealing with complaints regarding its responsive repairs service, other than those which progress to Chief Executive and Committee level, and cannot demonstrate that improvements are made in response to complaints; and
- it does not involve tenants directly in preparing future major maintenance programmes.

4.27 Whiteinch & Scotstoun has taken some positive steps to engage with and respond to users of its property maintenance services, but its approach is not yet fully developed. There are weaknesses in its approach to collecting, analysing and using feedback from tenants on the responsive repairs 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 and cost.

4.28 The Association's costs for delivering its property maintenance services increased slightly in 2003/04 to £191 for each of its houses. This is approximately 18% below the average for its peer group in the previous year. Some of the costs of managing property maintenance are currently included in housing management costs, as noted in section 3.

- 4.29 Whiteinch & Scotstoun's performance in recovering rechargeable repairs costs is weak. Although the total value of rechargeable repairs is relatively small, the proportion of these repairs which are invoiced to tenants has reduced over the last three years. During the last two years it has recovered only around 6% of the £2,275 tenants owed the Association.
- 4.30 The Association manages the procurement of its property maintenance effectively, using a range of approaches aimed at balancing quality and price. It has negotiated extensions with contractors on key contracts, based on clear and continuous assessment of their performance on previous projects or contracts. Whilst this approach has had positive results, the Association will continue to test the market periodically to demonstrate that it is obtaining best value from its procurement approach.
- 4.31 Whiteinch & Scotstoun recognises that it needs to review its approach to appointing external consultants. At present it generally appoints them on an individual project basis, but is considering appointments to work on more than one project at a time. The Association plans to extend its balanced quality and price approach to the appointment of consultants.

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.

- 4.32 Whiteinch & Scotstoun's framework for managing performance needs development. As with housing management, the absence of a service improvement plan weakens the Association's ability to clearly plan for and measure performance improvements. There are particular weaknesses in the area of quality control of responsive repairs where current policies and procedures are limited.
- 4.33 However, the Association does make good use of detailed performance indicators in measuring how its individual planned repairs projects are

progressing. Whilst there are currently no overall formal objectives for this part of the service, the Association does prepare detailed briefs for each project which set out specific standards and targets.

Grade and overall assessment of property maintenance

4.34 Our overall assessment is that Whiteinch & Scotstoun's property maintenance service is fair. We found it is performing well generally in carrying out responsive repairs against its targets, and has a good approach to carrying out planned and major repairs. It also has many important areas for improvement. We set out below the key factors we have taken account of in coming to our overall assessment.

4.35 The Association has some strengths in its property maintenance service:

- it is performing generally well in meeting its responsive repairs targets;
- the quality of its houses is good;
- it is achieving good results in developing new housing that meets security, safety, access and energy efficiency requirements; and
- it is achieving good levels of satisfaction from tenants, particularly in respect of major repairs and improvements.

4.36 The key areas for improvement are:

- the management and control of responsive repairs, particularly the lack of a targeted approach to inspections and monitoring of cost variations;
- the management of gas safety;
- the management of asbestos in its properties;
- collecting, reporting on and using tenant feedback on repairs generally;
- the poor performance in recovering rechargeable repairs costs; and
- the under-developed approach to performance management.

5. Governance and Financial Management

GOVERNANCE

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 There are some key weaknesses in the Association's approach to planning. The internal Management Plan (IMP) is limited in scope, containing only a small number of wide ranging, corporate level objectives and these are not SMART¹ objectives. It has not translated these broad aims and objectives into specific service objectives, standards and targets and has not systematically monitored progress against them. These weaknesses make it difficult for the Association to establish clear direction and guidance for staff or to assess its effectiveness in achieving its aims and objectives.
- 5.2 Whiteinch & Scotstoun Recognises this and the current plan is an updated version of the IMP agreed almost two years ago. This update is intended as an interim measure until a strategic review this year produces a revised approach, to be built into the new plan for 2006/07 onwards.
- 5.3 The IMP was reviewed in October 2004 and, following a conference to enable staff to make a contribution, a revised plan for 2005/06 was prepared. The committee considered and approved the IMP in March 2005 but, unlike the staff, it was not involved at an earlier stage in its preparation.

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.

¹ Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Realistic, Time-bound.

