

PERFORMANCE AUDIT

PERFORMANCE INDICATORS 1999/2000

Housing services

Comparing the performance of Scottish councils



Introduction

Each year, councils publish a range of information to show people how well they are providing their services and how they compare with other councils.

This leaflet contains information on four indicators relating to councils' management of housing services in 1999/2000. They are:

- the proportion of housing repairs undertaken within target times
- the level of rent lost due to empty dwellings and the time taken to re-let empty premises
- the level of rent arrears for current tenants
- the time taken to sell council houses.

Other pamphlets published by the Commission cover:

- Fire and Police services
- Social Work services
- Leisure and Library services
- Education services
- Environmental services
- Regulatory services
- Benefits, Finance and Corporate issues

The Commission also publishes:

- a comprehensive compendium of the information for all the services for which there are performance indicators
- council profiles analysing indicators on a council-by-council basis.

Using the information

For each activity we have set out why some of the differences in performance may have arisen. We also highlight particular features of the information – for example, the range in performance achieved by different councils or the overall change in councils' performance over time.

Several factors affect the way a council performs its activities. You need to be aware of these in order to understand why results may vary. Some of these factors are outwith the control of the council – for example, population size and density, geographical area, and the mix between urban and rural settlements. Others may be specific to a particular service or the groups of people it serves. These **local factors may mean that a council with a performance which, at first sight, appears to be worse than that of another has, in fact, done better** given the circumstances it faces.

In this pamphlet we have shown information for councils for 1999/2000, and where appropriate made comparison with previous years.

Key

Auditors appointed by the Accounts Commission have reviewed councils' arrangements for producing the performance information. In the tables and charts shown in this pamphlet, an asterisk (*) against a council's name indicates that the auditor expressed doubts about the reliability of the council's arrangements for producing the information.

In view of the Commission's earlier report which highlighted the high cost of repairs classified as emergencies, it is a matter of concern that in seven councils, more than a third of all repairs to council houses were classed as emergencies in 1999/2000.

see indicator 1

Six out of every ten re-lets took longer than four weeks to complete. The amount of rent loss due to empty houses has increased to £31.5 million in 1999/2000.

see indicator 2

In 1999/2000, tenants were due to pay councils £444 million in rent, net of housing benefits, of which £37.4 million (8.4%) was in arrears at the end of the year.

see indicator 3

In five councils, more than three-quarters of council house sales took longer to complete than the national target time of 26 weeks.

see indicator 4

INDICATOR 1: COUNCIL HOUSE REPAIRS

The number of all repairs per council house; the proportion of all council house repairs completed within the council's target times; the number of emergency repairs per house and the proportion of emergency repairs completed within the target time.

Councils classify repairs into various priority categories, each with its own target time for completion. For example, a council may undertake to repair a burst pipe within 24 hours but allow up to six weeks to repair a window sill. The target time set for undertaking repairs covers the period between a repair request being received and the work being completed satisfactorily.

This indicator shows the number of repairs undertaken by each council, and its success in achieving its own target timescales for these repairs. The indicator also shows the number of repairs treated under the most urgent category, ie emergencies, where danger would arise or damage could be caused if the work was not done quickly.

Points to bear in mind

The indicator reflects success against each council's own targets for performance for different types of repair. Therefore, particular care is required before drawing any comparison between the performances of different councils. In view of this difficulty, the indicator has been identified as 'transitional', that is, it is subject to further development so that direct comparison between councils is made easier. Nevertheless, in view of the importance of the repairs service to council housing tenants, we have included this indicator in the pamphlet.

In 1998 the Commission published the report '*Emergency repairs to council houses*' which explored the varying proportions of housing repairs that were categorised as emergencies by Scottish councils and the cost of these repairs. The report found that:

- emergency repairs are generally more expensive than other repairs
- councils need good management information in order to take effective action to reduce the numbers of emergency repairs and their costs
- variations in levels of emergency repairs could be attributed to differences in the levels of:
 - over-categorisation – treating less serious repairs as emergencies
 - fair wear and tear – affected by the age of the houses, and levels of previous investment
 - vandalism
 - misuse or abuse of property by the tenants themselves.

