

# Decent Homes Standard, The Repairs Policy And Complaints Process



**BASSETLAW**  
DISTRICT COUNCIL  
NORTH NOTTINGHAMSHIRE

## **Scrutiny is an Independent, Councillor-led Function, Working with Local People to Improve Services.**

### **Foreword**

This Review has given all Members involved a much greater understanding of the services provided by A1 Housing. We reviewed the implementation of the Decent Homes programme, flexibility and implementation of the repairs policy and customer care and complaints. Our visit to the A1 Housing Call Centre at Carlton Forest provided a useful insight into the repairs call handling operations and the software that allows jobs to be planned efficiently.

During the time period for the Review the Audit Commission reported on the findings of the A1 Housing Best Value Inspection held in November 2010 and this scrutiny review considered their evidence. In response A1 Housing produced an Action Plan to address the Audit Commission recommendations. Many of these issues had been identified within the Select panel review and several of these are also among the outcomes of this review.

The Review found that communication of the work and performance of A1 Housing to Councillors could be improved. Several recommendations have been made, including, a proposed Annual Councillor Conference to exchange information. The Panel also wanted to commend the best practice identified by the Audit Commission of the Council and A1 Housing introducing alternative forms of sustainable energy into its housing stock and maintaining its position as a leader in the use of alternative energy.

I have enjoyed chairing this Panel and take this opportunity to thank all the witnesses who provided evidence for this review as their information was invaluable to the completion of the report. Thank you also, to the Officers and cross-party Members for their attendance and support in the formulation of the recommendations.

**Councillor Hazel Brand  
Chair Select Panel 4**



## Contents

<b>Foreword</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>Contents</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>1. Executive Summary</b>	<b>4</b>
1.1 Summary of Findings	4
1.2 Equality Issues	6
1.3 Scope of the Review	6
1.4 Membership	6
1.5 Summary of Recommendations in Priority order	7
<b>2. Background</b>	<b>11</b>
2.1 Audit Commission Inspection Report	12
<b>Barriers to improvement</b>	<b>12</b>
2.2 Customer Care	16
<b>Decent Homes Standard and Customer Care</b>	<b>18</b>
2.3 Repairs Policy	18
2.4 Complaints Policy	21
2.5 Relationship between A1 Housing and Bassetlaw District Council	25
<b>3. Method of Review</b>	<b>29</b>
3.1 Summary of Review Meetings, External visits and Surveys	29
3.2 Visit to the A1 Call Centre and Back Office	30
3.3 Councillor's Survey	31
<b>4. Addressing the Scope: Evidence Gathered for Recommendations</b>	<b>33</b>
4.1 Analyse and compare the repairs policy with other similar areas	33
4.2 Review the procedure, definitions of essential/ non-essential work and timescales	35
4.3 Review the customer care element	40
The Inspection reported that the strengths of Customer Care outweigh weaknesses and has a strong strategic approach.	44
4.4 Review number of complaints linked to repairs	44
<b>Audit Commission Inspection Report Comment on complaints linked to repairs</b>	<b>48</b>
4.5 Review the performance of repairs	49

4.6	Energy Efficiency .....	52
4.7	A1 Housing's Adaptations Service .....	52
4.8	Communication .....	53
<b>5.</b>	<b>Conclusion .....</b>	<b>54</b>
<b>6.</b>	<b>Appendices .....</b>	<b>57</b>
6.1	A1 Housing Action Plan .....	57
6.2	Log of A1 Housing repairs.....	58
6.3	Performance Indicators .....	59
6.4	A1 Contribution to BDC's Corporate Plan .....	61
6.5	Balanced Score Card .....	62
6.6	Housemark Data 2010/11 .....	63
6.7	Key indicators showing current performance of A1 Housing.....	64
<b>7.</b>	<b>Bibliography .....</b>	<b>70</b>

# 1. Executive Summary

## 1.1 Summary of Findings

Bassetlaw District Council's Select Panel 4 was tasked to review the Implementation of the Decent Homes programme, flexibility and implementation of the repairs policy, customer care and complaints process. The topic was approved by Overview and Scrutiny in July 2010. At the Scoping Meeting following the presentations from A1 Housing Officers, the Panel decided to limit the scope of the review to the repairs policy and complaints process. The information provided regarding the Decent Homes programme addressed the issues raised by Members at the Scoping exercise. These were around the issues of tenant expectation and the lack of understanding of the Decent Homes Standard. It was agreed that the title of the review would be changed to reflect this to Decent Homes Standards, the repairs policy and the complaints process.

The review received information on the existing procedures and also compared them with excellent authorities as recognised by the Audit Commission. A1 Housing compared favourably. Members also visited the A1 Housing Call Centre to view the day to day operations for repairs handling. In addition there was a survey of all Councillors' to obtain some insight into the amount of involvement that they have with tenants concerning the A1 Repairs service.

The Panel looked at the customer care offered to tenants and made recommendations on the workforce composition.

