

West Lothian Council

# Housing and Building Services Business Plan Review

September 2007

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**Private and Confidential**



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## **1 Introduction**

- 1.1 DTZ was commissioned by West Lothian Council to undertake a review of its Housing & Building Services Business Plan. Since the last Housing Services Business Plan was developed in 2005, the service has been restructured to include Building Services. The combined service generally performs well, as evidenced through the recent Communities Scotland inspection. However, the Council sees the integration process as an ideal opportunity to challenge historical conventions in service delivery and structures, building on previous success to ensure the integrated service is fit for purpose for the medium to long term i.e. to provide excellent customer services within the context of the public sector efficiency agenda.
- 1.2 The review has involved a number of stages: review of progress since the last Business Plan was approved; diagnosis of the current position; and, recommendations on the future direction of travel for the service.
- 1.3 DTZ recognises that the service is already making steps towards integration. Some of these steps are addressing the actions identified in the previous Housing Services Business Plan (2005), or issues identified in the diagnosis stage of this commission (as summarised in chapter 2 below). Appendix 1 and 2 set out the current structures of Housing and Building Services.
- 1.4 DTZ's aim in this assignment is to add value over and above what the Council's current thinking and actions are – to provide a strategic view on how to bring together the various different elements of change, that might otherwise be implemented in a piecemeal way.

## **2 Housing Service Business Plan 2005 - Review**

2.1 The following summarises the change and activity that DTZ understands to be already underway or planned. Some of this work is a direct result of the direction of travel set out in the previous Housing Services Business Plan (2005), while other work has come about as a result of more recent integration activity between Housing and Building Services.

The benefits already realised from the Business Plan and recent restructuring are summarised below.

- The 2005 Business Plan makes recommendations for housing office closures - recommended as part of the Council's drive to meet the efficiency agenda. Gains to be achieved should be demonstrated through direct cash savings and / or improvement to services. Since the 2005 Business Plan was approved, the Linlithgow housing office has been closed (service moved to the Broxburn office), the Blackburn office has closed (service moving to Whitburn) and there are active plans for the Fauldhouse office to close (service to move to West Calder).
- Again, as part of the efficiency agenda, the number of Customer Service Managers (CSMs) has reduced from four to three. There are now two CSMs with geographic service responsibility for the nine housing areas (East and West), and one CSM with asset management responsibility. The role of the Asset Manager CSM is to review all capital programme and SHQS activity, to specify to Social Policy on the priorities for investment (and then for Social Policy to commission), and has process ownership for all repairs, including responsive repairs. This CSM role is being undertaken by a Manager previously located within Building Services.
- The nine housing areas and four local repair teams (LRTs) are implementing plans for restructure in line with the new multi-member wards (see Appendix 3 for the LRT structure).
- There is a review underway of the Capital Programme Liaison Officers (CPLOs) to refocus their activity towards the capital programme, rather than being involved in repairs activity work.
- There has been a change in role of the Learning and Development Manager to an Organisational Development Manager. This is a strategic organisational change role reporting directly to the Head of H&BS. This Manager has responsibility for five learning and development officers: two currently within Housing Services and three within Building Services.
- There will be an integration of activity of the Performance Management and the Assessment and Review sections across the service. These two sections will work closely with the Organisational Development Manager to drive change, and their remit will be expanded to support Building Services in performance management and review.
- The Homelessness service has moved from Social Policy to H&BS, and a new post of CSM (Housing Needs) has been created.
- The Debt Support Unit is planned to move out of H&BS to a Corporate Debt Support Unit.

- Building Services has put in place restructuring of the LRTs to the multi-members wards, and at the same time has reviewed the way in which specialist trade support teams work with the LRTs. Previously each LRT foreman was also responsible for one or more specialist support teams (e.g. glaziers or fencing works, etc). These specialist support teams are now centralised to the depot with a number of foremen to improve the service delivery across the whole of West Lothian. In the medium term these centralised specialist teams may be decentralised, but for the short-term it is considered the best structure to secure consistent quality of workmanship across all areas. DTZ also understands there is scope to re-consider the number of foremen working in the specialist support teams.
- There are plans to change the electrical supervisor role to a manager role to follow the same model as the gas team, and it has been suggested this principle may follow to other areas of the Building Services structure. With one of the Operations Managers recently moving out of Building Services, this presents opportunities for further restructuring.
- Over the last year there has been a 'Lean Systems Thinking Review' which has been considering how responsive repairs are undertaken.