- 5.4 The Association has a set of clear standing orders which define the roles and responsibilities of the Committee and its sub-committees. The Committee works well with, and is very supportive of, the Association's staff. However, weaknesses in strategic planning and performance-reporting restrict the Committee's ability to effectively guide and control the activities of the Association and the services it provides.
- 5.5 The Association makes limited use of service targets and carries out little continuous monitoring and review of the outcomes from, and quality of, the services it delivers. The Committee receives some good information through quarterly reports on the Association's activities, but the use of targets and the level of detail vary across the different service areas and their respective reports. The Committee relies heavily on these reports for their picture of performance and, since this information is inconsistent and incomplete, it is not well placed to take informed, transparent decisions in exercising its responsibility for overseeing the Association's performance.
- 5.6 The weaknesses in the framework for performance monitoring and management mean that the Committee and staff have a poor picture of the quality of service they are providing. While the Association has recognised it needs to review and develop its performance management and reporting structures, the committee's ability to take informed decisions about services and performance has been limited by this for at least two years.

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 Whiteinch & Scotstoun's Committee members have a range of skills and experience in housing and governance. The Association has a positive attitude towards supporting Committee members in developing their skills and knowledge. It aims to meet the needs of individual new members, although this is limited at present largely to an induction session with the Chief Executive and referral to general housing training. The Association plans to develop an

induction pack for new members, and a “buddy” system in which new members will be supported by a more experienced member. It has not, however, set specific timescales for this.

- 5.8 The Association’s training and development policy requires that each Committee member attends a regular skills and training needs review. However, this has not been happening over the last two years. The Association is taking steps to address this shortcoming and, at the time of the inspection, was carrying out a training needs analysis for Committee members.

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 a landlord to demonstrate accountability. Whiteinch & Scotstoun encourages a broad range of people to become members of the Association, but it does not promote membership effectively. Membership levels have declined slightly in the last 3 years to 215; 47%, or 101, of its members are tenants. The Association’s last three AGMs were attended by, on average, 11% of its members. This is in line with the national average.
- 5.10 The Association has 10 elected Committee members and one who has been co-opted. It has been successful in maintaining a Committee which represents the local community, with 50% of its Committee being tenants. It has recognised that many of the current Committee members have been in place for a number of years, and that there is a need to encourage new members to become involved. This is a significant challenge, against a background of declining Association membership. Whilst this problem is recognised, the Association does not have formal plans in place to tackle it.
- 5.11 Social landlords should place the people they serve at the heart of their work and be responsive to their views and priorities. The Association recognises that it has been slow to involve tenants in its key service areas, but it is making

progress in broadening the ability of tenants and residents to influence its activities. It worked with tenants in agreeing its tenant participation strategy, but does not actively monitor its progress in implementing it or report this to tenants. It has taken some positive steps, through the establishment of a Residents Forum, and a consultation register of tenants wishing to be involved in the review of policies. However levels of participation through these have been low, and the Association does intend to use its forthcoming satisfaction survey to ask tenants about how they prefer to participate and be consulted.

- 5.12 Social landlords should give stakeholders the information they need about the organisation and its plans, services and performance. The Association's approach to providing information to service users is under-developed. It provides some basic performance information in its Annual Report, which it replicates on its new website, but it does not compare this against its own targets or any benchmark performance information. The Association is aware of weaknesses in its approach, but without a sufficiently developed performance management framework, the Association has difficulty in demonstrating accountability.

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.

- 5.13 Whiteinch & Scotstoun recognises the importance of both staff and Committee members adhering to the highest ethical standards and we found no indication that awards or benefits restricted by schedule 7 of the Housing (Scotland) Act 2001 had been granted other than appropriately. However, its Schedule 7 policy is not compliant with the Act in ensuring that any tenancy or benefit must be approved by the Committee before being granted.
- 5.14 We also found an instance when the Association did not apply its policy on managing conflicts of interest in full. The Association has been using a local community business, Westworks, to provide cleaning and refuse disposal

services to its tenants. Two of Whiteinch & Scotstoun's Committee members are also members of Westworks' board, although they have no personal financial interest in it, as it is a non-profit distributing company. When this contractor first tendered for the proposed contract, the Committee members concerned declared their interest at the relevant Committee meeting, but were then allowed to take part in the discussion before the Committee made its procurement decision. This approach can affect perception of the Association but is an isolated instance of poor practice.

- 5.15 Whiteinch & Scotstoun's policy to gifts and hospitality is not always implemented in full. We reviewed its gifts and hospitality register and found that on more than one occasion gifts of cash were accepted from tenants. While these, and any other gifts are recorded and used for charitable purposes, we also found that entries in the register do not record an estimate of the monetary value of gifts or hospitality offered or accepted.

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.