During the time period for the Review the Audit Commission reported on the findings of the A1 Housing Inspection held in November 2010. The Audit Commission reported on the Decent Homes Programme, repairs, customer care and complaints. A1 Housing retained its Two Star status and the Audit Commission found that A1 Housing has a range of strengths including:

- there has been good progress in improving properties to meet the Decent Homes Standard;
- the energy efficiency of homes has been increased, reducing fuel charges for many residents;
- repairs are carried out efficiently;
- services are generally easy for customers to access and there is a good range of information available;
- complaints are dealt with promptly and well, and lessons are learnt from them;
- A1 housing has a good understanding of the profile of its customers.

These findings are relevant to the review because they addressed the concerns raised by Members.

The Audit Commission made several recommendations for improvements including:

- communicating information on Decent Homes to residents
- improving the speed of telephone answering at the Call Centre and an area of improvement
- enhancing performance monitoring

In response to the Audit Commissions inspection, A1 Housing has produced an Action Plan to address the Commission's recommendations. Several of these recommendations had been identified by the Select Panel.

The Panel noted that complaint figures have shown an improvement and support the work of the dedicated Complaints Officer. There were concerns that the future reduced funding levels for Decent Homes may increase the number of repairs and complaints.

The Panel was interested in the relationship between A1 Housing and the Council and looked at the Joint Working Protocols that are in place. There is a strong working relationship but the roles needed clarifying on both the Repairs and Complaints Policy.

A1 Housing has a comprehensive performance monitoring system and reporting system to the A1 Housing Board and Bassetlaw District Council, which ensures that issues are identified, and measures taken if possible to resolve the matter.

The performance information received by the Panel showed that A1 Housing performs well compared to other similar ALMOs over a range of indicators. A1 Housing also has an extensive range of consultation processes with its partners and tenants to identify concerns about service provision. The review raised the issue that not all residents may have access to the internet and other options should be considered. A1 Housing is responsive to the needs of its customers and is continually updating its service provision as it aims to be a resident led organisation. The review identified that A1 Housing is a transparent organisation and produces a wealth of information, which is accessible to everyone. Members made recommendations on ways to improve communication to raise the awareness of how to access this information.

During the course of the review the Panel were informed that energy efficiency is important to maintaining a home to a good standard. Although not part of the original scope, the review recognised the best practice of A1 Housing in providing alternative forms of sustainable energy as identified by the Audit Commission. Also, in addition, the review wanted to monitor the recommendations on Audit Commission in relation to the A1 Housing Adaptation Service.

## 1.2 Equality Issues

An Equality Impact Assessment has been carried out for this review. This can be viewed at [www.bassetlaw.gov.uk](http://www.bassetlaw.gov.uk) under the Equality Section or by contacting the Policy and Scrutiny Unit on 01909 533189. It should be noted that A1 Housing has its own Equality Impact Assessment process in place.

## 1.3 Scope of the Review

This review is considering the implementation of the Decent Home programme, repairs policy and how the Decent Homes Standard has impacted on repairs. The customer care and complaints service linked with repairs and improvements have also been considered. The Panel decided on the following terms of reference:

- Analyse and compare the repairs policy with other similar areas.
- Review the procedure, definitions of essential/ non-essential work and timescales
- Review the customer care element
- Review number of complaints linked to repairs
- Review the performance of repairs

## 1.4 Membership

The following Councillors were appointed to be members of Select Panel 4:

Councillor H. Brand (Chair)  
Councillor J. B. Rickells (Vice-Chair)  
Councillor R.B Carrington Wilde  
Councillor F. Hart  
Councillor B. Jones

Councillor Mrs M.W. Quigley  
Councillor A. Rhodes  
Councillor J. Scott  
Councillor Miss M. Stokes  
Councillor Mrs V. Wanless

## 1.5 Summary of Recommendations in Priority order

	<b>Recommendation</b>	<b>Responsible Officer</b>	<b>Financial Implications</b>	<b>Delivery Timescale</b>	<b>Risks to delivery/ Officer Comment</b>
1.	Bassetlaw District Council needs to provide stronger guidance about what is included in both the Repairs and Complaints Policy.	Managing Director A1 Housing/ Director of Community Services, Bassetlaw District Council	None	Ongoing	This will be managed through the A1/BDC Strategic Housing Group.
2.	That the Managing Director of A1 Housing report back to Overview and Scrutiny Committee in October 2011 to inform Members of progress in the A1 Improvement Plan produced in response to the Audit Commission review.	Managing Director A1 Housing	None	October 2011  It is acknowledged that each individual recommendation has its own delivery timescale varying from April –June 2011.	It is acknowledged that each individual recommendation has its own delivery timescale varying from April – June 2011.
3.	That A1 Housing raises Members awareness on the work and performance of A1 Housing by: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The quarterly performance monitoring reports provided to the A1 Housing Board be included in</li> </ul>	Managing Director A1 Housing / Corporate	None	July 2011	This will take place from July 2011 following the