2.2 The following sections set out more evidence of the current position and the customer's journey to inform recommendations on the service's future direction.

### 3 The Current Position

3.1 DTZ's remit in this review was to gain an understanding of how Housing and Building Services currently 'fit' with each other, and ultimately, how the route to the customer can be improved. This requires an understanding of the current position so that advice may be provided on the future direction of the service. The following is a summary of the current financial and service structural context.

- The Housing Revenue Account (HRA) supervision and management costs are relatively high and are in the lowest quartile (highest cost) when compared to the other Scottish local authorities. However, costs have risen only slightly since the 2005 Business Plan (see Appendix 4).
- In terms of Building Services costs, it should be noted that the Council's responsive and cyclical maintenance costs are low when benchmarked against four other local authorities.
- In overall terms, DTZ concludes that Housing and Building Services costs are being managed, and the actions that have, and continue to be taken in meeting the efficiency agenda will assist in further improving value for money for customers.
- Three quarters of the Building Services activity relates to HRA capital and revenue activity, with the split between capital and revenue being broadly 50/50. A large proportion of the capital activity, and therefore workforce, relates to the kitchen and bathroom programme, which includes some internal SHQS work. This programme will complete within the next three years. The remaining 25% of Building Services activity is focused largely on education capital and revenue, and other Council buildings work.
- The move from competitive tendering to the Best Value regime has resulted in the Council removing the Building Services trading account and therefore any surplus requirement for Building Services. In practice this now means accounting, and paying for, actual costs for each individual repair. DTZ found that there is an unnecessary duplication of costing systems between the SOR nominal cost and the actual cost of response repairs (which requires considerable administration activity, as discussed below). The more critical knock-on effect is that there is now a culture of 'it costs what it costs', where actual costs often do not reflect the budget costs set. DTZ has observed this to be true in both revenue and capital activity. We understand that action is already being taken to resolve this issue for capital projects.
- There is scope for system efficiencies in the repair and maintenance activity, much of which will be dealt with through a rapid move to mobile working (planning for which is underway). This should eliminate the requirement for manual administration activity for repair accounting, and because all labour and material information will be captured electronically, will provide the opportunity for assessment of value for money in a number of different, and more meaningful ways.
- The move to integration between Housing and Building Services staff should be accompanied with a change and sharing in culture. There is still a cultural client / contractual split and this should be resolved through joint accountability to customers for the whole housing service in each area, regardless of professional specialism. However, this accountability is not only about achieving high service performance (for which West Lothian Council is renowned), but just as importantly, is about cost control and value for money in service delivery. The integration therefore requires a structure, and way of working, to combine awareness of customer care, efficiency and value for money by all Housing and Building Services staff. The following sections sets out how this should be achieved.

## 4 The Customer's Journey

4.1 The previous two sections set out the service and financial context of Housing and Building Services. The following section sets out what all this means for the customer, with a focus on the repairs experience.

4.2 Figure 1 below sets out a typical journey for the customer. It sets out what the service should be aiming for, compared to what is happening in reality. The move to the preferred option i.e. 'The Aim' is summarised in Figure 2.

4.3 **The Reality** – Figure 1 sets out what currently occurs in the repairs process – both for the customer, but also in the bureaucratic processes that support the repairs services.

- Reporting a repair - currently there are a number of means by which tenants can report a repair although the web based reporting is a request for a call rather than a direct report. Tenants go through a detailed discussion with staff in order to diagnose the problem as accurately as possible before anyone visits the tenant's home.
- SOR codes – the reporting process and associated tool 'Repair Finder' automatically raises a schedule of rate code (SOR) which provides a job description and material detail for the local repair teams (LRT). There is a nominal cost associated with the SOR code, although this is later adjusted for the actual price. Based on the SOR code information, the LRT (or other specialist trade) will attend the house and complete the repair. However, the repair may be different to that specified and require a variation to the instruction, materials and price. Obtaining approval (if over the delegated variation limit), may result in a delay.
- Planned reactive – if a repair cannot be specified from the diagnostic tool then it is categorised as a 'planned reactive' repair. Planned reactive repairs are then received by Housing and Building Services staff who consider whether the repair should be undertaken and if so, when. However, DTZ has observed this method appears to be undertaken in lieu of a cyclical programme for works such as minor environmental improvements, fencing works, gutter cleaning etc. The current planned reactive system has limitations in that it relies upon tenants asking for repairs and the Council reacting to this, rather than the Council developing a pro-active plan for cyclical works.
- Post repair inspection – currently post repair inspection occurs in triplicate – undertaken by the customer service centre staff, the foremen and postal questionnaire. The three different processes consider quality of repairs, response of service and customer satisfaction. However, it is possible that one tenant may be contacted three times for one repair.
- Reconciliation process / timesheets etc – the current system relies on manual recording of labour time - the tradesmen complete details of the time required for each repair job on timesheets and then all this information is entered manually into IT systems by administrative staff. There is then a financial reconciliation process matching materials, labour time, and overheads (which is applied at a standard rate across all jobs) to arrive at the actual cost. There is also a reconciliation process between the nominal SOR cost and the actual cost to show level of variances for each job.

