



MOCK INSPECTION SELF ASSESSMENT 2007

SECTION 1 - SETTING THE SCENE

1.1 Introduction to Nottingham City Homes (NCH)

Nottingham City Homes (NCH) is the Arms Length Management Organisation (ALMO) created by Nottingham City Council to manage its housing stock. We were set up in April 2005 following consultation on the options available to meet the investment gap of £165 million required to achieve the Decent Homes Standard and the subsequent ballot of our tenants where there was a 40% turnout with a 76% preference to create an ALMO.

We now manage a stock of 29 010 properties and an additional 996 leasehold properties and are the third largest ALMO in England.

We were inspected in October 2005 and received a fair, one star rating with uncertain prospects for improvement. Subsequent to that inspection, the organisation has been in a period of significant transition, in which achieving stability in the organisation and recruiting a new senior management team have been our main priorities.

Following a review of our Governance structures, we now have a new more focused Board made up of five tenants, four independent members and three City Councillors.

In February 2007, our new permanent Chief Executive started and embarked on a process to engage tenants, customers and stakeholders to refresh our Mission, Vision and Values for the future:

- Our Mission is: *To deliver excellent Services*
- Our Vision is: *Homes and places people want to live in.*
- Our Values are: *Tell the truth
Keep your promises
Be fair
Respect the individual
Work as one team
Encourage fresh thinking
Strive for the best*

1.2 National context

We contribute to the delivery of key national housing policies, specifically set out in the Government's sustainable communities plan by:

- Engaging with our tenants and giving priority to their concerns in particular by tackling anti-social behaviour on our estates and working in partnership with the police and city council including by supporting Neighbourhood policing
- The development of our Choice Based Lettings scheme, HomeLink and the partnership with RSLs across the City
- Developing our Decent Homes programme
- Supporting the work of the Council on prevention of homelessness and assisting homeless families

We are also now actively engaging with the new government's agenda on housing, and are developing our strategy in recognition of them. These include:

- The Green Paper: Homes for the future: more affordable, more sustainable housing - Nottingham is actively working with English partnerships to look at setting up Local Housing Company of which NCH will play a part.
- The recently published review of John Hills and Martin Cave – our chief executive is represented on the Housing Reform Advisory Panel formed by government in response to the Hill's review.
- The Government's white paper on the changing role of local government, "Strong and prosperous communities"
- The CLG's Review of Arms Length Management Organisations (2006)

1.3 Local context

General information and population

We operate within the administrative boundary of Nottingham City Council which is a unitary authority in the East Midlands region. Nottingham is one of the eight Core Cities which are recognised by the Government as key contributors to regional and national growth and prosperity. The population of Nottingham is in the region of 280 000, within a broader "Greater Nottingham conurbation" which has an estimated population of 630 000. 18.95% of Nottingham City's population are from minority ethnic communities

Levels of deprivation

In terms of deprivation: Nottingham is the 7th (out of 354) most deprived area of England and unemployment (in April 2007) stood at 4.3% compared to the average rate for England of 2.5%. We manage estates in the most deprived areas in Nottingham. Our 2005 STATUS survey undertaken by the National Federation of Housing points out that "nine out of every ten Nottingham tenants live in the worst two deciles of wards in the country (67% in worst and 22% in second worst). Child poverty is also high: 62% of all 0-18 year olds in Nottingham live in a workless or low income household (cf. 38% in England)."

A study of Nottingham compiled in 2006 using the "Mosaic" classification of households revealed that 22% of households in the City fell within the "municipal dependency" grouping (low income families living in estate-based social housing), compared to 6.2% in England. A further 16.6% of Nottingham households were "welfare borderline" (living in social housing with uncertain employment in deprived areas) compared to 5.5% nationally. Conversely, whilst in England 10.2% of households were identified as "symbols of success" (career professionals living in sought-after locations), the figure for Nottingham was only 2.8%.

Nottingham City Council

Nottingham City Council comprises 55 councillors with Labour in overall control. Currently the City's system of governance involves an Executive Board of nine members, supported by an Overview and Scrutiny Committee together with a number of standing panels and area committees. The Executive comprises the leader of the council, the deputy leader, who each hold a portfolio and seven other portfolio holders. The portfolio holder for Neighbourhood Regeneration currently covers housing issues. The City Council appointed a new Chief Executive in November 2006 and in spring 2007 launched a new management restructure.

Nottingham City Council's overall vision is currently:

"A safer, cleaner and ambitious Nottingham – a City we are proud of"

The priorities are crime, education, cleanliness and employment.

The Comprehensive Performance Assessment result for Nottingham City Council following inspection in March 2007 was 2 stars performing adequately and 2 stars improving adequately. This CPA assessment particularly identified (amongst others) the following areas for improvement:

- The need for a longer term vision for the City, to be developed in partnership
- A need to seek better value for money for the City's residents
- A need to clarify its community empowerment approach with its partners and with the communities themselves.

The City Council in partnership with One Nottingham has now embarked on developing a vision for 2030 and a sustainable community strategy.

1.4 Our Customers

We have a very diverse customer base, so for example:

- The majority (58%) of our tenants are single people or couples without dependent children
- About 20% of our tenants are from black or other minority ethnic groups
- A significant proportion (40%) of our tenants are relatively young (aged between 16 and 44); whilst 28% are over 65. 15% are over 75.

Some of the key issues for us are the high level of deprivation, low skills and economic inactivity:

- 60% obtain their income wholly from state benefits or state pensions: two thirds of tenants receive Housing Benefit.

- As well as high levels of benefit dependency, economic inactivity is high amongst our tenants – Only 26% are in full or part time employment.
- A large proportion of tenants have a long-standing illness, disability or infirmity.
- Educational attainment at school is low in Nottingham generally and adult skills levels are below average at most levels

1.5 Our Key Challenges and Opportunities

We now have a new senior management team to provide the vision, leadership and ambition to achieve our Mission of providing excellent services. We have embarked on a significant change process which aims to make our organisation truly customer focused.

Our initial focus, through our foundation plan has been on our core services and some of the most significant activities include:

- Tenant Involvement: we have launched our new tenant involvement strategy and tenant compact and have an expanded team of tenant inspectors and mystery shoppers
- The quality of repairs: we have been working with Nottingham City Council on a tender of our repairs and maintenance contract which will be worth in the region of £230 million pounds over the next seven years
- Housing Income Management: we now have a dedicated and specialist service to ensure a focus on improving our collection rates
- Vacant Property Management and Lettings: following the successful introduction of our choice based lettings scheme HomeLink, and some initial improvements in reducing our number of voids we have now developed a dedicated service which brings together the allocations, lettings and vacant property management teams
- Tenancy and Estate management: we are transforming our approach to estate management and carried out three pilot estates “weeks of action” to identify how we can improve housing patch managers “client role”. We also have signed up to the Respect Housing Management standard and we are actively engaging in the role out of Neighbourhood Policing.
- Customer focus: following a number of initiatives in our customer focus strategy including the launch of the 3C’s (Compliments, comments and complaints), we are now embarking on full culture change programme involving the entire workforce

We are now developing our longer term strategy which sets our ambition beyond our focus to deliver excellent cores housing services. This is timely, the City Council, in partnership with One Nottingham (Nottingham’s Local Strategic Partnership) has also started a process of developing a vision for 2030 and a sustainable community strategy. We are actively engaged in this: our Chief Executive is on the One Nottingham executive group, and also represented on the Crime and Drugs Partnership and the Housing Strategic Partnership.

SECTION 2 – SERVICE AREAS

Our self-assessment is the product of a comprehensive gap analysis against the KLOEs undertaken through a series of workshops (involving front line staff, service heads, tenants and City Council representatives) and two KLOE challenge events. The first of these was an internal event involving tenants and managers from across the company; the second was an external event with representatives from 3 star ALMOs and the City Council. Comments from both events have been incorporated into the final self-assessment.