	Recommendation	Responsible Officer	Financial Implications	Delivery Timescale	Risks to delivery/ Officer Comment
	<p>the monthly Bassetlaw District Council Members Information Bulletin</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Providing links to the A1 Housing Board papers on the A1 and BDC websites.</li> <li>• Including A1 Housing as part of the Bassetlaw District Councillor induction programme.</li> <li>• A1 Housing to hold a members conference in 2012 using the tenants' conference as a model, for information sharing. If it is successful, it can be introduced as an annual event.</li> </ul>	<p>Development and Policy Manager</p> <p>A1 Director of Strategy and Change/Corporate Development &amp; Policy Manager</p> <p>Managing Director A1 Housing</p>		<p>April 2011</p> <p>July 2011</p> <p>May 2012</p>	<p>issuing of 2011/12 Quarter 1 report</p> <p>Completed</p> <p>Induction sessions have already been held with new Members. Can organise specifically with A1 Housing in the light of this recommendation.</p> <p>Proposals have been presented to the Leader, Deputy Leader and Housing Portfolio Holder for approval.</p>
4.	That A1 Housing monitors any impact of the revised Decent Homes	Managing Director A1 Housing	None	Ongoing	This will be managed through

	<b>Recommendation</b>	<b>Responsible Officer</b>	<b>Financial Implications</b>	<b>Delivery Timescale</b>	<b>Risks to delivery/ Officer Comment</b>
	Standard funding on future performance levels of complaints and repairs to 2013.				the A1/BDC Strategic Housing Group.
5.	That the Council and A1 Housing continue to introduce alternative forms of sustainable energy into its housing stock and maintain its position as a leader in the use of alternative energy.	Managing Director A1 Housing/Director Community Services	None	Ongoing	A potential scheme of putting Photo voltaic panels on properties in the Tuxford area is currently being discussed with an external company. The cost to BDC to do the work was evaluated as not cost effective
6.	That Bassetlaw District Council, Housing Strategy and Renewal Manager, monitor the impact of A1 Housing's decision regarding the funding of the A1 Housing Complaints Officer post.	A1 Housing Director of Strategy and Change/ BDC Housing Strategy and Renewal Manager	To be met within A1 Housing's revenue budget	April 2012	This will be managed through the A1/BDC Strategic Housing Group.

	<b>Recommendation</b>	<b>Responsible Officer</b>	<b>Financial Implications</b>	<b>Delivery Timescale</b>	<b>Risks to delivery/ Officer Comment</b>
7.	Bassetlaw District Council Supports the inclusion of a Councillor Board Member on the Complaints Appeal Panel.	Managing Director A1 Housing	None	May 2011	This has now been completed
8.	Encourage A1 Housing with their initiatives to increase the number of women in skilled trades.	Managing Director A1 Housing	To be met within A1 Housing's revenue budget	Ongoing	A1 will continue to work with local schools and partners to encourage more females to enter the market place, but there are no guarantees
9.	A1 Housing to consider options other than the website for information sharing as not all tenants will have access to the Internet.	A1 Housing Director of Strategy and Change	To be met within A1 Housing's revenue budget	Ongoing	A1 already use a number of ways to keep tenants informed including leaflets, poster, surveys, public meetings and meetings with tenant representatives

## 2. Background

The scrutiny review addresses the A1 Housing Core Long Term Aims of:

Aim One is to provide high quality, warm, and well maintained homes which states that by using new and existing resources efficiently, effectively and using best modern practice to bring all homes to the Decent Standard by 2013 and to keep them well-looked after. It also includes energy efficiency in the housing stock and the adaptations service.

Aim Two is to be a resident-led organisation providing fair, accessible and equal services. This includes increasing the hours of the Contact Centre and increasing appointment times for repairs.

Aim Three is to provide an excellent and seamless service by using best practice and innovation to ensure that all services are effective, efficient, well co-ordinated and achieving high levels of customer satisfaction. This includes benchmarking to evaluate performance against other organisations.

Aim Five is to be an ambitious and well run organisation.

This review also addresses key corporate priorities of Bassetlaw District Council.

A1 works in partnership with Bassetlaw District Council (BDC) and the A1 Service Delivery Plan 2011/12 states that delivering decent homes supports the BDC corporate priority to improve the Quality of Housing and Housing Choice. This is measured by the percentage change in the proportion of homes, which are non-decent. The repairs service and complaints support the BDC corporate aim to Improve Customer Satisfaction by providing accessible and responsive services. This is measured by the percentage of response repairs where an appointment is made and kept and the percentage of customers satisfied with complaints.

## 2.1 Audit Commission Inspection Report<sup>1</sup>

From the outset of the review the Panel were aware that an Inspection was carried out by the Audit Commission in November 2010, and that the report was due to be officially published during the review (February, 2011). The Panel were made aware that the evidence in the Audit Commission Report would influence the outcomes of this scrutiny review. A1 Housing maintained its existing two star rating. The Audit Commission star rating system is no longer used and in future there will be a different performance management system.

The number of strengths in the organisation outweighed the weaknesses and the number of recommendations made by the Audit Commission were significantly reduced from 2007 (38 to 14). The number of barriers to improvement had increased from 6 to 8 in the same period but there was only one that related to the scrutiny review.

They found that A1 Housing has a range of strengths which are relevant to the review including:

- there has been good progress in improving properties to meet the decent homes standard;
- the energy efficiency of homes has been increased, reducing fuel charges for many residents;
- repairs are carried out efficiently;
- services are generally easy for customers to access and there is a good range of information available;
- complaints are dealt with promptly and well, and lessons are learnt from them;
- A1 has a good understanding of the profile of its customers

A specific weaknesses relating to the Scrutiny review was:

Call answering by the Contact Centre at peak times is slow. The depth and accuracy of some telephone advice is inadequate.