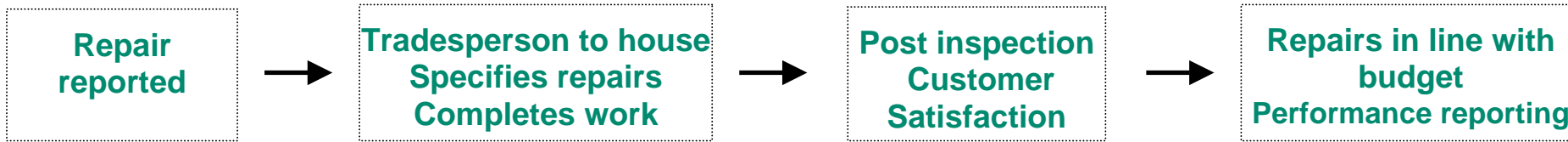
4.4 **The Aim** – DTZ’s overall recommendation is to shorten the route to the customer and reduce the bureaucracy associated with the ‘back-office’ repairs processes.

- Reporting a repair – as noted above, currently there are a number of means by which tenants can report a repair and this customer focussed choice should continue. Some improvement is required to be made to web-based reporting. However, the actual repair to reported can be simplified .e.g. ‘I have a leak in the kitchen’ or ‘I need a plumber’ rather than tenants having to spend time on the phone going through a detailed diagnosis process on the exact nature of the repair.
- Tradesperson to house – the aim here is to have generic teams that are able to visit the house, diagnose / specify the problem on site and complete the work. In the majority of cases this will all happen within one visit, but for larger or more complicated works there may be a requirement for two visits to allow for ordering of materials / specialist trades (the first visit being an assessment).
- Information technology - supporting the repair activity. Through a mobile working environment this will directly record the materials and labour data for each repair job, will minimise manual administrative support required, and enable real time and accurate repair performance reporting.
- Post inspection - should encapsulate repair quality, service and customer satisfaction within one process, so that the customer is contacted only once to provide feedback.
- Accountability for area budget and service performance – while the above processes will ensure far more delegated responsibility to respond to, and act upon customer requests, each team will have to account for their budget and service performance against targets. These targets should be broken down and delegated as far as possible e.g. to individual local repair teams, and to local housing management teams. This will provide a management tool and incentive for staff to manage workloads (and in the case of repairs, materials) as efficiently and effectively as possible – giving equal status to service excellence and value for money indicators.
- Offices and depot – There will be a reduction in the housing offices as stock numbers reduce, and the move to mobile working will enable efficient methods of working for all housing and building services staff. This will also impact on the depot, the requirement for which will reduce due to mobile working, but also with the reduction of capital works currently driven by the kitchen and bathroom programme and other capital activity.
- Materials and equipment – Impress Stock enables LRT vans to be restocked to minimise travel to and from the depot. This will continue but with the move away from a large depot, sourcing materials and equipment may be more efficiently achieved through partnership arrangements with other local service providers.