- councils may have scope to reduce levels of over-categorisation but they have less direct control over the number of emergencies arising from wear and tear, vandalism or misuse/abuse. Nevertheless, actions such as investment in anti-vandalism measures, and issuing of guidance material on tenants' responsibilities and on recharge policies will assist.

Commentary

All repairs

The total number of council houses decreased by nearly 12% between 1996/97 and 1999/2000, from 638,000 to 564,000. However, the overall number of repairs to council houses remained relatively constant over this period, at around 2.1 million repairs per year. As a result, the overall number of repairs per house rose from 3.5 in 1996/97 to 3.8 in 1999/2000.

Across Scotland, over 83% of all housing repairs were completed within councils' own target times. The proportion has remained relatively stable since 1996/97 (Figure 1). Five councils completed at least nine out of ten of all their repairs within their established target times (Angus, Glasgow City, Highland, South Lanarkshire, West Lothian).

In 1999/2000, the average number of repairs per dwelling varied significantly among councils, from 2.0 (Angus) to 5.9 (City of Edinburgh) (Table 1). Sixteen councils reported making four or more repairs per house and only five councils needed to make fewer than 2.5 repairs per house (Angus, Eilean Siar, Glasgow City, Highland, Orkney Islands).

Emergency repairs

The number of emergency repairs undertaken by Scotland's councils has fallen by over 113,000 (17%) since 1996/97, to 568,500 in 1999/2000.

Emergency repairs accounted for just over a quarter of all repairs carried out by the 31 councils that reported the information in 1999/2000. However, this represents a welcome decrease from the 32% reported in 1996/97. The proportion of repairs classified as emergencies ranged from 6.0% (Scottish Borders) to 45.1% (East Dunbartonshire). **In view of the Commission's 1998 report it is a matter of concern that in seven councils, more than a third of all repairs were classed as emergencies.**

Since 1996/97 there has been of a significant increase in the proportion of emergency repairs completed within councils' own target times (Figure 1). In 1999/2000, just under 90% of emergency repairs were completed within

councils' own target times and the proportion ranged from 68.5% (South Ayrshire) where the target time was four hours to 99.9% (Dundee City) where the target time was 24 hours. Seventeen councils completed at least nine out of ten emergency repairs within their established target times.

The number of emergency repairs per dwelling ranged from 0.2 (Angus, Orkney Islands, Scottish Borders) to 2.6 in East Dunbartonshire.

The Commission's earlier report identified three councils (Aberdeen City, East Dunbartonshire and City of Edinburgh) as having more than two emergency repairs per dwelling, based on the 1996/97 performance information. In both Aberdeen and Edinburgh, the number of emergency repairs dropped to 0.9 and 1.1 per dwelling respectively in 1999/2000, leaving East Dunbartonshire as the only council in Scotland reporting that it undertook an average of more than two emergency repairs per dwelling.