### **Barriers to improvement.**

The track record of performance indicators is mixed, with no improvement in overall tenant satisfaction.

The following key recommendations were made by the Audit Commission:

---

<sup>1</sup> [Audit Commission Inspection Report<sup>1</sup>](#)

R1. Improve the focus on customers by:

- Improving the speed of telephone answering by the Contact Centre and the quality of advice provided by telephone

R2. Improve the approach to stock investment and the suitability of the stock by:

- Ensuring that accurate information on future decent homes work is clearly communicated to residents at the earliest possible stage.
- Working more effectively with occupational therapists to deliver aids and adaptations promptly, and improving information for residents;
- Improve performance monitoring.

A1 Housing produced an Action Plan in response and the details can be seen in Appendix 6.1.

### **Decent Homes Standard**

Although this was not included in the scope it was important to understand how it works and the impact that it will have on Repairs and Complaints. The Government set out a target in 2000 that it would "ensure that all social housing meets set standards of decency by 2010, by reducing the number of households living in social housing that does not meet these standards by a third between 2001 and 2004, with most of the improvement taking place in the most deprived local authority areas".

Local authorities have been required to set out a timetable under which they will assess, modify and, where necessary, replace their housing stock according to the conditions laid out in the standard.

The criteria for the standard are as follows:

- it must meet the current statutory minimum standard for housing
- it must be in a reasonable state of repair

- it must have reasonably modern facilities and services
- it must provide a reasonable degree of thermal comfort.

A1 Housing was established in 2004 as an Arms Length Management Organisation (ALMO) to manage the housing stock of Bassetlaw District Council. A key aim was to enable additional resources to bring the housing stock up to the Decent Homes Standard by 2012/13. A Gap funding bid for £62 million was made. The ALMO was inspected after just six months and got a zero star rating. Following on from two inspections in 2007 a 2 star rating was gained and the Decent Homes programme commenced. Following a survey of the stock it was found that 4,700 homes needed work in 2004. The number of homes classified as non –decent changes overtime but about 300 homes fall out of decency each year.

In 2008 the Decent Homes money was extended to 2012 and in 2011 was extended again to 2015 but the funding has been reduced. It is estimated that 5600 homes will have been made decent out of a stock 6942 by April 2011. A1 Housing has been able to deliver a lot more improvements through efficiency measures and inward investment. On completion of the programme in 2015 it is estimated that 6,400 properties will have been improved.

The scheme was administered by two external partners Connaught PLC and Bullock Construction PLC. On the 8<sup>th</sup> September 2010, Connaught PLC went into administration, A1 Housing has risk managed the process and now operates the Decent Homes programme via one partner Bullock Construction PLC.

As part of the 2010 Comprehensive Spending Review all ALMOs had to reapply for Decent Homes funding and the scheme was opened to local authorities. The conditions of funding also changed to areas requiring improvement instead of star rating or performance. A1 Housing received reduced funding. A1 Housing was one of the top 4 bids nationally. A1 Housing used a cost model that ensured that it did not run out of money. A1 Housing was only allocated £11.8m to complete the Decent Homes programme leaving a shortfall of £9.585m.

In 2011 the shortfall has to be managed with several options to be considered:

- Re-profile Decent Homes so that things are done differently to maximise efficiencies. No decisions have been made on the amount of work that will be done to homes in the future and tenants may be expecting more than can be delivered. Homes will be made warm, water and windproof. Properties will be resurveyed and expenditure will be focused.
- Review current specifications and works e.g. kitchen units and finishes.

- Review rates paid to Bullock Construction PLC.
- Measure the number of non-decent properties annually so that a strategy can be developed with the available funds.
- Re-examine the ways to bring the non - traditional homes, such as Wimpey at Carlton, up to Decent Homes standard.
- Review the whole process so that best value is being achieved.
- Achieve savings with the new Notts City materials tender where A1 Housing is working with other authorities to set up a buying club.

A1 Housing Board considered and approved the way forward in March 2011. The time taken from receiving the funding decision to producing the Action Plan was only 3 weeks. This will be considered by the A1 Housing/Bassetlaw District Council Strategic Housing Group and the changes will commence from April 2011. A1 Housing is looking for efficiencies and cost savings. In the past A1 Housing has provided Decent Homes Plus but is now considering the standard scheme. Details of the Decent Homes Plus are included in information provided by A1 Housing. An example to illustrate the differences is that the Standard scheme states that a kitchen should be replaced with similar units. A1 Housing have been replacing the fitments to a higher modern standard, providing new flooring and decorating. This will continue. The bathroom standard plus included fitting a shower over the bath but the standard scheme does not. It is proposed to do the standard scheme but showers will continue to be provided in older peoples' bungalows. There will be full tenant consultation and notification of changes to the scheme. There will be flexibility and A1 Housing will look at individual cases with the option of tenants paying at cost. The scheme is being implemented in localities so that everyone living in an area has the same facilities subject to fulfilling the criteria.

## **Energy Efficiency**

Vulnerable people and fuel poverty are integral to decent homes. Energy efficiency is an important element of the Decent Homes Programme. Over the last five years A1 Housing has improved the SAP rating (energy efficiency) of properties moving from the bottom 25% to the top 25% performing Arms Length Management Organisations (ALMOs) nationally. It uses new innovations such as ground and air source heat pumps to improve the efficiency of heating systems and reduce costs to tenants especially in areas where there is no gas supply. A1 Housing is recognised as a leader in the use of sustainable energy sources. The Audit Commission cited Energy Efficiency as an area of Best Practice for A1 Housing.