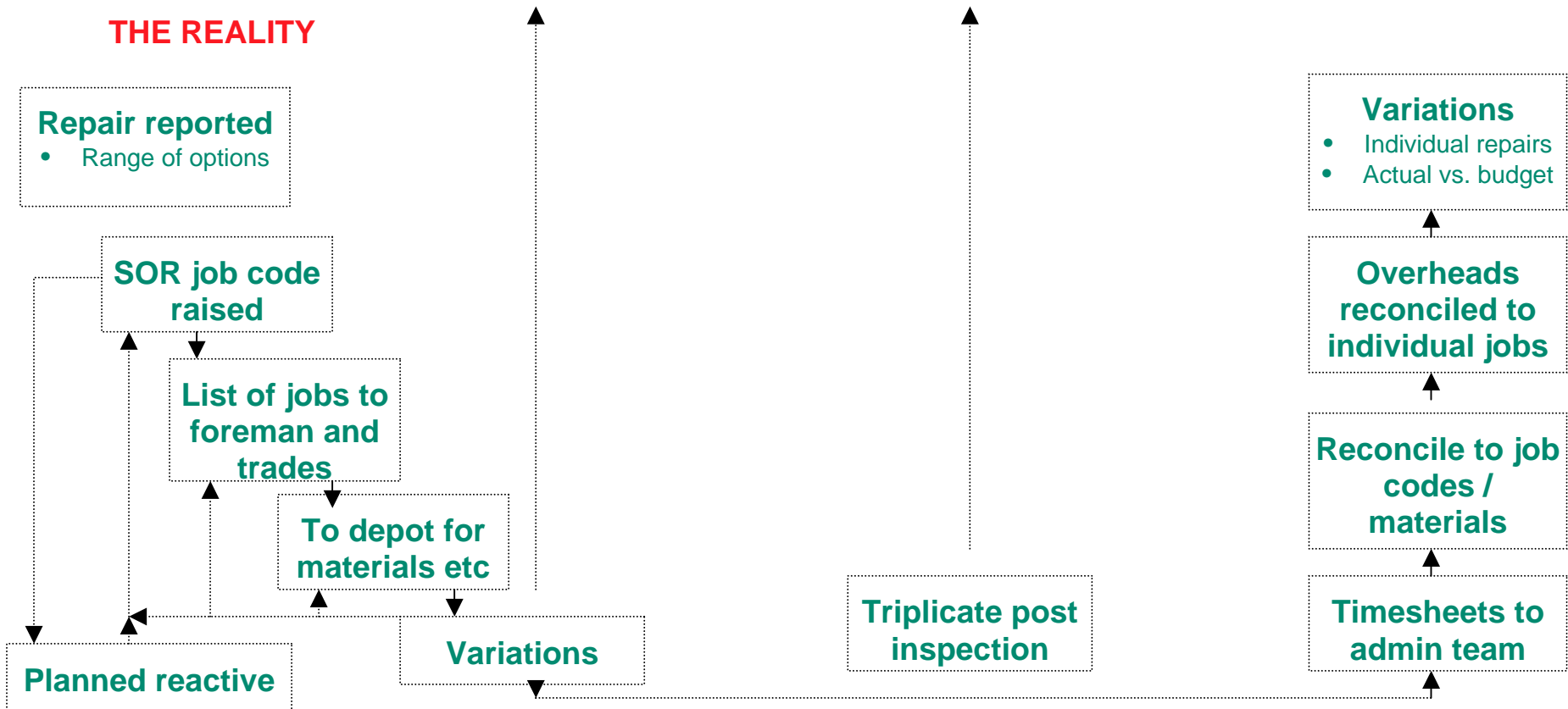
# Figure 1 - The Customer's journey

## The aim ..... and the reality

### THE AIM



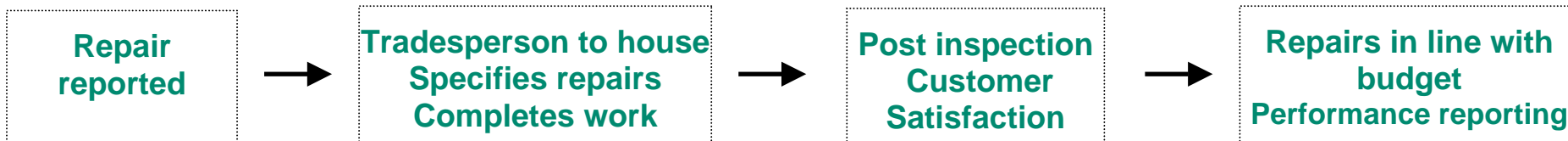
### THE REALITY



## Figure 2 - The Customer's journey

### The aim ..... how?

#### THE AIM



#### HOW – service delivery

- 'Generic' reporting e.g. a leak
- Mobile working
- Enables electronic transfer of materials and labour (timesheets) information
- Generic trades teams
- Respond to general enquiry e.g. a leak
- Specify and completes work
- All area team (housing and repairs) staff jointly accountable for their area budget and service performance
- One joint post inspection process