Figure 1: The percentage of repairs completed within councils' own target times

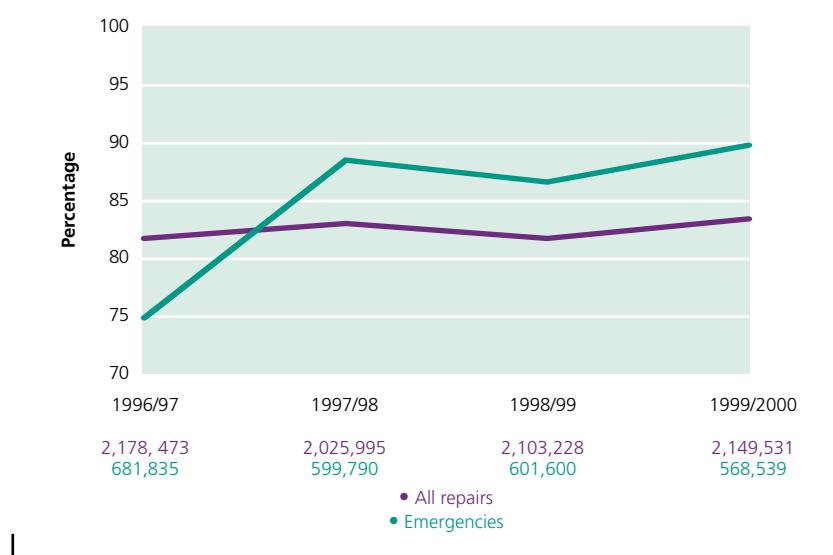


Table 1: Repairs to council houses

COUNCIL	Total number of repairs	Percentage of repairs that were emergencies	Percentage of repairs completed within target times		Number of repairs per dwelling	
			All	Emergencies	All	Emergencies
Aberdeen City	113,381	23.1	87.6	98.5	4.1	0.9
Aberdeenshire	47,493	28.2	85.8	84.4	2.9	0.8
Angus	19,921	11.4	91.1	93.5	2.0	0.2
Argyll & Bute	23,944	23.6	74.7	91.1	3.5	0.8
Clackmannanshire	27,590	30.4	86.6	96.6	4.3	1.3
Dumfries & Galloway	60,630	37.2	81.6	81.8	4.6	1.7
Dundee City	100,108	13.6	88.3	99.9	4.9	0.7
East Ayrshire*	62,450	Not reported	37.5	Not reported	3.4	Not reported
East Dunbartonshire	36,143	45.1	83.0	96.2	5.8	2.6
East Lothian	37,609	12.9	68.3	85.4	3.7	0.5
East Renfrewshire	17,318	20.4	74.8	73.6	4.1	0.8
Edinburgh, City of	168,111	19.3	87.9	79.0	5.9	1.1
Eilean Siar	4,569	19.2	81.9	92.0	2.3	0.4
Falkirk	72,272	33.1	87.1	94.0	3.4	1.1
Fife	202,367	25.7	84.8	85.4	5.1	1.3
Glasgow City	209,816	39.8	93.4	92.3	2.3	0.9
Highland	41,407	29.0	94.4	96.4	2.2	0.7
Inverclyde	50,726	10.2	75.4	95.4	4.4	0.5
Midlothian	21,652	35.8	82.2	86.5	2.8	1.0
Moray*	18,476	16.5	76.6	79.3	2.5	0.4
North Ayrshire*	48,502	32.7	67.0	84.3	2.8	0.9
North Lanarkshire	233,775	33.6	78.9	90.1	4.8	1.6
Orkney Islands	1,920	11.3	80.1	83.8	2.1	0.2
Perth & Kinross	29,814	24.7	85.5	85.1	3.0	0.7
Renfrewshire	111,372	18.0	87.3	93.9	5.2	0.9
Scottish Borders*	25,133	6.0	85.0	86.1	3.3	0.2
Shetland Islands	9,958	20.9	81.8	95.1	4.2	0.9
South Ayrshire	46,385	34.5	65.9	68.5	4.4	1.5
South Lanarkshire	137,017	35.5	95.1	98.1	3.9	1.4
Stirling	35,371	27.6	84.4	95.4	4.3	1.2
West Dunbartonshire	66,305	32.3	70.7	82.5	4.5	1.5
West Lothian	67,996	14.1	92.4	96.2	4.0	0.6
All Scotland	2,149,531	26.4	83.4	89.8	3.8	1.0

INDICATOR 2: MANAGING TENANCY CHANGES

The total annual rent loss due to voids as a percentage of the total rent due for the year, and the time taken to re-let council houses.

The indicator shows the level of rent loss resulting from council houses remaining empty when they could be available for letting, and the efficiency of the council in managing tenancy changes.

Points to bear in mind

Factors that will have an impact on a council's performance include:

- the nature of the property and the general level of demand for council housing in an area
- the type of property (eg, tenement flat, end terraced house), its location and its condition
- the time taken to identify and carry out repairs necessary before a new tenant can move in
- the time taken to identify new tenants, and for them to sign a tenancy agreement.

Commentary

Rent loss due to voids

The amount of rent loss due to voids has increased year-on-year, rising from £26.4 million in 1996/97 to £31.5 million in 1999/2000 (Figure 2).

Across Scotland, the proportion of rent loss in 1999/2000 due to voids was just under 3%, and varied among councils from 0.2% (Moray) to 6.3% (Shetland Islands).