## **Audit Commission Inspection Report Comments on Decent Homes**

The inspection found that 'there is a generally customer-focused approach to Decent Homes work. There has been a significant reduction in demand for repairs since the Decent Homes programme began. In both 2005/06 and 2006/07 the ALMO carried out around 34,000 repairs, but this has dropped steadily to 18,401 in 2009/10, a reduction of 46 per cent in repairs per property. The reduction is higher for repairs related to Decent Homes improvements. For example, kitchen repairs fell by 60 per cent, bathrooms by 76 per cent and heating by 62 per cent. This shows the benefit to customers of having modern amenities.

The Audit Commission report supported the evidence gathered by the Panel. The perception also was that every tenant would get the whole package of improvements and did not understand the criteria. A1 Housing has now produced a booklet, which explains what customers can expect from the programme in terms of the condition of existing fitments as the early publicity was less explicit. There is a caveat which says that if the kitchen/bathroom is in good condition and fit for purpose then it does not meet the criteria. Panel Members reported that there had been negative feedback from tenants who had looked after their properties and did not meet the criteria.

The Panel identified that Customer Care and access to the repairs service were important to tenants. The Panel wanted to look specifically at the operation of the A1 Call Centre.

Strengths still outweigh weaknesses and there has been good progress in completing decent homes work. Customer liaison is good, with regular staff visits before and during works and a comprehensive information pack.

## **2.2 Customer Care**

A1 Housing has an overarching Customer Strategy that sets out how it will ensure that customer needs and expectations are met over 3 key areas;

- Access and Customer Care
- Communication
- Resident Involvement.

The Strategy outlines how A1 Housing uses and learns from customer feedback to shape services and make improvements that are resident led. The basis is that all customers should have easy access to services that meet their requirements and have clear information, developed with customers, that meets their needs. A1 Housing uses a variety of access points. There are two property shops located in Worksop and Retford Town Halls and at Head Office in Carlton. Home visits are offered for vulnerable customers.

Research has informed A1 Housing that customers prefer contact by telephone, which has led to the development of the A1 Housing Contact Centre. There is also a comprehensive web based service. Customers also need access to written information in formats that meet their needs and preferences including DVD's for low literacy levels and magnifying sheets for sight impairment.

A1 has developed the Customer Insight Programme (CIP), it has a range of activities to enable A1 Housing to obtain the views of various residents and their level of satisfaction with services.

### **Informing Customers**

A1 Housing provides a quarterly report to customers in the tenant newsletter, In Touch. The report will include information about:

- Total number of complaints, comments and compliments received across A1 Housing
- A breakdown of the type of complaints, comments and compliments received across A1 Housing, (by key driver)
- Number of complaints resolved outside policy timeframes
- Actions taken to address issues raised by complaints, comments and compliments

### **Resident Involvement**

A1 Housing has also included a Resident Involvement Strategy to assist it to become a resident led organisation. A1 Housing's key principles for resident involvement are: -

- Resident involvement will make us change the way we do things
- We will listen
- We will let you know what is happening

- We will tell you what differences you have made
- Involvement includes everyone
- Resident involvement has to make a difference
- Residents will be our judge
- To provide clear information

The role of a Tenant Board member is to ensure that the Resident Involvement structure is clear, fit for purpose and makes an impact. The Tenant Board Member is on the Complaints Panel.

### **Decent Homes Standard and Customer Care**

There is a structured process in place to inform tenants of the proposed work starting 6 months before the start date and continuing to 1 day before. A1 Housing's Customer Services Manager meets the Contractors Tenant liaison team quarterly to monitor customer liaison issues.

### **Repairs and Customer Care**

There is an appointment reminder system to call or text the customer 24 hours before the appointment. A password system is used to prevent unwanted callers. Operatives have information on vulnerable customers. A vulnerability policy was introduced in 2009 which allows A1 Housing to waive recharges, upgrade a repair category, carried out tenant responsibility repairs i.e. repairs to internal doors. A1 Housing is a contractor for the Nottinghamshire Sanctuary Scheme which supports victims of domestic violence. Rechargeable repairs are identified and prices quoted.

## **2.3 Repairs Policy**

The Panel wanted to look at the implementation of the Bassetlaw District Council Repairs policy, and how it compares to other authorities.

The repairs policy was revised and implemented in 2008. This was carried out with consultation of residents through the Tenants and Investment Group (TIG), Joint Housing Advisory Group (JHAG) and 100 Club. The categories of repairs and

the time limits were reviewed. It was noted that top quartile performing organisations completed non urgent repairs in 15 days. It was decided to change the existing 10 and 25 working days for repairs targets to 15 working days.

The repair categories are:

- Emergency – 4 hour response, jobs include blocked drains, loss of power and water supply
- Very Urgent response – 1 working day, jobs include bath leak, cistern leak
- Urgent response – 3 working days, jobs include repair taps, banister rail to stairs
- Non-urgent – 15 working days, jobs include re-glazing, showers, refix sink unit top, refix wall tiles
- Planned – 13 week repairs, jobs include renew door, windows, gutters and plastering
- Tenant responsibility for repairs, including internal doors, draught excluder, light bulbs, and washing machine fittings.

