

Summary and recommendations

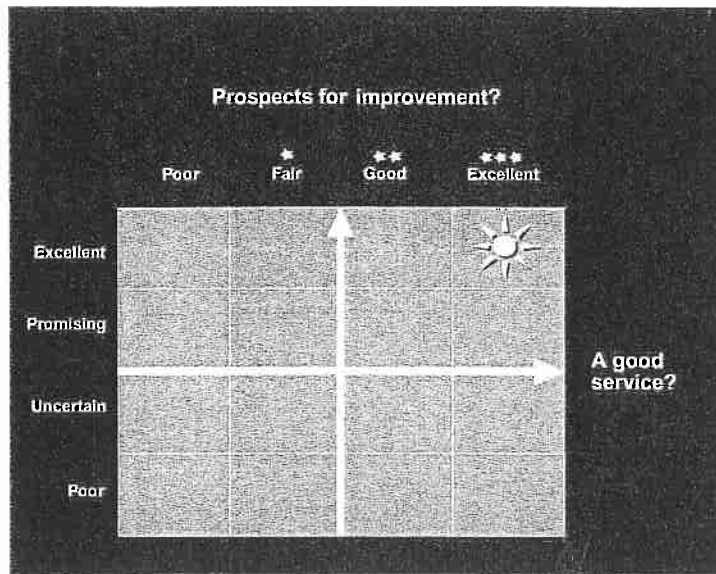
Summary

- 1 The City of Derby is situated in the East Midlands in the south of the county of Derbyshire. It lies on the river Derwent and close to the Derbyshire Dales and the Peak District National Park. The population of the area covered by Derby City Council is 238,000, living within 99,059 households. 9.4 per cent of the population are from black and ethnic minority (BME) communities.
- 2 Derby City Council was established as a unitary authority, responsible for all local government services, in 1997. The Council has 51 elected Councillors and control is held by the majority Labour Group. The Council adopted the modern cabinet style structure, for decision making by Councillors during 2001, with ten executive members who have responsibility for specific areas of the Council's work.
- 3 The Council's net overall budget for the year 2000/01 was £208 million for day to day running costs (revenue budget) and £42 million for major works (capital budget). The Council employs approximately 11,000 members of staff.
- 4 The Housing Management and Maintenance Service has responsibility for the Council's housing stock of 15,279 homes and is the largest of the Council's housing services. The service has been awarded the Charter Mark on three consecutive occasions in 1993, 1996 and 1999 and achieved Investors in People (IIP) accreditation in 1997 and 2000.
- 5 The 2001-2002 budget for Front Line Housing Services and Sustainable Estates was £12.1 million, consisting of £8.1 million supervision and management costs and £4 million for day to day repairs spend to the Council housing stock. The service directly employs 215 staff with a range of contractors engaged in carrying out repairs, maintenance and improvement programmes to homes.

Scoring the service

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

Scoring chart²: Derby City Council – Front Line Housing Services and Sustainable Estates



'an excellent service that has excellent prospects for improvement'

- 7 We consider the Front Line Housing Services and the work carried out to achieve Sustainable Estates to be excellent. The Council has clear and relevant aims for the services that mirror their strategic objectives. The Council can demonstrate a comprehensive and inclusive approach to achieving sustainability on estates and this is complimented by robust and ongoing research. There is evidence of a shared culture that is working through inclusive partnerships to achieve the delivery of high quality services.

We have highlighted the following excellent aspects of the service:

- ◆ Tenants and leaseholders are actively involved in the planning, delivery and monitoring of services. Steps have been taken to make sure that representation on tenants and leaseholders groups reflects the local communities.

² The scoring chart displays performance in two dimensions. The horizontal axis shows how good the service or function is now, on a scale ranging from no stars for a service that is poor (at the left-hand end) to three stars for an excellent service (right-hand end). The vertical axis shows the improvement prospects of the service, also on a four-point scale.