In three councils less than 1% of rental income was lost due to voids (Aberdeenshire, Moray, West Lothian). However, four councils lost over 4% (Glasgow City, Inverclyde, Shetland Islands, West Dunbartonshire).

Time taken to re-let council houses

Approximately 17% of the council dwellings made available for re-letting in 1999/2000 were re-let within two weeks (Table 2). The proportion ranged from 1.0% (North Ayrshire) to 75.4% (West Lothian). In three councils more than half of all re-lets were in this time band (Angus, Moray, West Lothian).

Nearly a quarter of re-lets were completed within two to four weeks. The proportion ranged from 1.5% (Aberdeen City) to 44.3% (Clackmannanshire). In seven councils, more than a third of all re-lets were in this time band.

About 60% of re-lets took more than four weeks to complete. In five councils (Aberdeen City, City of Edinburgh, Inverclyde, North Ayrshire, West Dunbartonshire), more than eight out of ten re-lets took longer than four weeks to complete.

| **Figure 2: The percentage of net rent loss due to voids**

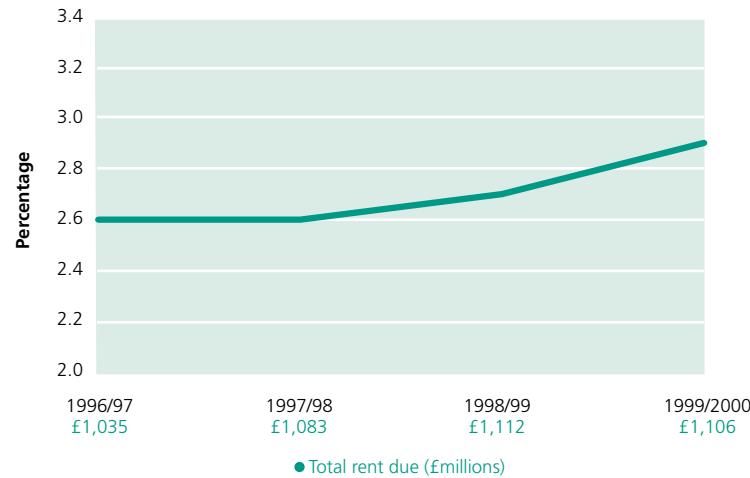


Table 2: The time taken to re-let council houses 1999/2000

COUNCIL	Total number of houses re-let	Average proportions of houses re-let, by void time band		
		Re-let in less than 2 weeks (%)	Re-let in 2-4 weeks (%)	Re-let in more than 4 weeks (%)
Aberdeen City	2,793	2.6	1.5	95.8
Aberdeenshire	1,449	33.1	39.9	27.1
Angus	1,117	55.9	15.2	28.9
Argyll & Bute	679	46.2	18.4	35.3
Clackmannanshire	580	9.1	44.3	46.6
Dumfries & Galloway	1,217	9.9	35.7	54.4
Dundee City	2,401	31.8	31.1	37.1
East Ayrshire	1,385	3.2	28.4	68.4
East Dunbartonshire	451	5.5	19.1	75.4
East Lothian	574	3.5	34.0	62.5
East Renfrewshire	333	5.1	17.4	77.5
Edinburgh, City of	4,439	8.4	8.9	82.6
Eilean Siar	177	6.8	15.3	78.0
Falkirk	1,898	26.1	34.2	39.7
Fife	4,447	12.0	13.1	74.9
Glasgow City	10,455	17.4	34.7	47.9
Highland	1,543	17.6	25.2	57.2
Inverclyde	1,893	2.5	6.8	90.7
Midlothian	376	6.1	36.4	57.4
Moray	533	71.3	19.7	9.0
North Ayrshire	1,478	1.0	13.2	85.8
North Lanarkshire	3,845	11.0	27.0	62.0
Orkney Islands	93	18.3	21.5	60.2
Perth & Kinross	823	14.9	23.7	61.4
Renfrewshire	2,275	28.9	17.6	53.5
Scottish Borders	921	5.4	27.6	67.0
Shetland Islands	202	17.8	20.3	61.9
South Ayrshire	835	14.7	18.0	67.3
South Lanarkshire	2,576	9.1	22.8	68.1
Stirling	617	6.2	32.9	60.9
West Dunbartonshire	1,325	2.4	7.0	90.6
West Lothian	1,781	75.4	19.1	5.5
All Scotland	55,511	17.3	22.8	59.9

INDICATOR 3: RENT ARREARS

The level of current tenants' rent arrears as a percentage of the net amount of rent due in the year and the proportion of tenants seriously in arrears (ie those tenants owing £250 or more and over 13 weeks in arrears) at the end of the year.