A1 Housing has a responsive repairs procedure to ensure the effective management of repairs prior to, during and after the Decent Homes programme. This procedure should be read in conjunction with the A1 Housing Repairs Policy and Procedures. All tenants are provided with a Repairs Handbook, which provides comprehensive information about how to report a repair, the categories, the time frame and the repairs that are the responsibility of the tenant. The Handy Hints for Easy Home Maintenance gives straight forward guidance on basic tasks in the home that do not need a DIY expert and using only basic tools.

Repairs are intrinsically linked to the Decent Homes Programme. A1 Housing have a profile of the work to be carried out, so if a repair is reported but there is improvement work programmed in the next 3 months, it may be a case of making it safe and waiting for Decent Homes work to be carried out. In the case of security or health and safety it may require the improvement to be done more quickly.

Repairs can be reported by a Free-phone repairs number, on line or in person at the area offices. All customers receive a repairs statement every quarter.

The CIP has introduced a suite of customer satisfaction surveys for several service areas, which include day-to-day repairs, capital works, adaptations, gas servicing, complaints, decent homes and allocations. The CIP will provide the structure for A1 Housing to record and report on formal consultation e.g. status surveys and ad hoc surveys on a specific issue. This information is collected on a quarterly basis to produce the Customer Insight Report which is presented to A1 Housing's Board and A1's Tenant Scrutiny Panel.

## **Performance Management in Repairs**

In addition to looking at the repairs process, the Panel wanted to assess how well A1 Housing performed compared to other authorities.

A1 Housing wants to ensure that its services provide Value for Money (VFM) as well as the delivering the best possible services. Its benchmarking exercise indicated that A1 Housing was in the top four in the country for building repairs and are investing in repairs.

A1 Housing uses a performance management system called A1 Route Planner, which has been developed specifically to meet the organisation's needs. It provides smart action planning, however, it is not linked to the BDC performance system – COVALENT (a small number of A1 Housing indicators are reported in this system and reported to Bassetlaw District Council's Audit and Performance Scrutiny Committee (APSC). These are percentage of Homes which are non- decent and the average SAP ratings for dwellings.

All the major projects, Business Plan, Service Plans are built into the system- 62 plans in total. All the outcomes in the system are referenced to each service objective and the Core Aims of the organisation. The Business Plan, 2011/12, Service Plan 2011/12 and Best Value Improvement Plan 2011/12 were approved at the A1 Board Meeting 29th March 2011 and are now included in the system. To view the information refer to items 7 and 8 on A1 Housing's website.

Performance reports are produced for Heads of Service and Team Leaders to monitor their individual service but corporately it allows the Management Team to have an overview. The performance of all services is monitored monthly by SMT and the Board receive quarterly reports. The performance is also monitored through the joint A1/BDC Strategic Housing Group which challenges performance.

As part of the services agreement A1 Housing is responsible for reporting performance to BDC on the housing indicators that directly relate to operational housing services. The Government's national set of performance indicators has been changed and now only records percentage of non-decent homes and percentage of tenant satisfaction with landlord services. Where possible, comparison is made with performance in previous years.

A1 Housing also uses a Balanced Scorecard, which includes performance on Key Projects, service improvements suggested by Service Reviews and Performance Indicators. It provides a strategic overview of performance to meet the annual objectives of the organisation. The Balance Scorecard is reported quarterly to the Board. A table of the performance indicators and the Balanced Scorecard relevant to the review is attached in the Appendix 6.3, 6.4, 6.5 and 6.7.

A1 Housing is in the Chartered Institute of Housing Housemark scheme that collates performance across all housing organisations.<sup>2</sup> This provides performance information for A1Housing compared against other organisations such as benchmarking information on answering calls to the organisation; response to complaints; complaints upheld; repairs completed within target time; energy efficiency rating and tenant's satisfaction

Performance can be measured against all councils, all ALMOs, ALMOs of a similar size, common stock – Bassetlaw has no high rise accommodation and also takes account of rural areas.

## 2.4 Complaints Policy

Members wanted to ensure that the Complaints Policy met the organisation's needs. Tenants do make complaints to Councillors about the A1 Repairs service and the Panel wanted to look at the extent of the problem. This was because Members have reported that some tenants had experienced difficulties with Call Centre staff when reporting repairs and requesting information on the progress of repairs. As a result they were less likely to complain about the service that they had received.

When A1 Housing was created in 2004, the organisation adopted the current Bassetlaw District Council complaints process, which had three stages and used the RESPOND software database to record complaints. This met the organisation's needs at that time. In those early days the Customer Services role was as a Co-ordinator, to log onto the system and send the complaint to the relevant Service areas for an investigation to be carried out.

The time limits were:

- 5 days to acknowledge receipt.
- 15 days to provide a response at Stage 1

---

<sup>2</sup> <http://www.housemark.co.uk/hm.nsf/Home?ReadForm>.

- 15 days to provide a response at Stage 2
- 15 days to provide a response at Stage 3

The process was lengthy and the responses were inconsistent because they came from Service Managers and it was not always clearly communicated how the customer could proceed if they still were not satisfied.