2.1 Access, customer care and user focus

Our strengths in access, customer care and user focus are:

- A customer focus strategy which has resulted in:
 - the launch of a new approach to managing customer feedback through the '3Cs' (Compliments, Comments and Complaints) and the establishment of a new customer relations team
 - an accommodation strategy which includes a programme of office improvements and aims to consolidate our call centres
 - a culture change programme developed in full consultation with customers and staff to ensure the development of consistently high levels of service
- A 24 hour repairs call centre
- Monthly newsletters for all tenants produced on an area basis
- Reviewing our service standards in partnership with tenants
- More services are now available through our website
- Developing the use of text messaging for the repairs and rents service
- Quarterly estate, telephone and reception area mystery shopping by tenants

There are some weaknesses, and we are taking appropriate action in:

- Performance improvement on some indicators
- Improving our website to enable more interactive services and developing our ICT strategy
- Making better use of our customer profiling data to target and improve service delivery to diverse groups
- Improving mechanisms for reporting and acting on customer feedback
- Consolidating our call centres

Corporate Culture and Governance

We are committed to improving the way in which we deliver services to our customers and a major cultural change programme has been commissioned to move NCH further towards being a truly customer focused organisation. The key drivers behind the programme are to ensure consistency, improve performance and develop a customer-focused culture. Our commitment to cultural change runs throughout NCH and the entire workforce, Board members and tenant representatives will have engaged in the programme by March 2008.

Tenant Services Inspectors regularly test our services and complete mystery shopping exercises evaluating access arrangements and responsiveness of staff. Their findings, along with performance against all indicators are reported to our Performance Executive Management Team and the relevant tenant forum. In addition, we have recently recruited a significant number of new tenants as mystery shoppers and high rise quality assurance inspectors to test and monitor performance.

We have separate tenant and leaseholder handbooks, which are both to be reviewed during the current financial year in partnership with our customers, along with our range of service charters. Our tenant compact has been comprehensively revised and reissued in June 2007 following extensive consultation.

We are developing a new system of customer surveys (vision management system) to drive service improvements. This will be used as a key management tool to actively canvass customer views, monitor trends on an ongoing basis and inform service improvements. Customer satisfaction in the key areas of vacant property management and repairs has seen an upward trend for 2007-08 with satisfaction levels at 93% for both service areas.

We have established a dedicated Customer Relations Team whose focus is the use of customer surveys, complaints and other customer satisfaction information to shape services and to look at all means to improve service delivery through evidenced customer feedback.

Access to the service

Delivering our vision of a truly customer focused organisation requires change to our customer access points and ongoing performance improvements in call handling and enquiry response rates. Our office improvement programme is underway and we aim to provide DDA compliant public areas by June 2008 and a corporate customer contact centre providing consistent customer focus and customer care in the longer term.

More services are now available through our website including the mutual exchange register; choice based lettings and online rent payments. Our website will be further developed during 2007-08 to improve functionality, information and availability in community languages. We already utilise texting for repair appointment reminders and are working on developing its use in other areas of our business.

Information

We provide a range of information for customers, including handbooks, leaflets and newsletters. Our leaflets cover all the key services and are available both via our website and access points. All our leaflets are produced in plain English and are made available in other formats on request. We produce a newsletter for tenants and leaseholders every month in 3 local editions that includes specific information relevant to each of the operational units.

Complaints

Our 3 C's Policy, introduced in April 2007, ensures a wider system of recording complaints, compliments and comments. The new system seeks to expand our knowledge of the customer perspective beyond formal consultation and traditional complaints systems and has proved to be a great success, with a significant increase in the numbers of customers accessing the complaints system over the first five months of operation. Other improvements include customer choice on how to receive a response to a complaint (e.g. written, verbal or personal visit) and quarterly reports and individual case conferences to learn from complaints.

Consultation and Feedback

We are expanding our range of consultation and feedback mechanisms through our menu of tenant involvement and the vision management system.

We presently canvass customer views through a variety of surveys, including independent satisfaction surveys on repairs and decent homes. We are currently undertaking our STATUS survey, with over 18,000 households being surveyed, the results of which will be available from 6th September 2007 and will be reflected in our service improvement plans. We propose to undertake the STATUS survey on an annual basis in future years and will survey a rotating 50% of our tenants each year so that all have the opportunity to feedback on a two year cycle.

2.2 Diversity

Our strengths in diversity are:

- Compliance with CRE Code of Practice on Rented Housing and a target to achieve Level 3 of the Equality Standard for Local Government
- Effective harassment policies and 24 hour victim support scheme
- We have BME tenant and staff groups and are supporting the development of a tenant disability focus group and youth forum
- Ethnicity data on 73% of households and improved language and disability needs data
- Diversity training is integral to our culture change programme and Board Development Programme
- A systematic needs assessment process is in place
- Over 30% of CBL bidders from BME communities Equality impact assessments have been carried out for all key services and we are developing our ongoing policy and programmes

There are some weaknesses, and we are taking appropriate action in:

- Reviewing our workforce targets and implementing an action plan to ensure they are achieved
- Reviewing our translation policy to achieve VFM in providing translated documents
- Developing a range of equality schemes beyond our existing Race Equality Scheme

Corporate Culture and Governance

We have a comprehensive equality and diversity policy, which is promoted via diversity training which all Board and staff members receive as part of the induction process. A service charter on equality and diversity is published across reception areas and spells out our commitment to customers. We have assessed our compliance against the Equality Standard and have a target to achieve Level 3 by December 2007.

Our equality and diversity strategy was developed through a well-attended consultation seminar in 2005 involving various stakeholders representing faith, disability, staff, tenant, Police and other groups. We have a Board Diversity Champion and our Executive Management Team is responsible for the equality and diversity agenda, with regular articles in staff and tenant newsletters to promote awareness.

Guidance on diversity issues including 'making information and services accessible', a 'know your customer' factsheet and an 'accessibility checklist' for meetings have been produced and made available to staff. We have developed an equalities 'behaviour statement' summarising what is expected of staff. This has been publicised through Board equalities training and the EPDR process, and is issued in a pocket-sized format to all employees.

Equality impact assessments have been carried out against key services. An inclusion strategy was developed and two outreach support officers recruited to address the findings of the impact assessment of our choice-based lettings scheme (HomeLink) and allocations policy. HomeLink is proving popular with our BME communities, with over 30% of users from the BME community.

We support a number of PATRA trainees and an apprenticeship scheme to recruit female staff to our repairs service. We have agreed workforce targets and a positive action plan, although we need to review these and ensure the action plan is fully implemented. This plan addresses the findings of an impact assessment of company employment procedures. As part of this plan and in response to suggestions from ethnic minority staff, we are supporting an ethnic minority employee forum to research and discuss work and service issues in partnership with management, and make the most of BME talent and skills in the company.

Access and Customer Care

Our customer profile initiative has successfully increased our levels of customer data, with ethnicity records held for 73% of tenants and disability and language needs data for 15%, with a target to increase this to 60% by March 2008. A 'customer profile' checking system has been developed to allow easy access to information about customer needs, with information utilised to target individual needs, e.g. our tenant newsletter is produced in alternative formats, rent statements are produced in large print to 500 tenants, and job tickets include useful information in relation to older and vulnerable tenants.

A detailed needs assessment for all new customers has been introduced and regarded as best practice by HouseMark with details recorded on the central housing database and flagged to staff whenever customer records are accessed.

Improvements have been made to the consistency of multi-language straplines on company literature and to information on availability in alternative formats. We used a survey of customer needs, research and an options appraisal to determine our customers' key languages. We have taken steps to provide our main documents and information on the website in these languages. When information is produced in alternative formats it is made available electronically and printed as needed to minimise waste. We have a register of staff with language skills who can assist customers where needed as a faster and value for money alternative to external interpreters.