The indicator shows each council's performance in collecting rent that is lawfully due but unpaid by current tenants. It does not reflect councils' performance in recovering rent arrears from former tenants.

Points to bear in mind

In June 2000, the Accounts Commission published '*Managing rent arrears – getting the balance right*', which provided a snapshot of the extent to which councils, and a sample of registered social landlords (RSLs), were implementing good practice in managing rent arrears. The report recommended actions that should be taken by councils and RSLs to improve their management of rent arrears, including:

- giving rent collection a high priority and having a formal arrears policy supported by clearly documented procedures
- maintaining effective liaison between staff involved in dealing with tenants, most particularly staff dealing with rent arrears and housing benefit
- managing the recovery of overpaid housing benefit separately from rent arrears, whether via tenant rent accounts or other means
- developing a performance culture, where staff are:
 - committed to reducing arrears
 - encouraged to perform well
 - supported to do their job effectively, for example, by providing needs-based training and good IT systems that provide ready access to complete up-to-date information on rent account balances.

However, a council's local circumstances affect its ability to collect all of the rent due. For example, councils in urban areas tend to have higher levels of deprivation and higher levels of arrears compared to those in rural areas that appear to benefit from a better payment culture among tenants and staff maintaining a closer relationship with tenants.

The study found that there are two main family groups of councils, and established targets for each group of:

- 3% for those in semi-urban and rural areas
- 7% for those in city and urban areas.

By adopting good practice, all landlords can work to ensure that their levels of arrears are lower than they otherwise would be.

Commentary

Overall levels of arrears

In 1999/2000, tenants were due to pay councils £444 million in rent, net of housing benefits, of which £37.4 million (8.4%) was in arrears at the end of the year. These figures compare with £451 million of rent due and £37.2 million (8.2%) in arrears the previous year.

Four of the councils in the semi-urban and rural group (Angus, Argyll & Bute, Moray, Perth & Kinross), and only two councils in the city and urban group (North Lanarkshire, South Lanarkshire), met the target level of rent arrears (Table 3a).

Fifteen councils reduced their level of arrears compared with 1998/99 and four councils recorded a decrease for the third consecutive year (Eilean Siar, City of Edinburgh, Orkney Islands, West Lothian). However, ten councils reported an increase for the third consecutive year.

The overall level of rent arrears varied widely within the family groups:

- semi-urban and rural councils – from 2.3% (Argyll & Bute) to 12.6% (East Ayrshire)
- city and urban councils – from 5.4% (North Lanarkshire) to 15.9% (Glasgow City).

Serious rent arrears

At the end of 1999/2000, 5.8% of council house tenants were in serious rent arrears, ie owing £250 or more and over 13 weeks' rent. This compares with 5.4% of tenants the previous year (Table 3b).

Six councils reported that more than one tenant in twelve was seriously in arrears, compared to only two councils in 1998/99, and fourteen councils recorded an increase in the level of tenants in serious arrears over the two previous years.

The overall level of serious rent arrears varied widely within the family groups:

- semi-urban and rural councils – from 0.8% (Argyll & Bute) to 10.6% (Midlothian)
- city and urban councils – from 2.6% (South Lanarkshire) to 10.4% (Inverclyde).