- 5.16 Whiteinch & Scotstoun's approach to risk management is under-developed. The Association encourages all staff and Committee members to be aware of risk. However, it acknowledges that it does not have a formal policy or strategy for managing risk; or a robust or integrated view of the range of risks it faces. Nor does it adequately identify risks at an operational level, which could have implications for service users. An example of this includes the failure of its risk management systems to identify potential shortcomings in its approach to gas safety, or the impact of not reviewing and updating policies on allocations and estate management frequently enough.
- 5.17 The Association has taken a positive approach to assessing risk in specific projects, for example its Executive Team's comprehensive approach in evaluating and monitoring risk in its neighbourhood centre project. Whiteinch & Scotstoun recognises that the absence of a clear strategy and formal framework

for managing risk is a weakness, and plans to address this within its planning review in the coming financial year.

- 5.18 Whiteinch & Scotstoun makes good use of internal audit, (a recent example leading to improved performance reporting on planned repairs), and produces action plans to address the issues highlighted and detailing responsibilities and timescales for implementation. Progress on addressing issues highlighted by audit is reported regularly to the audit sub-committee.
- 5.19 Whiteinch & Scotstoun has some strengths in governance, but weaknesses in its strategic and service planning, and in its performance management frameworks, make it difficult for the Committee and managers to give clear leadership and direction to the Association and control its performance. The Association is achieving good levels of participation by tenants and service users in the governance of the organisation, but it needs to develop its other mechanisms for participation in a planned and responsive way. There are some minor weaknesses in its approach to ensuring it is seen to meet the highest ethical standards.

GOVERNANCE & FINANCIAL MANAGEMENT

Financial Viability & Management

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

- 5.20 The Association has continued to deliver a solid financial performance in recent years, with surpluses each year from 1999 to 2003. Although the most recent set of annual figures, for 2003/04, recorded a deficit and further short term deficits are forecast, these are planned. They are a direct result of the current stock investment programme which is to be funded entirely from the Association's own resources.

5.21 Medium term plans provide the Committee with a good level of detail. The plans are prepared on a rolling annual basis and are based around a robust set of broad assumptions. Forty year projections are also prepared in conjunction with available life cycle costing information. The Association is able to use these plans in a way that allows it to look at some possible future scenarios and the likely effects of some changes in key variables. The plans are regularly reviewed and indicate long term sustainability.

Financial performance	£000s 2000/01 (Actual)	£000s 2001/02 (Actual)	£000s 2002/03 (Actual)	£000s 2003/04 (Actual)	£000s 2004/05 (Budget)
Turnover	2,094.2	2,148.6	2,236.3	2,444.8	2,541.1
Operating Surplus/(Deficit)	473.8	195.8	193.9	(237.7)	(520.0)
Net Surplus/(Deficit)	497.1	220.3	207.3	(206.3)	(520.3)

5.22 The last four finalised sets of trading results, together with the forecast figures for 2004/05, indicate continuing growth turnover. Although the current levels of investment in the housing stock are creating short term deficits, the Association's accumulated reserves are allowing this investment to be funded without a materially adverse effect on viability.

5.23 Recent performance has been further influenced by low debt and high cash resources, with the interest received on cash deposits often more than the interest payments on the Association's loans.

5.24 The budget setting process has strengths; importantly its timescales and procedures allow senior staff input, tenant consultation and committee discussion prior to approval in advance of the start of the financial year. There is an acknowledgement, however, that timing can often prove challenging, so plans are in place to bring some aspects of the process forward to ease the pressure during the last quarter of the year.

5.25 Quarterly financial monitoring reports provide the committee with a good level of detail with which to review actual performance against budget. They do not include the previous year's figures, and a projected year end outturn, which

would allow a more comprehensive review of the financial position to be presented throughout the year.

- 5.26 Whiteinch & Scotstoun's business plan indicates it is financially viable in the medium term and has a low exposure to financial risk. It has a good financial management framework.

6. Areas for Improvement Action

6.1 These are the key areas that need to be targeted for improvement action. They are broadly in order of priority within each of the key service areas:

Across all of its activities, Whiteinch & Scotstoun should:

- develop its performance information and performance management frameworks and establish an effective performance culture; and
- develop more effective ways for tenants and residents to influence the planning and delivery of services, and build on its positive approach to tenant participation.

In housing management, Whiteinch & Scotstoun should:

- implement a clearly articulated policy for letting its houses, which provides equitable access to applicants in different needs categories;
- introduce procedures to support staff in implementing the policy and in demonstrating how letting decisions have been made;
- improve its performance in collecting rent and managing rent arrears;
- improve how it manages its empty houses, and ensure that delays in letting are minimised;
- manage its neighbourhoods more actively, and have a clear approach to how it will tackle antisocial behaviour; and
- minimise delays in processing housing applications and actively manage its waiting list;

In property management, Whiteinch & Scotstoun should:

- improve its management and control of responsive repairs, particularly its use and monitoring of inspections and monitoring of costs;
- ensure that it complies with its legislative duties relating to gas safety;
- put an effective asbestos management plan in place; and
- improve its performance in recovering rechargeable repairs costs.