Service user involvement

We support a BME forum that is regularly attended by the Chief Executive, Board Diversity Champion, and key officers. Our ethnicity monitoring form was changed in response to suggestions from the group to include a specific category of 'Black British'. Monitoring shows that this is now a popular choice for customers to describe their ethnicity.

Disability and Youth forums are being developed with a remit to scrutinise services and improve representation across all our involvement activities. A fully accessible launch (15th September) of 'Homes 4 Us', our new disability forum, is being planned by disabled tenants and leaseholders in conjunction with voluntary and community sector stakeholders and relevant City Council services for disabled people. Our Tenant and Leaseholder Compact sets out challenging provisions for including traditionally under-represented groups using a variety of means of involvement. Targets have been set and positive action carried out to ensure Area Panels are reflective of the ethnicity, disability, gender and age profile of the area.

Partnerships

We work closely with the Council and Police on a variety of neighbourhood management and anti-social behaviour issues, including the development of a domestic violence sanctuary scheme. We are represented at a senior level on One Nottingham, the local strategic partnership. Outreach work to raise awareness in 'hard to reach groups' and to develop links with voluntary and community sector groups is being carried out by six specialist tenant and resident involvement officers, two outreach workers supporting the choice-based lettings scheme, and three financial inclusion officers to increase financial awareness among young people and other target groups.

Our 'inclusion events budget' enables staff to bid for support for events that involve traditionally under-represented groups or that bring different groups together. Our work with local communities varies from supporting the Nottingham Caribbean Carnival, celebrating the 10th anniversary of an office's opening with the local community, providing support to an Asian women's group to promote awareness of our choice-based lettings scheme and policies and working relationships with Polish and Somali voluntary groups. These relationships are helping us understand the needs of 'new' communities and those with hidden needs and help raise awareness of our services.

Diversity was an important factor in our selection of Decent Homes contractor partners, and satisfaction with Decent Homes work is routinely monitored by ethnicity and other factors.

Harassment

We have strong policies on racial and other forms of harassment, which we are reviewing with customers. Our harassment procedures ensure various kinds of support are available to victims including advice, 'target hardening' of properties and where necessary temporary or permanent rehousing. We operate a well-regarded victim support alarm scheme that ensures staff are available 24 hours a day to help co-ordinate response to victims of harassment. Our domestic violence policy and procedure were developed in partnership with the Council. They are detailed and provide a variety of support mechanisms to survivors, although more work is needed to provide quality assurance of the service survivors and other victims of harassment receive. Information on harassment cases is shared with the local Racial Equality Council Common Monitoring Project.

Legislation

We are developing a combined equality scheme, involving staff and customer consultation, to address our disability, gender and other equality duties. A review of company policies and procedures in relation to cohesion and changing equalities legislation is taking place in conjunction with our customers and is scheduled for completion in summer 2008. The staff intranet site features up to date information on national equalities reports and the latest legislation.

2.3 Stock investment and asset management

Our strengths in stock investment/ asset management are:

- We are developing a fit for purpose Asset Management Strategy -including our decent homes investment plan - and are updating our repairs and maintenance strategy
- We have framework contracts with private sector builders delivering our Decent Homes programme
- Gas servicing section with almost 100% achievement in servicing gas appliances 3 years in a row
- Our Property Services section retained ISO 9001 and ISO 14001 accreditations in 2007
- Our independently validated KPIs for the DLO compare with top quartile
- Our independently audited and delivered customer surveys on both repairs and Decent Homes show high levels of customer satisfaction
- Consistent user involvement in development and monitoring Decent Homes and the repairs service
- In 2006/07 we achieved close to 100% spend against the capital programme
- We have an award winning apprentice training scheme
- We make appointments for all routine repairs including external repairs
- Work on collaborative procurement has been progressed and we are now members of the 4SY procurement consortia and helping to lead on the CEP programme
- The R&M tender is well underway and is on target to deliver a market tested service by April 2008
- We are targeting planned repairs at the priority estates identified by our Tenant Inspectors
- We have effective working relationships with the City Council to provide Aids and Adaptations services

There are some weaknesses, and we are taking appropriate action in:

- Ensuring our capital programmes are re-aligned to deliver investment that is sustainable
- Embedding accurate costing of services and budgetary control of capital and maintenance programmes
- Developing multiskilling as general practice within the workforce
- Achieving improved value through Decent Homes and other services
- Dealing with the dissatisfaction of tenants not receiving new kitchens or bathrooms under the Decent Homes programme
- Completing a major restructure of the service which has been in progress for a significant period of time leaving staff feeling vulnerable with high numbers of temporary staff in place creating inefficiency
- Developing a workforce that is representative of the wider community
- Improving our responses to vulnerable tenants on Repairs and Decent Homes

Asset Management

We aim to implement a balanced stock investment programme that will bring the whole of our stock into compliance with the Decent Homes Standard by 2013 and maintain properties at that standard. We are currently working with the Council and Savills to produce a clear and achievable programme that will produce the type of homes and communities that our tenants aspire to and are developing a 'decent homes plus standard' with tenants.

To assist the decision making process we have a comprehensive database of stock information within our Keystone database. A revised 20% stock condition survey carried out on our behalf by Savills during the summer of 2006 along with the Curtins non traditional survey of 2006 provides the basis of our asset management system. This information has been used by Savills to formulate our revised Decent Homes programme.

We are developing a comprehensive asset management strategy (AMS) that will achieve the right balance between asset condition, delivering decent homes (investment needs), demand, building sustainable communities and financial viability. This strategy is being developed with the Council to ensure compatibility with the Council's vision for communities.

The current programmes for Capital and Revenue are not aligned to deliver the best investment possibly due to programmes being drawn up without sufficient long term thinking and the necessary consideration to other strategies and plans. For instance we are installing wooden windows through our Decent Homes programme and PVCu windows through regeneration schemes. The AMS and the Repairs and Maintenance Strategy will develop a holistic approach to capital programmes and future maintenance needs.

Budgetary control of these programmes has been developed but is in its infancy. Managers are continuing to learn and engage with this process with effective monitoring in place to ensure that programmes hit targets and that the early warning systems in place to enable adjustment to programmes where necessary are used.

Decent Homes Programme

Decent homes work started in October 2005 under the PPC2000 contract. The 4 current contract partners, Lovell, Keepmoat, Bullock and Mears have formed a successful partnership delivering the Decent Homes package to over 1000 homes within the city to date.

Customers were involved extensively in the choice of contractors and were trained to ensure that they could take a full part in the procurement process. Customers have been at the heart of the decision making process for Decent Homes, being represented on the steering group and attending focus groups throughout the programme. Tenants were consulted in July 2007 on their priorities for the Decent Homes programme and these results are now being used to prioritise the programme. The most important aspects of the Decent Homes programme in order of priority were security, heating and internal works. Our independently audited customer satisfaction figures have generally been good in comparison to similar local schemes.

We are now working with local training agencies to embed training schemes within the future Decent Homes programmes.

We are improving value for money within the decent homes programme following work undertaken this year with the City and Faithful + Gould QS practice to put together a valuation process, which will be agreed by all parties and guarantees better value for money and continuous improvement for the remaining Decent Homes Phase 1 Contract.

Procurement

We are currently operating several large scale procurement projects, the largest, the repairs and maintenance tender is a joint project between the Council and ourselves. This process, currently at PQQ stage, will be delivered by April 2008 and the contract will be worth over £200 million pounds over the next 7 years. There has been significant tenant involvement on this project with tenants again being trained to take a major part in the decision making process.

We use a variety of good practice methods for procurement including via PfH, OGC Framework, the London Housing Consortia LHC, Procurement Cards, and using processes already in place in

collaboration with both the County and City Councils. Formal guidance on procurement practice within NCH has now been developed and revised rules and regulations implemented to ensure that all decisions made on procurement are based upon best practice.