- ◆ Access to services is provided through a network of decentralised, well maintained, local housing offices providing payment facilities for rents and other charges.
- ◆ There are effective, practical examples of partnership working to deliver services designed to improve the life chances and quality of life of tenants.
- ◆ Work has been carried out to improve the physical environment on estates and the tenants and leaseholders view the outcomes as positive.
- ◆ Services are delivered by committed, highly motivated and well trained staff working to deliver services to agreed standards.
- ◆ The Money Advice Team is a valued service and can demonstrate its cost effectiveness in terms of the additional income raised for tenants through the benefit system.
- ◆ The Empty Properties and Allocations Service provides a decentralised service and a city centre facility for customers, and has developed service standards for the processes involved in delivery.
- ◆ Anti-social behaviour and racial harassment are effectively tackled through tenancy management, effective partnership working and monitored procedures where intervention is required.
- ◆ Resources have been concentrated on reducing rent arrears and progress is being made. The target for rent arrears in 2001-2002 was £996,000 and this was achieved. At week one of 2002-2003 the figure was £993,000.
- ◆ Responsive Repairs Services are well managed with a range of customer satisfaction performance monitoring arrangements in place.
- ◆ Gas servicing is planned and monitored, and innovative approaches are taken to work with all households to achieve 100 per cent of homes serviced.
- ◆ Disabled adaptations are dealt with efficiently and sensitively in partnership with Social Services.
- ◆ The Planned and Programmed Repairs and Maintenance Service meets the needs and aspirations of tenants and leaseholders whilst ensuring the improvement and sustainability of the housing stock.
- ◆ A strong corporate commitment to domestic energy efficiency and affordable warmth is delivered through investment in homes, advice and promotional activities.
- ◆ Sheltered housing schemes provide secure, supported housing for older people and supported housing projects provide good accommodation for vulnerable people.
- ◆ Arrangements are in place to deliver the Supporting People programme due to be introduced in April 2003.

- ◆ Estates are well managed with closely monitored arrangements in place to maintain and improve the appearance and security of areas in partnership with other agencies.
- ◆ Efficiency savings of 3 per cent have been identified through the implementation of the best value review improvement plans.
- ◆ Research carried out to assess and predict the sustainability of estates is innovative, thorough and informs all other service areas.

However, there are a number of weaknesses in the services that we inspected:

- ◆ Access issues for disabled people, people with restricted mobility, people with hearing loss and frail older people have not been addressed in all service areas.
- ◆ The appointment system for repairs is limited and we found confusion amongst tenants and some staff. The current diagnostic tools available for repairs reporting are inadequate.
- ◆ We found evidence of a small number of cases where procedures and service standards were not applied. There is no up to date housing management manual in use at the current time.
- ◆ Modernisation and improvements to sheltered housing flats have not been carried out to a specification that can meet the long term needs of tenants.
- ◆ Formal protocols for joint working with social and health care providers require further development.
- ◆ IT systems are not sufficiently developed to deliver and monitor all services to the levels required. Examples of this are the inability of existing IT systems to generate letters for rent arrears chasing and weaknesses in the automated budget monitoring of responsive repairs.

- 8 We have judged that the Council has excellent prospects for achieving improvements in Front Line Housing Services and Sustainable Estates. There is a shared understanding of the issues to be addressed and a shared commitment to achieving continuous improvement. This shared culture is complimented by an established track record in implementing service improvements through partnership working. The Council can demonstrate that it has the performance monitoring arrangements in place to ensure that the improvement plans are carried out within agreed timescales, within defined resources and are measured against a range of communicated objectives.

Recommendations

- 9 To rise to the challenge of continuous improvement councils need inspection reports that offer practical pointers for improvement. In this context, the inspection team feels that the Council should now take action to resolve a number of general, political, managerial and partnership issues.
- 10 We recommend that you carry out the following:

- ◆ Address the issues of access for people with disabilities at local housing offices using our findings, and those of the tenants' Service User Review Group (SURG), to inform the improvements required. Carry out training with staff on this aspect of customer care.
- ◆ Carry out an evaluation of existing interpreting services offered at local housing offices. Develop additional services that reflect the needs of the local community whilst making sure that all languages can be accommodated when they are needed. Carry out training with staff on this aspect of customer care.
- ◆ Make sure that the appointment system for repairs is developed to meet the needs of all tenants and leaseholders. Carry out training to make sure that all staff understand and are able to administer the system. Communicate the details of the appointment system to tenants and leaseholders.
- ◆ Make sure that any future investment to improve accommodation in sheltered housing is carried out to a specification that will meet the long term needs of older people.
- ◆ Review the use of mediation services and evaluate the contribution that existing services can make in the resolution of problems arising for, and caused by, tenants and leaseholders. Determine the level of mediation services required and identify the appropriate level and sources of funding.
- ◆ Review the revised draft housing management manual and make sure that it provides comprehensive coverage of all the service areas and provides a robust procedural manual for staff.
- ◆ Take action to address all other weaknesses identified in this report.
- ◆ Present the report to the appropriate Executive.

- 11 We would like to thank the staff of Derby City Council particularly the Housing Services Department who made us welcome and who met our requests efficiently and courteously.

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