In Governance and Financial Management, Whiteinch & Scotstoun should:

- improve its overall planning approach to link clear long term corporate objectives to resourced service objectives and targets for improvement in the medium term;
- improve its formal risk management and integrate this with its overall planning;
- ensure the governing body has key performance information across all services to guide its management of the Association;
- support committee members with a regular assessment of training needs and access to targeted knowledge and training;
- demonstrate its compliance with statutory requirements and good practice guidance in relation to Schedule 7 issues and conflicts of interest ; and
- increase its efforts to recruit new members to the Association.

We will agree an improvement plan with Whiteinch & Scotstoun for all these areas of improvement.

7. Next Steps

7.1 This report highlights our findings following this housing inspection. We ask organisations that receive fair or poor grades to produce an improvement plan within eight weeks of the publication of this report. This plan should show how it intends to respond to our findings. The plan will be agreed with us.

7.2 If you would like to see the improvement plan you should contact:

Whiteinch & Scotstoun Housing Association Ltd
1040 Dumbarton Road
Glasgow
G14 9UL

TELEPHONE: 0141 954 0204

EMAIL: imorrison@wsha.org.uk

WEBSITE: www.wsha.org.uk

7.3 We will re-inspect Whiteinch & Scotstoun in 2 years' time.

Sources of evidence

Groups and third parties consulted

- Communities Scotland Area Team
- Communities Scotland Tenant Participation Team
- Homepoint
- Glasgow City Council DRS Investment
- Glasgow City Council – Social Work
- Glasgow City Council – Strategy
- Whiteinch Community Association

Interviews / meetings

- Chief Executive
- Assistant Chief Executive & Secretary
- Service delivery Manager
- Financial Services Manager
- Projects Programme Manager
- Frontline staff
- Housing Officers
- Management Committee meeting
- Individual Members of Management Committee
- Discussions with a range of tenants and service users

Reality checks

- Review of allocations
- Review of antisocial behaviour cases
- Review of applications
- Review of complaints
- Review of legal actions

- Review of gas safety
- Review of procurement
- Review of rechargeable repairs
- Review of rent arrears
- Review of responsive repairs
- Review of section 5 referrals
- Review of re-letting process
- Shadowing antisocial behaviour cases
- Shadowing rent arrears cases
- Shadowing responsive repairs
- Shadowing re-letting process
- Estate visits

Key documents reviewed

- Inspection Submission
- Policies, Procedures, Strategies and Publications
 - Allocations
 - Annual Report
 - Antisocial Behaviour
 - Approved Contractors & Consultants
 - Arrears
 - Complaints
 - Conditions of Contract for General Maintenance Contractors
 - Estate Management
 - Expenses for Committee Members
 - Former Tenants Arrears
 - Housing Services Sub-Committee Remit
 - Newsletters
 - Nominations
 - Reactive Repairs
 - Rechargeable Repairs
 - Risk Management

- Schedule 7
- Strategic Housing Brief
- Tenant Participation
- Treasury Management
- Void Management

Glossary

Annual Statistical and Performance 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.
Average	The arithmetic mean – the sum of all the values divided by the number of values.
Benchmarking	A process used by organisations to systematically compare service processes and performance to identify best practice.
Common housing register	A register of all applicants for social housing used by two or more landlords within an area.
Cyclical maintenance	Planned programme of work to deal with predictable deterioration of building components, for example regular painting of window frames.
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.
Life cycle costing	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.
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 APSRs.
Performance indicator	A measure of how a RSL is achieving its objectives.

Performance Standards	Performance Indicators can be compared with a pre-set standard (a benchmark) or with other organisations.
Planned maintenance	Housing standards for all social landlords in Scotland. The planned renewal or maintenance of key property components.
Quartile	The range represented by one quarter of the ordered performance of all Scottish RSLs. So for example, the upper quartile is the top 25% of RSLs.
Serious arrears	Where a tenant owes more than 13 weeks rent payments and this is more than £250
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.
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	A scheme which gives tenants legal rights to have certain repairs in defined times.
Scottish secure tenancy (SST)	The Housing (Scotland) Act 2001 establishes the Scottish Secure Tenancy as the tenancy for all tenants of social landlords in Scotland.
Shadowing	An inspection technique that involves accompanying and observing staff while they carried out their day-to-day tasks.

Regulation & Inspection

EDINBURGH

Rosebery House
9 Haymarket Terrace
Edinburgh EH12 5YA
Tel: 0131 313 3700

GLASGOW

Highlander House
58 Waterloo Street
Glasgow G2 7DA
Tel: 0141 226 4611