We have now joined the award winning 4SY procurement consortium facilitated by the Centre of Excellence and have put forward proposals relating to major savings over the next 5 years. In addition we are now taking an active lead on helping to establish the Central England Procurement Partnership (CEPP) and are developing a business plan along with other RSL partners in association with Gleeds consultants, sponsored by seed funding from the East Midlands Centre of Excellence.

A company-wide Procurement Strategy which recognises the most efficient methods of procurement is being formulated. Utilisation of IT in procurement (E-procurement) is also an area we are looking to improve.

Repairs and Maintenance

Day to day responsive repairs are delivered by our internal DLO of some 350+ operatives of various trades operating from two depots within the city. Repair requests are raised through our Repairs Call Centre (at first point of contact with the customer) as either emergency or routine categories. An extensive suite of performance indicators are used to measure and monitor delivery of the service on a monthly and cumulative basis and customer satisfaction is gathered by an independent external source. Customers have been and continue to be involved in the development of the service through various forums and project groups.

We are reviewing the repairs handbook, repairs service standards and information in the Tenants Handbook to ensure consistency and accurate reflection of services. A successful pilot scheme targeting planned repairs was introduced on three estates identified as a priority by Tenant Inspectors. This pilot was so successful that it is now being rolled out across all estates.

The R&M tender process has attracted, via the OJEU process, most of the major national players in the maintenance market. These companies have submitted Prior to Qualification Questionnaires which are currently in the process of being evaluated and those Companies shortlisted will receive invitations to tender in September 2007. The contract will be awarded in January 2008 with contract commencement from 1st April 2008.

Cyclical Programmes

Planned cyclical programmes are currently completed by our Prior to Paint Section which completes planned works to properties (mainly replacement doors and windows) on an eight year cycle. Customer satisfaction is measured through an external source and reported on a monthly and cumulative basis.

We recognise that our current method of providing prior to paint contracts has generally remained unchanged for many years with no assessment of VFM or best use of resources being completed and we will be addressing this during the current financial year. Similarly the performance framework for the delivery of planned cyclical and capital works is being strengthened with performance indicators being in place to measure and monitor programme progress and completion.

Gas servicing

The service for our circa 30,000 appliances is coordinated via a dedicated team within our DLO. The team has been successful in achieving almost 100% success rate in servicing for the past three years. Whilst we currently force entry as a last resort to ensure 100% completion of servicing, we are now developing procedures which will make this method even less prevalent than is currently the case.

Due to the projected increase in the number of heating systems being installed within the Decent Homes programme, we are engaging Corgi Registration Services to audit our responsibilities under the Landlord Gas Regulations to ensure best practice in this area is maintained.

Repairs Call Centre

We operate an efficient 24 hour call centre to deal with repairs requests in which performance has improved consistently for the past two years. Our current challenge is to ensure that in a very competitive local market we are able to recruit and retain staff of sufficient skills to maintain our high service standards we have achieved to date.

Adaptations

Aids and adaptation requirements are completed by a dedicated team within our DLO. Requests for work are referred to us by the aids and adaptations agency of the City Council. The working relationship between the two teams is very good with an agreed working protocol in place to strengthen accountabilities and responsibilities and performance monitoring.

Customer satisfaction is gathered independently and work is underway to ensure returns are more reflective of the amount of work completed.

2.4 Housing Income Management

Our strengths in housing income management are:

- We offer an extensive range of payment methods (direct debit weekly & monthly, Post Offices, Paypoint, telephone, internet, local offices and a door to door collection service for vulnerable customers).
- Increased capacity and resources through specialist Rents Teams geographically based across the city that are able to meet local need
- Significant reduction in the number of tenants evicted for rent arrears; down 30% in 2 years
- A free and impartial debt advice service delivered in partnership with the voluntary sector
- An Advice Agencies joint working Debt Protocol has been agreed
- An established Tenant Rents Panel
- Staff have access to the Council's housing benefit systems to enable effective monitoring and assistance with claims. Details of pending claims are provided for Rent Account Managers to assist in collecting information required to assess the claim
- Effective working relationships with the court service and local advice agencies

There are some weaknesses, and we are taking appropriate action in:

- Improving our performance on rent collection and arrears recovery
- Strengthening our approach to preventative work
- Providing more in house processing of former tenant arrears to improve performance and VFM
- Improving our ability to effectively profile tenants in arrears
- Devising additional mechanisms to establish customer views (especially hard to reach groups)
- Improving customer information, publicity and access to the service

- Developing a Financial Inclusion Strategy with key local partners
- Developing a Benefit Take Up Strategy and improving joint working with outside agencies.
- Improving the monitoring of agreed protocols such as Housing Benefit and developing new protocols with Children's Services, Homeless Prevention and other agencies
- Developing an effective range of incentives & promotion of VFM payment methods

Delivering the Rents Service

We have recently restructured housing management services into 3 discrete teams; rents, voids and allocations, and tenancy and estate management. Our rents service is delivered by 3 locally based teams and a central team providing support services. Each local team comprises of a manager, an enforcement officer, a financial inclusion officer and 8 rent account managers. The provision of a dedicated and focused local rents team ensures that resources are directed where needed and local factors are understood.

Financial inclusion officers have been appointed to tackle the high levels of deprivation and financial exclusion experienced by tenants. They visit all new tenants within the first week of their tenancy to verify HB claims and provide support in supplying outstanding information, completing a financial statement, help with budgeting and, advice and assistance in obtaining a bank account, home contents insurance and a credit union savings account. A Financial Inclusion Strategy is to be developed bringing together initiatives across the sector.

Our central support team comprises of a manager, the Rents Call Centre, a rent administration team and the Home Collection Team. The central team produces most rent documentation, direct debit, home contents insurance and court administration and is responsible for collecting former tenancy arrears. The rents call centre answers 1000 calls per week, 78% within 18 seconds and took £1.2 million in card payments in 2006/07. The Home Collection Team collects rent and all council bills from vulnerable customers as well as assisting with housing benefit and Supporting People subsidy applications. The call centre are to extend opening hours to 8.30am to 6.30pm Monday to Friday during the second quarter of 2007/08 and we are exploring the options of extending accessibility throughout the team.

General advice on rents and Housing Benefit is provided by the tenancy and estate management teams at local housing offices. Rents surgeries are held at all offices without a full-time rents team in residence. Our debt advice service has surgeries at all local offices, our homeless families unit and attends bulk rent possession hearings at Court.

Rents and Service Charge Accounting and Collection

A wide range of options for making payments is provided and we are currently undertaking a value for money assessment across all methods. Routine tenancy sign-up procedures include face-to-face interviews that provide information on rent payment methods. We reinforce the tenant's responsibility for rent payment through welcome meetings, written information and publicity campaigns to encourage regular payments.

Current and Former Tenant Arrears Recovery

Despite the management of rent arrears showing significant improvement in performance during the last four years; reducing arrears levels from £10.3 million in July 2003 to £3.8 million in June 2007, current tenancy arrears remain too high.

We have recently reviewed our approach to rent arrears and assessed how performance can be improved. This strategic move places emphasis on proactive, preventative approaches rather than enforcement. Post tenancy commencement there is early intervention for arrears through personal contact and signposting to debt advice services, together with an extensive welfare benefit training programme.

Measures have been put in place to monitor satisfaction with the rents service, arrears recovery and debt advice. Responses received will be used in allocating resources and direction of the service.