#### HOW – support, infrastructure and culture

- Online reporting in addition to others
- IT integration
- Gradual office closures with less stock
- Depot review
- Sourcing materials and equipment
- West Lothian Assessment Model
- Budget control and accountability
- Performance reporting on averages - repair type, specific areas, WL
- Equal focus on service excellence and efficiency performance indicators

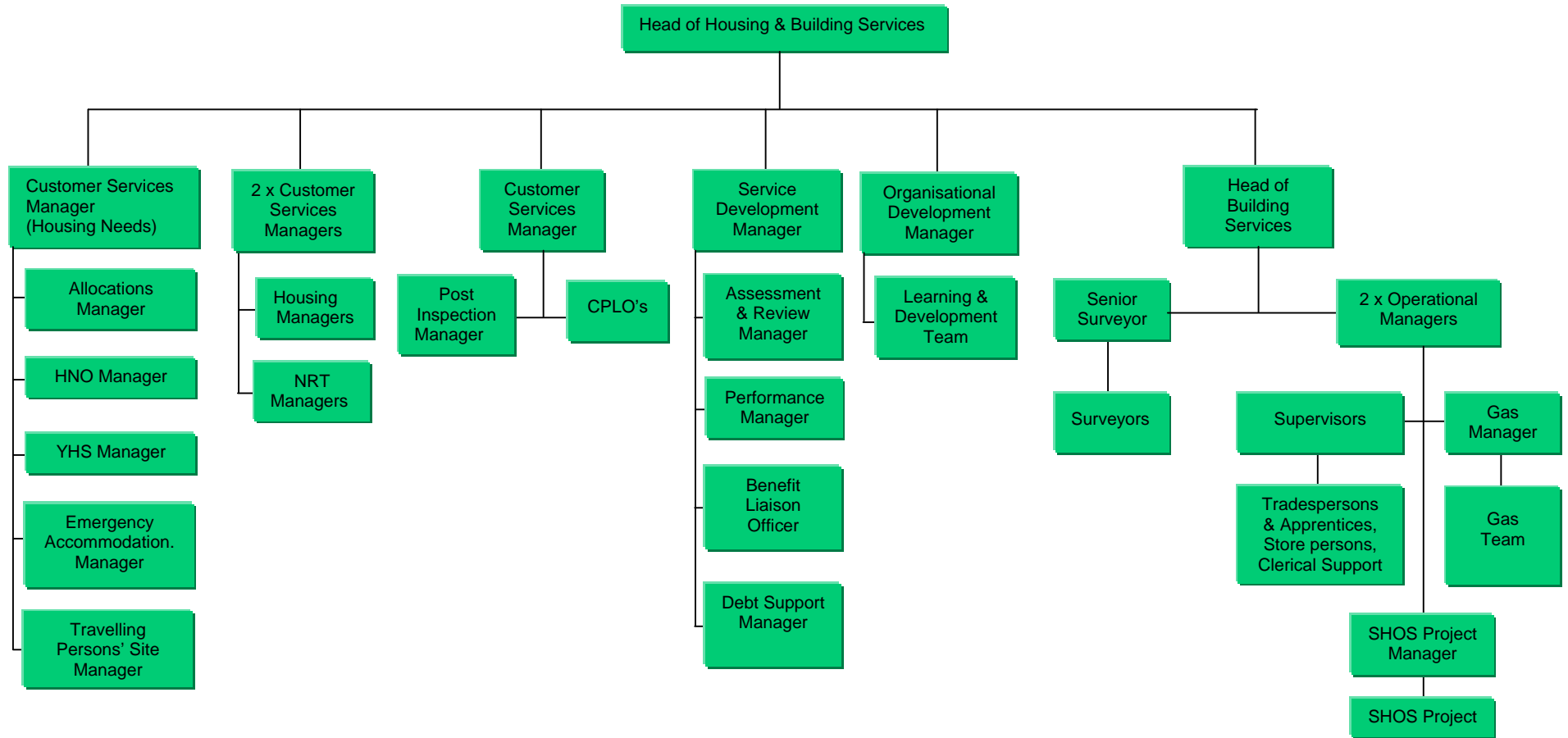
## **5 Conclusion**

- 5.1 This review has considered progress against the last Housing Services Business Plan (2005), and examined what benefits have already been realised through the integration of Housing and Building Services. There is already evidence of efficiencies being achieved and routes to the customer being improved.
- 5.2 Integration of the two services has been seen as an ideal opportunity to build upon success and proven customer focus. The aim is now to further modernise services, to shorten the route for the customer and deliver on the efficiency agenda. The remit of this commission has been to examine the repairs and maintenance part of the service in particular, and the diagnostic stage of the work has shown a number of areas where bureaucracy can be reduced significantly, and routes to the customer improved.
- 5.3 This report has set out a series of measures to help achieve successful service integration. This should be driven by:
- customer focus – shortening the route for the customer wherever possible
  - delegating more responsibility and accountability for performance to locally based Housing and Building Service staff - both for service delivery and value for money
  - cutting out unnecessary bureaucracy.