Following the Audit Commission inspection in 2007, things had to change. A meeting was held with key officers and customer representatives who committed themselves to find a better way to deal with complaints. There is now a dedicated Complaints Officer who carries out the investigation by gathering facts and testing them against the policy and procedure.

*“The Complaints Policy states that A1 Housing recognise the important role that customer feedback and complaints play in ensuring that services are tailored to meet the needs of all of our customers as well as being used as a mechanism for learning and promoting continuous improvement across all services. A1 Housing believes it is in the best interest of our tenants, service users and customers to resolve complaints efficiently and effectively.”*

A1 Housing defines a complaint as ‘when a customer makes an expression of dissatisfaction about the service to them’. This may occur if A1 Housing has:

- Provided a poor service or failed to provide a service at all;
- Failed to do something that we have an obligation to do;
- Taken too long to deal with a request;
- Our staff, agents or contractors have behaved unhelpfully, discourteously or inappropriately;
- Failed to follow one of our own policies and procedures without providing reasonable notice or justification;
- Unfair or inappropriate procedures.

The objectives of the policy are:

- To ensure all A1 Housing services and schemes respond to feedback and complaints in a consistent and fair manner and within the stated timelines.
- To highlight the importance of front line staff being empowered to deal with feedback and complaints at a local level, finding immediate solutions wherever possible and appropriate.

- To ensure that the feedback and complaints procedure is accessible, well publicised, simple to understand and regularly monitored and evaluated.
- To highlight the importance of using information obtained through feedback and complaints to inform learning and continuous service improvement.
- Contribute to A1 Housing's Long Term Aim; to be a resident led organisation, providing fair, accessible and equal services.

The complaint policy and procedure should normally only be used where the customer has raised a complaint with A1 Housing within 6 months of the event.

### **The Process**

There is now a two- stage process in place. All complaints are acknowledged within 3 days.

Stage 1 – response is provided following investigation by Service Areas by the Complaints Officer within 10 days from the receipt of the complaint.

Stage 2 – Complaints Panel – If the customer appeals within 4 weeks of receiving the response. The target is to have the appeal within ten days of the request.

The Complaints Panel is made up of:

- Managing Director of A1 Housing – Chair
- One Tenant Board Member
- One tenant representative (Chair of Bassetlaw Tenants' and Residents' Association)
- From 2011 a member of the Quality Impact Panel.

The result is communicated two days after the appeal with the option of further action using the Local Government Ombudsman if the appeal is unsuccessful.



A1 Housing now also count the number of “avoided complaints”, this is when a person has asked to complain but the issue has been resolved at that time. All of the information gathered through the complaints process is used as a learning process to deliver service improvements.

The Complaints Officer’s role is to be a “tenant’s buddy” during the process. A home visit is offered to every tenant who makes a complaint, although not everyone takes this up. This allows the Complaints Officer to explain the process and gather the facts. It is crucial that the complaint is fully understood. The aim is to resolve as many complaints as possible at Stage 1. The tenant can build up a relationship with the Complaints Officer, which can be useful if the complaint is progressed to the Complaints Panel stage.

This policy will be reviewed at least every 2 years. It was amended in 2010 and the next date for review is 2012.

### **Stage Three Complaints**

The Complaints and Consultation Officer for Bassetlaw District Council is also the Ombudsman Liaison Officer. Stage 3 complaints are the final stage of the complaints process which is dealt with by the Ombudsman who views the Council and A1 Housing as one unit. The Stage Three complaints go directly to the Ombudsman Liaison Officer and the Chief Executive of Bassetlaw District Council so that a response to the Ombudsman can be co-ordinated. If a complaint is received that has not been through the A1 Housing complaints process they are redirected to A1 Housing for investigation. A premature complaint is a complaint that has gone directly to the Ombudsman before going through the complaints process so it is referred back to A1 Housing to progress. The Ombudsman can at any time choose to progress a complaint. The Ombudsman will reply to the Ombudsman Liaison Officer with the decision and any recommendations as a result of the complaint. No maladministration has been found in the complaints over the last 2 years.

A1 Housing uses information from complaints to improve its services and has processes in place to deal with this. Outcomes include the production of new leaflets on repairs; condensation; and decent homes. The customer care training received by all A1 Housing staff includes training on the new complaints procedures and the importance of complaints.

## 2.5 Relationship between A1 Housing and Bassetlaw District Council

The Panel wanted to understand the relationship between A1 Housing and Bassetlaw District Council and identify where the performance of A1 Housing is monitored and reported.