2.5 Resident Involvement

Our strengths in resident involvement are:

- Tenant and Leaseholder Compact developed in partnership with staff, tenants, leaseholders, elected members and City Council officers
- Strong strategic framework with a wide ranging menu of involvement opportunities
- Tenants now represent the largest group on our Board
- Tenants have helped to shape the company wide culture change programme
- Dedicated tenant participation staff at city wide and local level
- Staff undergoing CIH Level 3 Certificate in Housing (Tenant Participation)
- Additional resources to support a comprehensive tenant training programme
- Equality audit of all TRAs underway
- Established Tenant Services Inspection Team and recent successful recruitment of new mystery shoppers and high rise inspectors
- Annual tenant and leaseholder conference

There are some weaknesses, and we are taking appropriate action in:

- Encouraging a wider range of tenants to take up opportunities for involvement
- Improving tenant involvement in performance at local TRA and area panel level
- Increasing satisfaction with opportunities for involvement through our menu of involvement
- Developing the scrutiny role of forums

We have a clear tenant involvement structure which is fully explained in our tenant compact and explains the roles and responsibilities of each participation structure. Every tenant received a summary of the Tenant and Leaseholder Participation Compact during July and new tenants are provided with a copy at sign up. We have a much extended menu of involvement, enabling customers to choose from a range of opportunities that enables them to participate effectively in a way to suit each individual.

Our Tenant and Leaseholder Participation Compact launched in June this year is a tripartite agreement between ourselves, the Council and tenants and leaseholders. It has been developed in partnership with over 100 members of staff, a wide range of tenants and leaseholders, elected members and City Council Officers. We will use the compact as a tool to help ensure our services become more efficient, transparent and accountable so that customers know who is responsible for decisions and that tenants are actively involved in helping us improve performance and raise customer satisfaction. A compact review group involving tenants is to be established to look at progress against the compact action plan six months after its launch. A two page news sheet will be sent to all the

tenant groups, panels and forums detailing updated progress on the implementation of the action plan for the compact during September.

Local compacts will be developed by area panels who will tailor their individual compact in line with the aims and objectives of their panel. Area panels will work in close consultation with the Council's area committees and will offer excellent opportunities for partnership working on community projects and initiatives.

Satisfaction levels for opportunities for involvement have been historically low and we hope this will be addressed through the changes we have made this year to our strategy, menu of involvement and compact.

Resources

Our central Tenant and Leaseholder Involvement Team has responsibility for resident involvement across the city and is developing a strong strategic framework with a menu of involvement enabling customers to participate effectively in a way to suit each individual. The team is supported by locally based tenant and resident officers (TROs) whose role is to support and encourage community engagement at a local level and is evolving to bring in specialist responsibilities for young people, work around the Respect Agenda including enviro crime links, older people and taking information to schools for discussion with pupils.

Our budget for tenant involvement has been increased to reflect the increased emphasis on improving the service and there is a significant focus on the provision of training for both tenants and staff. Currently a training skills survey is being taken to all tenants and residents associations as well as the area panels, forums and tenants and leaseholders' congress to assess training needs. Training opportunities will be widely advertised for all tenant forums and groups to access. A number of our TROs are currently studying for the CIH Level 3 Certificate in Housing (Tenant Participation) and will complete the course in April 2008.

Our 'getting involved leaflet' for tenant participation, together with our 'wheel of involvement' has been developed and this will be given out in sign up packs, as well as being publicised on our website, by TROs and other members of staff at area offices. Our website is being developed to provide new and innovative ways for our customers to get involved through discussion forums and the introduction of 'blogs'. More customers of all profiles are gaining internet access and can be consulted without even leaving their home, and we are currently looking at how we can develop customer engagement through web access.

An equality audit of all tenant and resident groups is being undertaken during August and September by TROs and we are keen to encourage more customers to become involved to ensure a fully representative structure.

Impact of resident involvement

We have a well established Tenant Services Inspection Team who are involved in monitoring, reviewing and inspecting the quality of services and make recommendations for service improvements. Recent reports by the team have resulted in 3 pilot estate schemes to drive up performance. We have recently recruited a group of new 'uninvolved' tenants to act as mystery shoppers and high rise quality assurance inspectors.

Recent work with customers on shaping services include consultation events on developing an estate

standard, reviewing the leaseholder service charter, decent homes priorities and our successful ASB feedback events. Tenants are routinely involved in interviewing and selecting staff and we are working with our newly re-launched forums and area panels on developing their roles in relation to scrutiny and performance monitoring.

We are keen to evidence the impact of resident involvement and are developing systems to provide feedback quickly and efficiently within a set time of consultation taking place. Feedback will be publicised through various communication mechanisms including the newsletter and website as well as through the forums. Systems to track changes made as a result of tenant involvement include having 'success stories' as a standard agenda for area panel meetings.

2.6 Tenancy and Estate Management

Our strengths in tenancy and estate management are:

- We received a 'highly commended' award at the 2007 National Federation of ALMOs conference for our work on ASB Tenants Feedback events
- There is excellent partnership working on ASB at both strategic and operational levels
- We have undertaken a self assessment against the Respect Standard for Housing Management and have developed an ASB action plan to deliver the recommendations of the ASB Commission
- Victim support training has been undertaken.
- Introductory tenancies are in place with a review stage at 9 months
- A revised tenancy agreement is currently out for consultation, it includes a new clause to clampdown on drug activity in the home
- Comprehensive CCTV service for high rise blocks and partial coverage on estates
- Quarterly estate inspections involving a range of partners take place, with high risk estates receiving more frequent inspections
- Quarterly programme of star rating assessments of estates led by the Tenant Inspection Team
- A pilot project has been launched in the areas identified as most challenging to develop a template for estate improvements.
- 84 % customer satisfaction levels with our block caretaking service

There are some weaknesses, and we are taking appropriate action in:

- Improving the co-ordination and management of public realm services
- Reviewing service standards in consultation with our tenants
- Reviewing caretaking services
- Empowering Housing Patch Managers to affect real change in local neighbourhoods
- Effectively targeting ASB resources according to profiling information
- Increasing our focus on preventative rather than enforcement measures
- Developing a consistent performance management approach to ASB
- Robustly evaluating local lettings policies and the Allocations Panel
- Challenging our costs on estate and tenancy management services
- Market testing services to ensure VFM

Tenancy Management

Our service is delivered through 9 area offices and 54 housing patch managers each responsible for around 550 properties. Patch sizes vary according to the intensity of housing management required.

There are comprehensive policies and procedures on tenancy and estate management which can be accessed through the intranet but some policies and procedures need updating including associated standard letters. The adoption of the ISO standard is to be introduced to address this issue. A tenancy file management system is in place but needs to be more effectively managed and regular file audits undertaken. The ISO standard will assist this process.

A continuum of tenancy visits take place where rights, responsibilities and tenancy conditions are explained they include a welcome meeting, new tenancy visits, 9 month introductory tenancy reviews and biennial visits.

Enforcing tenancy conditions and dealing with crime and anti-social behaviour

We have strong partnership working arrangements on ASB at both strategic and operational levels. This has helped deliver a 25% reduction in crime and ASB in one of the most deprived areas of Nottingham over the last 2 years. An ASB Commission was established in 2005 to identify the improvements needed to multi agency services to address the experiences and perceptions of ASB by local communities. Our ASB action plan ensures the Commission's recommendations and those identified in the Respect Standards for Housing Management self assessment are being implemented. Our Chief Executive is represented on the board of the Crime and Drugs Partnership (CDP) and we have been fully engaged with the CDP's weeks of action through intensive tenancy enforcement interventions, Smartwatering tenants' goods and providing fire safety prevention advice. We are also actively engaging in the roll out of neighbourhood policing.

In managing ASB, there is a move to focus on victim and witness support and keeping people informed of progress. This is being achieved through staff training, the introduction of victim and witness action plans and more robust performance management. To help target resources to hotspots, ASB monitoring has been introduced that provides for greater analysis of ASB by type, location and actions taken. Software systems are being developed to facilitate this process.

An ASB Communications plan is being implemented which promotes the outcomes of ASB management, publicises success stories and raises the profile of reporting routes and an ASB Strategy is being developed in consultation with partners.

Estate Management

The maintenance of the public realm is delivered through a variety of agencies including the Council's Neighbourhood Services and in-house caretaking teams. We are transforming our approach to estate management through improving the communal repairs service, empowering Housing Patch Managers to adopt the client role for services provided by the Council and assume some budget responsibility for communal repairs on estates.