## **APPENDIX 1**

# Appendix 1

## Management Team Housing & Building Services

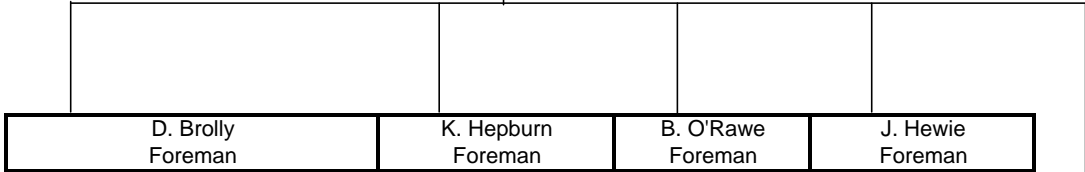


## **APPENDIX 2**



## **APPENDIX 3**

R. Green  
Supervisor  
Housing Repairs



LRT- Ward 3 4 & 6b Livingston North, Livingston South & Breich Valley(West Calder & Polbeth)

LRT- Ward 1 2 & 5 Linlithgow, Broxburn & Livingston East

LRT- Ward 8 & 9 Bathgate & Armadale

LRT- Ward 6a & 7 Whitburn & Breich Valley(Fauldhouse, Stoneybun, Longridge, Addiewell, Breich)

Voids & Scaffolding Co-Ordination

LOCAL REPAIR TEAMS (Approx 22 no. each area)

Day to day jobs (L1, L2, L3) Planned Reactive Jobs, Routine Jobs, Small Projects within their areas, Insurance Works, Asbestos Reinstatements Works

VOIDS TEAM ( 9 no.+ 1 no. Scaffolding Co-ordination)

B. Wilson  
Asst. Foreman

**CENTRAL DEPOT SUPPORT TEAM**

Glaziers 3 no.  
Chimney Rebuilds (Specialist) 6 no.  
Remedial Works (Specialist) 2 no.  
Plant & Equipment 3 no.

Medical Adaptations 12 no.  
Fencing Works 3 no.  
Painters 33 no.  
Stores 5 no.

Blacksmith 5 no.  
Joiners Shop 2 no.  
Rhone Programmes 4 no

## **APPENDIX 4**

## West Lothian Council – HRA Analysis

### Introduction

1.1 The following analysis is based on statistical information from the Scottish Executive *Statistical Bulletin – Housing Series*, DTZ Analysis of West Lothian Building Services Accounts and DTZ comparisons with in-house work done for other local authorities.

### Analysis of West Lothian Financial Performance – SE Statistical Bulletin – Housing Series

1.2 Table 1.1 shows Management and Maintenance Expenditure per unit for Local Authorities across Scotland with actual figures shown for 2002/03, 2003/04, 2004/05 and estimates for 2005/06.