Figure 3: Overall current tenants' arrears as a percentage of net rent due

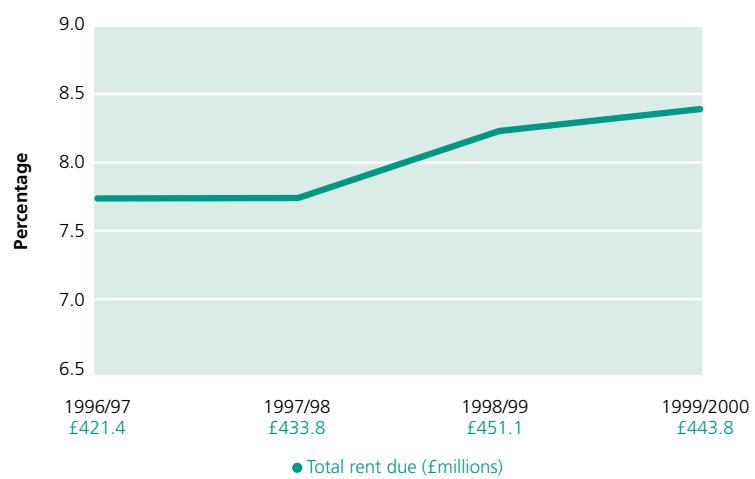


Table 3a: Current tenants' arrears as a percentage of net rent due

	Rent arrears (%)			
	1999/2000	1998/1999	1997/1998	1996/1997
SEMI-URBAN AND RURAL COUNCILS				
Argyll & Bute	2.3	2.8	2.6	3.8
Moray	2.4	3.0	2.1	2.7
Perth & Kinross	2.5	2.5	2.4	1.9
Angus	2.8	2.1	1.5	1.5
Aberdeenshire	3.1	3.0	2.6	2.6
Orkney Islands	3.2	4.4	4.8	4.9
Scottish Borders	3.3	3.0	3.0	3.0
Eilean Siar	3.6	4.4	5.2	6.8
West Lothian	4.1	5.6	*6.5	9.2
Dumfries & Galloway	4.7	6.7	5.2	4.3
Clackmannanshire	*5.0	*5.7	*5.3	*5.8
Shetland Islands	5.9	5.8	6.1	5.0
Highland	6.9	6.3	5.6	5.9
East Lothian	8.1	*6.6	5.1	5.1
Stirling	9.3	11.8	* 9.7	7.8
Midlothian	12.0	10.6	6.8	4.3
East Ayrshire	12.6	10.6	9.2	7.9
CITY AND URBAN COUNCILS				
North Lanarkshire	5.4	5.4	5.2	*5.7
South Lanarkshire	6.0	8.5	5.2	6.1
Aberdeen City	7.4	6.2	4.5	5.3
Falkirk	7.6	6.6	6.3	6.4
Edinburgh, City of	7.9	8.4	*14.5	*9.6
Fife	8.1	7.2	8.1	*7.4
Dundee City	8.6	8.7	8.3	7.0
Renfrewshire	8.6	8.8	8.0	8.1
East Renfrewshire	9.7	12.7	10.9	9.2
Inverclyde	10.2	10.3	8.3	9.8
South Ayrshire	14.3	13.0	7.4	9.2
North Ayrshire	14.3	*16.8	11.4	10.0
West Dunbartonshire	15.0	13.2	10.2	10.9
East Dunbartonshire	15.7	17.7	14.4	12.2
Glasgow City	15.9	13.6	*15.0	16.0
All Scotland	8.4	8.2	7.7	7.7