Service level agreements have been prepared since the last inspection for the garden assistance scheme and cleaning services. A grounds maintenance specification is being developed in conjunction with tenants through learning from the 3 pilot estates maintenance weeks of action. The caretaking service is scheduled for restructure into a generic service which will cover communal areas of all blocks. Estates services have not yet been exposed to market testing, and cleaning services and the garden assistance scheme will be market tested in 2007 and caretaking during 2008.

2.7 Allocations, lettings and voids

Our strengths in allocations, lettings and voids are:

- We have transformed our approach to lettings and allocations through the introduction of HomeLink and a new Allocations Policy and has led to improved probity, choice and access. One year on this allocations and lettings system is being reviewed and scrutinised.
- Effective CBL system, developed in partnership, linked to interactive website
- HomeLink has provided new business opportunities to the company
- Exploring opportunities to develop sub-regional CBL system with neighbouring authorities
- Support mechanisms for people through the bidding process
- Support Officers who work with vulnerable people to help them bid for homes
- A mutual exchange database is available on the internet increasing mutual exchanges by 30% in 2 months
- An integrated void management service with one accountable manager
- Improving performance across a range of indicators
- New tenants signed up in a location convenient to them
- Reviewing the lettable standard with tenants to drive up standards
- Suited locks to improve access to vacant properties

There are some weaknesses, and we are taking appropriate action in:

- Transforming our performance on vacant property management
- Improving performance on registering applications
- Further developing our needs assessment framework to ensure access/support for those with less obvious needs
- Developing effective relationships with voluntary sector partners
- Working with the Council to jointly deliver the homelessness prevention strategy
- Utilising customer and stakeholder surveys to inform service improvements
- Developing a new lettable standard
- Developing a strategy to deal with obsolete stock where there is very little or no demand

The whole lettings and vacant property management service is now operated from one central team combining HomeLink, a specialist allocations team, emergency accommodation, decommissioning and void property services. The service is now the responsibility of one Head of Operations providing clearer direction and leadership with a single focus, challenging targets and a dedicated and more co-ordinated workforce.

The housing register, the housing allocations policy and offering choice

Allocations are made via a CBL system (Nottingham HomeLink) which was introduced in June 2006. HomeLink is a partnership with 11 local RSLs. One year on, we are now in the process of reviewing the service with key stakeholders to identify where improvements can be made to increase accessibility and share a wider understanding of the service. In February 2006 changes were made to the allocation policy in preparation for HomeLink. These changes were made in partnership with our customers and equality impact assessments were carried out for both CBL and the allocation policy.

We have overhauled our reporting systems with monthly monitoring and detailed scrutiny and analysis on compliance with the allocations policy. Reports go to housing operations senior management, Performance and Best Value, Performance and Regulatory Committee and Strategic Board. There is now a clear demonstration of transparency with the allocations service with measures such as the Allocations Panel providing a clear audit trail of decisions made, and we now provide weekly feedback (on our website and as an addendum to the weekly advert in the newspaper) on how all our properties are allocated. Our allocations process also provides an audit/scrutiny system that ensures probity within the allocations system regarding applications from 'related parties' i.e. staff, board members, elected members, and relatives of these parties in either NCC, NCH or one of the partner RSLs.

We have received high bidding levels from BME applicants and further diversity targets are now being considered so that we can ensure the service provides wide accessibility. CBL has also achieved high bidding via the web; between April and July 2007 the cumulative bidding from BME applicants stands at 36%. This compares favourably with the percentage of offers and allocations being made to BME applicants (33% of offers and 29% of allocations).

There is good demand for general needs housing across the city with few problems experienced in letting properties to tenants, however supply outstrips demand for sheltered accommodation. We are developing a sheltered strategy using an asset management approach and this is being developed together with the Council's Older Persons Strategy.

Internal and external partnerships are in place to address wider community needs, for example, with the police in respect of witnesses and victims of serious crime; Adult Services and Police in respect of assisting people exiting prostitution; Children's Services in respect of care-leavers and the Multi Agency Protection Panel in respect of those considered to be a serious risk. An improved risk assessment framework was introduced in 2006 to ensure that where there is a potential risk of ASB, or known previous dangerous or serious behaviour, risks are identified and collectively managed with all appropriate parties. Further work needs to be carried out to ensure that the framework is monitored and that processes are embedded into working practices. We are developing partnership arrangements with the voluntary sector to address issues on operational practice and are working closely with the Council to ensure effective working relationships in relation to homelessness prevention.

During 2006 our needs assessment framework was introduced. This process helps to enable early identification of additional support or packages that will provide appropriate access to the right home, achieving increased sustainability. HomeLink Support Officers work closely with partners and support agencies to ensure that the needs of the vulnerable are taken into account and that support is available to access the service and in sustaining the tenancy. Further work needs to be carried out to ensure that the framework is monitored and that the processes are embedded into working practices. We also need to ensure that we identify and give support to applicants with less obvious needs.

Our registration process was centralised in December 2006 and whilst this has improved performance in terms of accuracy and quality of forms being registered, initial resourcing problems has meant that performance in relation to time taken to process the forms has deteriorated. Systems have been put into place to address the backlog of forms and to ensure that resources are in place to meet targets in future.

Vacant Property Management

We are focused on improving our performance on vacant property management and have reduced the number of voids between January 2007 and July 2007 from 704 to 565 and long term voids for the same period reduced from 170 to 144. Average relet times have also improved from 74.5 days in April 2006 to 68.2 days in July 2007, and the underlying trend excluding long terms voids is 40.4 days. Despite these improvements our performance and costs on voids remains too high in comparison with other ALMOs and we are working towards a step change improvement to address these inefficiencies. We are currently modelling the voids and allocations process and setting targets for all key stages. This will help us to have a more focused performance management to the process.

There are continuous improvements being made on performance for pre-termination visits and we have a target of achieving 100% accompanied viewings. A system of 'suited locks' has been introduced which improves access for staff during the void period. This minimises delays in the void period whilst keys are 'in transit' and means that work can be carried out by more than one member of staff at any time.

New Tenants are signed up for their tenancy at a location which is convenient to the customer. This can be in their current home, a local housing office, their new home or at another suitable location. Application of the lettable standard has been inconsistent in the past and we are currently reviewing the standard with tenants to ensure improvements in quality and consistency.

We are currently working with neighbouring authorities and the Council to explore options for a sub regional CBL scheme. It is proposed that HomeLink would be the lead organisation for this scheme.

2.8 Supported Housing

Our strengths in supported housing are:

- Nottingham On Call is accredited with the Telecare Service Association Code of Practice
- Nottingham On Call continues to expand and attract new business
- Working with the Council to assess the sustainability of sheltered housing schemes and more accurately balance supply and demand as part of the Older Persons Housing Strategy
- High level of social activity for sheltered housing residents and high levels of satisfaction
- Robust support plans in place and links to other care and support agencies
- Strong customer focus including comprehensive customer consultation
- Regular individual sheltered scheme newsletters
- Active tenants forum

There are some weaknesses, and we are taking appropriate action in:

- Developing mechanisms to address BME access to sheltered housing and community alarms and the under-representation of BME staff in sheltered housing
- Reducing the high level of voids and tackling the investment needs of some sheltered schemes through reviewing sheltered housing and decommissioning
- Developing a programme for the City Council to replace obsolete hard wired alarms with newer technology where appropriate to vulnerable tenants
- Improving access at Highwood House hostel through installing a lift

We provide supported housing through sheltered housing, floating support services, telecare services, and a hostel for homeless families. The key objectives of all our services is to enable people to live independently, sustain tenancies and to have an enhanced quality of life.