**Table 1.1 Management and Maintenance Expenditure Per Unit for All Scottish LAs**

AUHTORITY	2002-03	2003-04	2004-05	2005-06 ESTIMATE
	£s/Unit	£s/Unit	£s/Unit	£s/Unit
Aberdeen City	1,141	1,175	1,255	1,397
Aberdeenshire	1,010	1,179	1,301	1,416
Angus	1,204	1,093	1,197	1,351
Argyll & Bute	1,186	1,305	1,397	1,419
Clackmannanshire	975	1,399	1,327	1,509
Dundee City	1,445	1,545	1,536	1,647
East Ayrshire	955	1,042	1,170	1,222
East Dunbartonshire	1,166	1,222	1,454	1,455
East Lothian	1,388	1,514	1,532	1,630
East Renfrewshire	1,362	1,474	1,391	1,405
Edinburgh, City of	1,340	1,478	1,521	1,399
Eilean Siar, Comhairle nan	1,002	976	1,019	1,069
Falkirk	1,418	1,543	1,640	1,754
Fife	1,141	1,249	1,333	1,441
Highland	1,181	1,258	1,437	1,565
Inverclyde	1,472	1,476	1,335	1,594
Midlothian	1,103	1,163	1,364	1,447
Moray	1,068	1,291	1,248	1,288
North Ayrshire	1,215	1,309	1,425	1,345
North Lanarkshire	1,335	1,412	1,414	1,572
Orkney Islands	1,093	1,267	1,251	1,452
Perth & Kinross	1,228	1,228	1,231	1,455
Renfrewshire	1,297	1,480	1,456	1,584
Shetland Islands	1,490	1,337	1,288	1,298
South Ayrshire	1,417	1,427	1,608	1,711
South Lanarkshire	1,406	1,424	1,541	1,465
Stirling	1,287	1,451	1,660	1,685
West Dunbartonshire	1,126	1,204	1,140	1,219
<b>West Lothian</b>	<b>1,338</b>	<b>1,426</b>	<b>1,341</b>	<b>1,496</b>
West Lothian Position (04/05) for Management & Maintenance - 11*				
<b>Scotland</b>	<b>1,326</b>	<b>1,342</b>	<b>1,399</b>	<b>1,479</b>

*\*Rank shows expenditure in descending order, therefore West Lothian's management & maintenance expenditure in 04/05 was 11<sup>th</sup> highest amongst Scottish Local Authorities*

1.3 Table 1.1 shows that the management and maintenance expenditure per unit for West Lothian has been above Scottish average for 2002/03 and 2003/04 and was marginally below average in 2004/05. It is expected that West Lothian's management and maintenance expenditure for 2005/06 will be marginally above Scottish average.

1.4 Management and maintenance expenditure can be broken down into **supervision and management** costs and **repair and maintenance** costs. Table 1.2 below shows supervision and management costs per unit for Local Authorities across Scotland.

**Table 1.2 Supervision and Management Costs Per Unit for all Scottish LAs**

AUHTORITY	2002-03	2003-04	2004-05	2005-06 ESTIMATE
	£s/Unit	£s/Unit	£s/Unit	£s/Unit
Aberdeen City	335	258	289	346
Aberdeenshire	423	510	569	627
Angus	418	490	528	594
Argyll & Bute	548	644	717	759
Clackmannanshire	420	668	659	749
Dundee City	437	476	527	557
East Ayrshire	336	411	438	496
East Dunbartonshire	471	498	647	625
East Lothian	636	641	669	707
East Renfrewshire	424	480	443	472
Edinburgh, City of	544	560	542	518
Eilean Siar, Comhairle nan	293	292	316	309
Falkirk	366	380	491	575
Fife	394	424	467	505
Highland	476	518	613	660
Inverclyde	426	423	418	492
Midlothian	382	384	466	490
Moray	430	438	500	528
North Ayrshire	301	336	394	405
North Lanarkshire	404	431	452	501
Orkney Islands	432	602	708	753
Perth & Kinross	533	498	494	562
Renfrewshire	386	373	376	427
Shetland Islands	404	292	211	208
South Ayrshire	469	445	557	592
South Lanarkshire	477	391	491	451
Stirling	486	567	673	654
West Dunbartonshire	527	577	468	498
<b>West Lothian</b>	<b>646</b>	<b>743</b>	<b>653</b>	<b>664</b>
West Lothian Position (04/05) for Supervision & Management – 5				
<b>Scotland</b>	<b>449</b>	<b>455</b>	<b>491</b>	<b>524</b>

1.5 Table 1.2 shows that supervision and management costs per unit for West Lothian have been well above the Scottish average since 2002/03.