Table 3b: Percentage of tenants with arrears of more than 13 weeks' rent

	Tenants (%)			
	1999/2000	1998/1999	1997/1998	1996/1997
SEMI-URBAN AND RURAL COUNCILS				
Argyll & Bute	0.8	0.4	0.6	2.8
Dumfries & Galloway	1.0	3.7	Not reported	Not reported
Moray	1.1	1.6	0.7	0.5
Angus	1.4	0.8	0.5	0.5
Aberdeenshire	2.3	1.9	1.7	1.7
Shetland Islands	3.4	4.6	6.1	8.6
Perth & Kinross	3.5	2.1	1.6	1.1
Scottish Borders	3.5	4.0	3.6	3.4
Orkney Islands	4.0	3.3	3.6	3.8
Clackmannanshire	*4.0	*4.0	*4.2	*4.2
Stirling	4.1	8.2	*9.0	8.7
West Lothian	4.2	4.2	7.4	Not reported
Eilean Siar	5.0	4.5	8.0	9.0
Highland	5.4	5.1	3.6	5.5
East Lothian	7.3	*6.1	4.3	3.5
East Ayrshire	7.6	5.8	4.0	2.2
Midlothian	10.6	7.6	6.5	3.5
CITY AND URBAN COUNCILS				
South Lanarkshire	2.6	3.6	2.0	1.9
West Dunbartonshire	3.3	7.1	5.1	5.3
North Lanarkshire	4.0	2.3	2.7	*1.3
Renfrewshire	4.0	4.4	3.6	3.4
Fife	5.4	2.6	4.8	*5.2
Dundee City	5.4	4.3	3.8	3.2
Edinburgh, City of	5.9	6.1	*6.1	*5.3
Falkirk	6.3	5.9	5.7	6.9
East Renfrewshire	7.0	6.3	4.3	3.3
East Dunbartonshire	7.8	11.9	8.6	7.3
South Ayrshire	8.5	4.6	3.0	1.6
North Ayrshire	9.1	*8.2	4.6	4.4
Aberdeen City	9.1	6.4	3.5	4.0
Glasgow City	9.5	9.7	*13.1	17.8
Inverclyde	10.4	8.0	5.4	7.8
All Scotland	5.8	5.4	5.4	

INDICATOR 4: COUNCIL HOUSE SALES

The percentage of council house sales completed within 26 weeks.

The indicator shows the overall performance of each council in processing council house sales. It includes all council house sales completed under the Right to Buy legislation.

Points to bear in mind

The Housing (Scotland) Act 1987 gives most secure tenants of public authority houses the right to buy their homes, under specified conditions.

The average time taken to complete a sale will be affected by:

- the time taken for an applicant to respond once the council makes an offer to sell
- the time that it takes to complete the legal work in processing a sale.

Direct comparisons with the proportion of house sales meeting the target in previous years are not possible since 1999/2000 was the first year for which the indicator distinguished sales completed within the national target time of 26 weeks. Previously, the indicator reported the average time taken to complete sales.

Commentary

Across Scotland about 13,600 council house sales were completed in 1999/2000 (Table 4), approximately 850 more than in 1998/99.

Overall, 60% of sales were completed within the national target time. The proportion of sales completed within the target time ranged from 2.3% (East Lothian) to 91.3% (East Ayrshire).

Five councils completed 85% or more of sales within the target time of 26 weeks (Clackmannanshire, East Ayrshire, North Lanarkshire, Scottish Borders, South Lanarkshire).

In five councils, more than three quarters of council house sales took longer than the national target time to complete (Aberdeen City, Aberdeenshire, East Lothian, East Renfrewshire, City of Edinburgh).

Table 4: Council house sales 1999/2000

COUNCIL	Total number of house sales	Percentage of houses sold in 26 weeks or less
Aberdeen City	766	5.0
Aberdeenshire	351	20.8
Angus	232	74.1
Argyll & Bute	153	37.3
Clackmannanshire	129	85.3
Dumfries & Galloway	365	40.0
Dundee City	258	52.7
East Ayrshire	565	91.3
East Dunbartonshire	170	68.2
East Lothian	216	2.3
East Renfrewshire	84	23.8
Edinburgh, City of	564	18.4
Eilean Siar	32	50.0
Falkirk	351	61.5
Fife	840	62.5
Glasgow City	1,786	66.3
Highland	691	49.3
Inverclyde	365	61.6
Midlothian	219	67.1
Moray	182	59.9
North Ayrshire	447	59.5
North Lanarkshire	1,396	89.5
Orkney Islands	46	60.9
Perth & Kinross	249	79.1
Renfrewshire	490	66.5
Scottish Borders	164	86.0
Shetland Islands	104	45.2
South Ayrshire	286	55.9
South Lanarkshire	1,153	89.2
Stirling	218	44.0
West Dunbartonshire	249	71.9
West Lothian	495	43.8
All Scotland	13,616	60.2

Contacts

If you have any specific queries about the performance information, you may wish to contact your council. A contact person for each council is given below. If you have general queries about this pamphlet, you may wish to contact Alec Taylor or Jim Lakie at Audit Scotland.

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