Stock Investment and Asset Management

We are working to understand changing needs and aspirations and to develop services that reflect the needs and aspirations of present and future customers. We are working with the Council to assess the sustainability of sheltered housing schemes and more accurately balance supply and demand as part of the Older Persons Housing Strategy. Investment options for sheltered housing are being informed by a major survey we commissioned in 2007. A decommissioning programme has been developed with 8 schemes (357 properties) decommissioned so far, and 1 further scheme being decommissioned in 2007-08.

Nottingham On Call is currently managing the installation of 7 new alarm systems in sheltered schemes and is the first site in the UK to re-equip with the PNC5 operating system.

Service User Involvement

We have a comprehensive framework for service user consultation, involvement and information sharing for our supported housing. This includes an older persons forum and sheltered housing residents participating in the tenant inspection team; regular meetings with tenants and residents and sheltered scheme newsletters; and customer satisfaction surveys for all users of supported housing services which reveal a high level of customer satisfaction.

Tenancy and Estate Management

We work with a variety of agencies to provide an effective tenancy and estate management service. Our work with Victim Support and Trading Standards aims to address fear of crime and improve security in the home. We are also working with Community Support Officers and Neighbourhood Wardens including running safety sessions for our tenants and using the 'smart water' initiative in sheltered schemes.

Allocations and Lettings

Improving choice and meeting needs are central to the delivery of our lettings service. All sheltered housing vacancies are advertised through the CBL system and we are promoting sheltered housing including BME access through engaging with local communities, meetings, attending multi-racial festivals, events and open days.

Following a needs and risk assessment all tenants have a support plan developed with them; it is amended as needs change and subject to formal review at appropriate intervals.

Liaison with Partners and Performance Management

We have strong partnerships with other agencies and providers to ensure we are fully effective in service delivery and in developing new business:

- Effective partnership with Supporting People teams to ensure ongoing service improvement.
- Nottingham On Call is accredited to Parts I, II and III of the T.S.A Code of Practice.
- Attendance at case conferences where appropriate, interactions with mental health teams, including the Jackdawe dementia teams,
- Partnership working with stakeholders such as Gedling BC, RSLs and Housing Aid to enhance a 24 hour monitoring and emergency support service

- Partnership working with Adult Services to develop the use of assistive technology.
- Performance measurements and monitoring tools across all services

2.9 Leasehold Management

Our strengths in leasehold management are:

- Increased resources through the establishment of a dedicated leaseholder team
- Established Leaseholder Forum
- Involving leaseholders in reviewing our leaseholder handbook and service charter
- Developing our leaseholder customer profile
- Leaseholder staff consultation guide available on the intranet
- Developing a separate leaseholder newsletter and conference

There are some weaknesses, and we are taking appropriate action in:

- Improving front line staff knowledge of leasehold issues
- Developing information and access to the leaseholder repairs service
- Developing a formal dispute resolution policy and procedure with leaseholders
- Partnership working with the Council in order to deliver clear and customer focused service

We have recently created a central leaseholder team to reinvigorate our approach to leasehold services and provide a dedicated resource and contact point.

Stock condition and asset management

We have a leaseholder consultation staff guide that provides clear information on consultation requirements and draft public consultation notices. The guide is available on the intranet and is accessible by staff. A protocol for consultation on major works programmes has also been developed to ensure the active engagement of leaseholders in programmes and contractor selection.

Copies of works orders are not currently always routinely provided to leaseholders to allow them to check that works that they have been charged for have been carried out, and no survey is currently carried out with home owners after major works to check that works were of high standard and to their satisfaction. Leaseholders are not informed of costs when reporting repairs. We are implementing a review of systems to ensure that this is possible in the future.

Management of home ownership housing

We have an established leaseholder forum that has been involved in developing our leaseholder's handbook and service charter, both now to be reviewed again in September 2007. The handbook includes comprehensive information on rights and responsibilities and also contains the service charter that outlines service standards leaseholders can expect. The forum also provides a regular opportunity for leaseholders to discuss the services that they receive, and to comment on service improvement initiatives.

Leaseholders are involved in our Tenant Services Inspection Team and play an active role in the wider tenant involvement movement including representation at the Tenancy & Estate Management Forum. Leasehold services are to be inspected by the Tenant Inspectors following suggestions by tenants and leaseholders at our KLOE workshops. We plan to improve upon the information to leaseholders through the establishment of a separate leaseholders newsletter and leaseholders conference, should leaseholders feel that this would offer benefits over a joint conference with tenants.

We plan to undertake a comprehensive leasehold satisfaction survey by the end of September 2007 to develop our knowledge of leasehold customers and profile data. Knowledge and understanding of leaseholder issues needs to be improved amongst front line staff across the organisation and a programme of staff training to ensure a consistent service across all areas will be delivered in the third quarter of 2007. Further planned improvements to the service include the introduction of a visit four weeks following completion and then subsequent biennial visits to leaseholders, as well as improved (pre completion) RTB advice for prospective leaseholders.

Service charges and rents

We provide a range of flexible service charge payment options, including direct debit, standing order, cash, instalments and Internet payments. We are working with the leaseholder forum to develop a service charge policy, a formal dispute resolution policy and better promotion of debt and benefit advice services.

2.10 Value for money

Our strengths in value for money (VFM) are:

- VFM strategy and action plan in place which is being updated
- Asset Management Strategy which contains our Investment Plan which will deliver significant savings in our investment programme
- Procurement Strategy in development (completion Sept 2007) and large scale procurement proposals in place and involvement with Procurement for Housing national consortium
- Information and data regarding performance and costs available throughout organisation
- Benchmarking data available through Housemark membership
- Clear resource allocation against Company priorities
- SLA reviews beginning to deliver savings
- VFM profile and awareness being raised through VFM Champions Group
- Budgets and financial planning systems are more accountable
- Evidence of tenant involvement in VFM issues
- Citywide training schemes provided through Decent Homes programme
- Responsive repairs tender underway

There are some weaknesses and we are taking appropriate action to improve our:

- Business planning processes by introducing better information and data on performance and costs
- VFM assessment of our new structures and outputs
- Embedding of our performance, financial management and VFM frameworks and culture
- Timeliness of cost and performance data
- Involvement of tenants in assessing cost and performance information
- Collective understanding of procurement
- Attendance management and management of vacancies
- Timeliness of SLA reviews

In 2007 we have revisited and revised our VFM Strategy, Asset Management Strategy and Procurement Strategy to ensure that they are fit for purpose and provide the appropriate framework through which both VFM and the Gershon agenda can be delivered across the organisation.

We have used the benchmarking services of HouseMark for the past two years to assist us in comparing performance and costs with similar organisations and have used this to inform our financial and service planning processes. It is clear that we are currently a relatively high cost but poor performing organisation in a number of our service areas and we have adopted a mix of approaches to address some of these issues.

Our tenants have informed us that it is a priority to improve performance in respect of customer care, vacant property management, rent collection and estate services and as a consequence we have reorganised our service delivery processes in these areas to invest additional targeted resources to focus on the necessary improvements.

In respect of responsive repairs we have chosen to undertake a competitive tendering exercise which will result in a market tested service commencing from 1st April 2008. The potential value of this contract is in excess of £200 million over a seven year period and part of the tender evaluation process will include an assessment of the VFM proposals over the lifetime of the contract offered by the successful organisation.

Our current Decent Homes programme which commenced in October 2005 is being provided by four contract partners, Lovell, Keepmoat, Bullock and Mears under a PPC2000 contract. We have undertaken an evaluation of this work in 2007 with the City Council and Faithful + Gould Quality Surveying Practice and have put together an improved valuation process which we are currently implementing in discussion with our partners.

We have improved our approach to procurement by both improving our internal technical capacity and structure and utilising the benefits of a mix of procurement consortia via Procurement for Housing, 4 South Yorkshire and the London Housing Consortia. We are also taking an active lead on helping to establish the Central England Procurement Partnership (CEPP) which is developing a business plan along with other partners in association with Gleeds consultants, sponsored by seed funding from the East Midlands Centre of Excellence.