1.6 Table 1.3 below shows repairs and maintenance costs for per unit for Local Authorities across Scotland.

**Table 1.3 Repairs and Maintenance Costs Per Unit for all Scottish LAs**

AUHTORITY	2002-03	2003-04	2004-05	2005-06 ESTIMATE
	£s/Unit	£s/Unit	£s/Unit	£s/Unit
Aberdeen City	805	917	966	1,051
Aberdeenshire	587	669	731	789
Angus	786	603	669	757
Argyll & Bute	638	661	680	660
Clackmannanshire	555	731	668	761
Dundee City	1,008	1,068	1,010	1,090
East Ayrshire	619	631	732	726
East Dunbartonshire	695	724	807	830
East Lothian	752	873	862	924
East Renfrewshire	938	994	949	932
Edinburgh, City of	796	918	979	880
Eilean Siar, Comhairle nan	709	684	704	760
Falkirk	1,051	1,162	1,149	1,179
Fife	748	825	866	935
Highland	704	740	824	904
Inverclyde	1,046	1,053	916	1,102
Midlothian	722	779	898	956
Moray	638	853	748	760
North Ayrshire	914	974	1,031	940
North Lanarkshire	931	980	962	1,071
Orkney Islands	661	666	543	699
Perth & Kinross	695	730	736	893
Renfrewshire	912	1,107	1,079	1,157
Shetland Islands	1,086	1,045	1,077	1,090
South Ayrshire	949	983	1,051	1,119
South Lanarkshire	930	1,034	1,050	1,014
Stirling	802	884	987	1,031
West Dunbartonshire	598	627	673	721
<b>West Lothian</b>	<b>692</b>	<b>682</b>	<b>688</b>	<b>832</b>
West Lothian Position (04/05) for Repairs & Maintenance - 19				
<b>Scotland</b>	<b>877</b>	<b>887</b>	<b>908</b>	<b>955</b>

1.7 Table 1.3 shows that repairs and maintenance costs for West Lothian have been well below the Scottish average since 2002/03.

#### **Comparison of West Lothian Council HRA Finances**

- 1.8 This section compares West Lothian Council's Capital Investment Programme with that three other local authorities in Scotland for Year 1 (2006/07). This peer group was chosen due to similar stock size in two cases and location in all three cases.
- 1.9 Table 1.4 compares HRA expenditure for West Lothian for years 2005/06 and 2006/07.
- 1.10 Table 1.5 compares HRA expenditure on for the four local authorities listed in Section 1.8.
- 1.11 Table 1.6 compares capital expenditure on implementation of standard delivery plan over the five-year period from 2007 to 2011.

**Table 1.4 – HRA Expenditure Comparison between years 2005/06 and 2006/07 for West Lothian**

EXPENDITURE	WEST LOTHIAN BUSINESS PLAN 2005/06	WEST LOTHIAN BUSINESS PLAN 2006/07
	£s/Unit	£s/Unit
Staff Costs	731.68	768.39
Responsive Maintenance	390.22	393.77
Cyclical Maintenance	175.17	176.76
Total Costs/Unit	<b>1297.07</b>	<b>1338.92</b>

**Table 1.5 – HRA Expenditure Comparison – Year 1 (2006/07)**

EXPENDITURE	WEST LOTHIAN	LOCAL AUTHORITY A	LOCAL AUTHORITY B	LOCAL AUTHORITY C
	£s/Unit	£s/Unit	£s/Unit	£s/Unit
Staff Costs**	<b>768.39</b>	625.66	844.97	549.29
Responsive ^ Maintenance	<b>393.77</b>	654.72	578.30	375.39
Cyclical Maintenance ^	<b>176.76</b>	131.77	235.56	199.63
Total Costs/Unit	<b>1338.92</b>	1412.15	1658.83	1124.31

\*\*Staff costs do not include recharged central costs, any leasing, open space maintenance or travelling site costs. Other direct management costs are included in staff costs.

^Responsive and cyclical maintenance cost centres include repairs/maintenance/cyclical staff costs.

Stock numbers used to calculate per unit costs are average stock numbers during the year and not end of year stock numbers.

**Table 1.6 – Capital Expenditure on meeting the SHQS 2007-2011**

EXPENDITURE	WEST LOTHIAN	LOCAL AUTHORITY A	LOCAL AUTHORITY B	LOCAL AUTHORITY C
	£s/Unit	£s/Unit	£s/Unit	£s/Unit
Planned Investment to Meet the SHQS 2007-2011	<b>3209.22</b>	4825.97	6375.15	7011.45

### Conclusions

- 1.12 An year on year increase of approximately £36/unit in management costs can be explained on the basis of inflationary increase at 2.5%.
- 1.13 Based on our analysis West Lothian Council is performing well with regards to costs associated with both responsive maintenance and cyclical maintenance.
- 1.14 West Lothian Council's housing stock is in better condition than the peers used for this comparison. This is reflected in the lower SHQS investment requirements.
- 1.15 In both our analysis and the information from Scottish Executive statistical bulletins; West Lothian Council's supervision and management costs seem to be well above the Scottish average.