We have commenced work on improving our business planning processes and further integrating our performance and financial management systems to ensure that VFM is at the heart of the decision making processes of our managers. VFM is sponsored at Executive Management Team level by the Director of Finance, Performance and ICT and we have an active VFM Champions Group incorporating staff from across the organisation which is driving our approach to ensuring that the culture of VFM is embedded throughout. This is supported by a revised Employee Performance Development Review process that ensures that each individual employee is encouraged on an annual basis to identify their own personal contribution to achieving VFM. The VFM Champions Group is also working closely with tenant representatives to identify how we can improve the involvement of tenants in assessing cost and performance information and increasing options for choice.

SECTION 3 PROSPECTS FOR IMPROVEMENT

Self Assessment Summary

Our strengths in terms of our prospects for improvement are:

- Our new senior management team whose members have an excellent track record and the resulting complete reduction in reliance on consultants
- The development of new services including the introduction of HomeLink, our new Choice Based Lettings system and new allocation policy; and the new 3C's (Compliments, Comments and Complaints) service
- R&M tender well underway and will deliver a fully market tested service
- Some strong track record of improvements for example on gas servicing and the repairs call centre
- A 'foundation plan' which addresses the key service issues
- Tenant involvement strategy development and active team of tenant inspectors who regularly test the service
- A customer focused culture change programme which runs throughout the organisation
- The development of our 10 year strategy and asset management strategy which contains our Decent Homes Investment plan
- A value for money strategy and procurement strategy under development
- A new streamlined Board and a programme of accredited Board development training
- Service improvement plans for all services and Business planning in development

There are weaknesses, and we are taking appropriate action in:

- Previous year's performance has only seen limited pockets of improvements whilst the organisation has been in a year of transition and the company has undergone a significant change in its Board and management team
- establishing clarity and certainty in the organisation through a whole company restructure
- consistently learning from customer feedback
- embedding the change throughout the organisation including value for money and risk management

What is our Service Track Record in delivering improvement?

In our 2005 inspection we received a rating of 1 star and uncertain prospects for improvement. The audit commission raised some serious concerns about the leadership and management capacity and reliance on consultants, the culture including lack of transparency in the organisation, and some very serious issues about the allocation and lettings process. Subsequent to the inspection we received considerable negative publicity both locally and nationally and this had a major impact on both customer confidence and staff morale.

Following the 2006 inspection report, we have been in a period of significant transition which has included a governance review (resulting in a new streamlined Board which was established at our AGM in July 07) but also significantly the recruitment of a new senior management team. We have attracted a Chief Executive and Director of Operations with an excellent track record of leadership in ALMOs which have achieved 3 stars and excellent prospects for improvement and we have made a number of other key appointments.

An immediate priority following the inspection was the review of our allocations and lettings. We have carried out a complete review of our allocations policies and procedures and developed a new choice based lettings system, HomeLink which was successfully launched in June 2006. One year on, we are now planning a review of the service.

In April 2007 we launched our new 3C's (Compliments, Comments and Complaints) service. The service has resulted in more customers accessing the service improvements to our knowledge of our customers' feedback. We are now reviewing the service and looking at how we can systematically learn from the feedback.

We continue to safeguard the health and safety of our tenants through sustained excellent performance in our gas servicing. We continue to work positively with partners on crime and anti-social behaviour issues and in 2007 received "highly commended" from the National Federation of ALMOs for our consultation events on ASB in the partnership category.

We continue to develop our sheltered housing services and Nottingham On Call; our care alarm monitoring service has recently been accredited with the Telecare Service Association Code of Practice.

Whilst previous years performance has seen limited pockets of improvements these do include a reduction in arrears levels from £10.3 million in July 2003 to £3.8 in July 2007, a reduction the number of voids from 1066 in 2004/05 to 565 in July 2007 and a reduction in the number of voids empty for more that six months from 411 in 2004/05 and 244 in July 2007.

We continue to make improvement to the repairs call centre and with the percentage of calls answered within target increasing from 58% in 2004/05 to 76% in July 2007.

We are now embarking on a programme of quality standards for ours services and our ambition is to achieve ISO9002 and Charter mark across a range of our services.

We are working jointly with the City Council on the market testing or our repairs and maintenance service, a contract that will be worth £200 million over the next 7 years.

We have revised our Value for Money strategy, and Procurement strategy and recognise the need to embed a value for money culture throughout the organisation. Our approach includes zero based budgeting, monthly revenue and capital executive management team meetings and effective mechanisms for budget management.

39 of the 42 main actions from the inspection recommendations have been completed, the remaining 3 are ongoing and involve working in partnership with the City council: these include the development of our investment strategy which is in draft and subject to consultation, the implementation of the accommodation strategy and service level reviews, these are all included in our service improvement plans.

Performance Management

Under the new leadership of our Chief Executive, we engaged staff (in both road shows and staff consultation events) and tenants (in focus groups) in discussions on the key issues for our customers and our services. From this we developed our foundation plan which focused the organisation on six key priority areas of:

- Tenant Involvement
- The quality of repairs
- Housing Income Management:
- Vacant Property Management and Lettings
- Tenancy and Estate management
- Customer focus

From this we carried out a re-alignment of our services to create clear specialist services for income management, vacant property management and allocations and estate services.

We have also embarked on the development of a longer term strategy which refreshed the Vision, Mission, Values and Objectives of the organisation. The process for the development of these included extensive consultation with staff and engagement of key partners. We have also radically reviewed our asset management strategy and on track to deliver a revised investment strategy by the end of September. We are expecting this to produce significant savings and new methods of working.

We have carried out thorough self assessments of our services with tenants, staff, Board members and representatives from Nottingham City Council, and developed our service improvement plans which form part of our annual delivery plan.

A clear message from our customers and staff has been also for us to change the culture of the organisation and we are now embarking on a customer focused cultural change programme which has six key elements:

- Leaderships and Management
- Strategy, Planning and Partnerships
- Style and Values
- Performance management and accountability
- Systems, policies and procedures
- Value for money

We have revised our performance management framework and introduced a monthly cycle of accountability meetings. We also have monthly performance accountability meetings with Nottingham City Council. We recognise we need to do more in terms of embedding a performance management culture in the organisation and are introducing new performance development review processes, business planning processes and training to facilitate this.

We have an established and highly committed Tenant Services Inspectors team. The team have been involved in service reviews and carrying out mystery shopping which are reported to our performance management team. The tenant services inspectors were also actively engaged in the self assessment of our services and development of service improvement plans.

We recognise our challenge is to ensure culture change including our programme performance management framework is embedded throughout the organisation and delivers real improvements to performance and our customers.

Capacity

We now have a new senior management team, including our new Chief Executive, Directors of Operations and Organisational Development and in addition we have a new Head of Asset Management, a new Head of ICT, and Head of Organisational Development and Learning. We are currently recruiting a new Director of Finance, Performance and ICT.

Following our governance review, we have commissioned the Board Development Agency to carry out a profiled review of our Board members with the aim of delivering the ILM accredited governance programme through this financial year.

We have carried out a thorough competency review and provided a comprehensive training and development package for managers. This is now being further developed as part of our People Development Strategy and Development Plan.

Following the recruitment of our permanent management team we have concluded our use of consultancy support with the exception of some specialist support for our culture change programme and where necessary specialist external advice.

We recognise that following restructuring around our foundation plan priorities we now need to complete our whole company restructure.

We continue to develop a positive partnership relationship with Nottingham City Council and for example, we have a key role to play in supporting the development of Neighbourhood management. We are revising our governance and partnership arrangements with the City.

Our Chief Executive is part of the Executive of One Nottingham, the Local Strategic Partnership and is represented on the Crime and Drugs partnership board. We are member of the Housing Strategic Partnership and look forward to working with their newly appointed Chair, in the development of a new Housing Strategy for Nottingham.