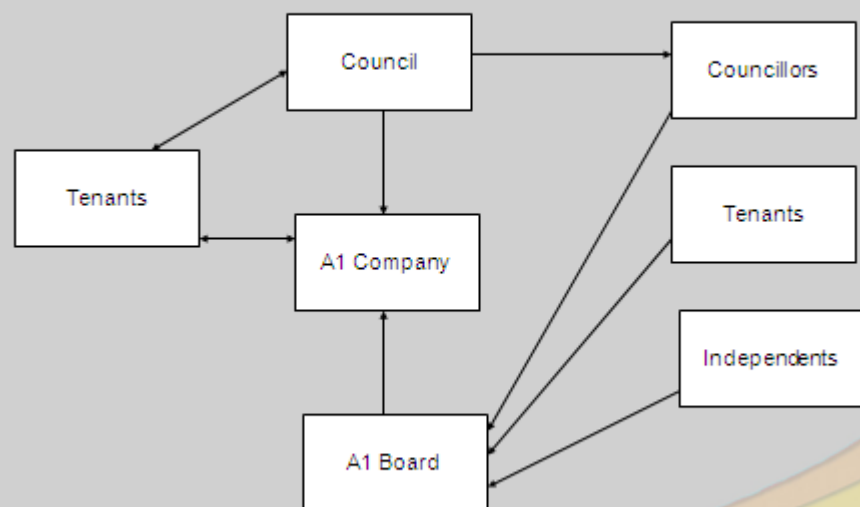
### **A1 Housing Board**

The Panel wanted clarification on the role of the A1 Housing Board. The Board has ultimate responsibility for the governance of A1 Housing. The Board's central role is to direct A1 Housing's work – that is to determine strategic direction, deliver the terms of the Management Agreement and approve overall expenditure and policies. A1 Housing produces a Board Governance Handbook for Board Members.

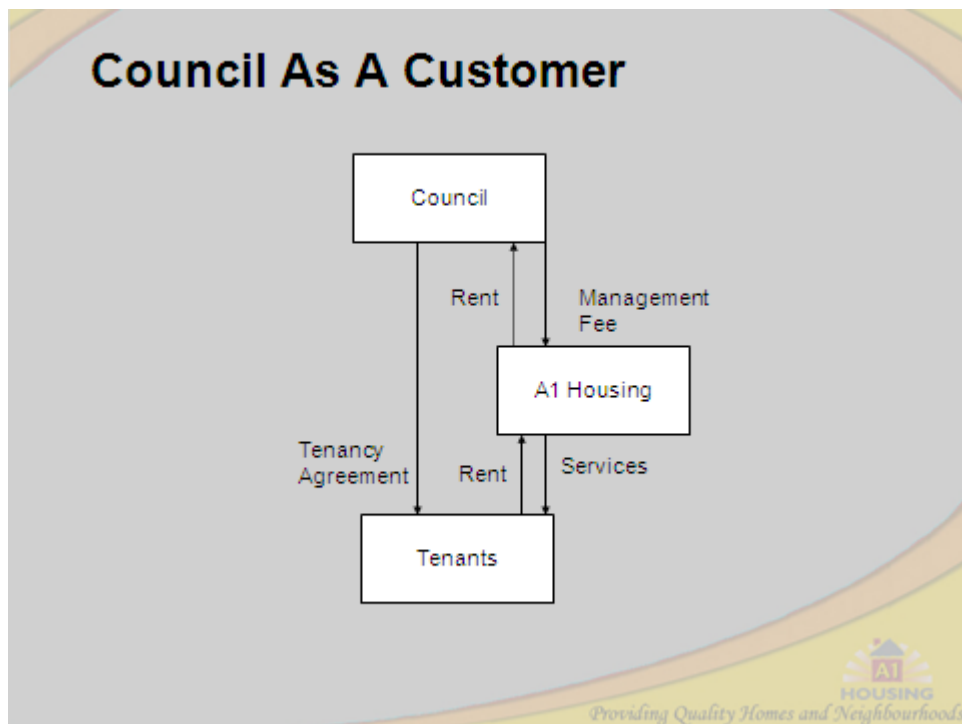
The Managing Director, A1 Housing provides training for all new Members to explain their legal and financial duties and responsibilities. Board Members must exercise independent judgement and act in the interest of A1 Housing as they are on the Board as Board Members and not Councillors or tenants.

The diagrams below show the relationships between A1 Housing and its partners and customers. Not only does A1 Housing and A1 Board have a responsibility to the tenant, but the Council also has a responsibility to ensure tenants receive a good service.

## Council As Owner



This diagram shows how the relationship works specifically between A1 Housing, the Council and the tenants.



### **Joint Working Protocol between A1 Housing and Bassetlaw District Council**

This protocol has been agreed by both organisations and sets out how the partnership will work. Key principles that are relevant to the review include:

## **Roles**

Bassetlaw District Council recognises A1 Housing Bassetlaw is run by a Board of Directors with specific corporate responsibilities. A1 Housing Bassetlaw recognises Bassetlaw District Council has the duty to monitor it in relation to its delivery programme, and as the sole member has ultimate responsibility and control.

## **Sharing Information**

The sharing of information enables both organisations to make better decisions. There is also a Communications Protocol in place stating that A1 Housing and Bassetlaw District Council:

- Meet at least once a month to discuss operational areas of concern, financial and budgetary issues, and performance against agreed key indicators.
- Meet at least once every three months to monitor performance, discuss any proposed changes to policy, procedure or working practices that may impact upon either of us, and review joint strategic issues.

## **Strategic Group**

A1 Housing manages the stock at arms length. In 2005 a joint A1/BDC Strategic Group was set up. This includes the BDC Directors of Resources and Community Services, Managing Director A1 Housing, Chair of A1 Board, BDC Cabinet Member and Strategic Housing and Renewal Manager, BDC. This group monitors the performance of A1 Housing and will receive information on the Decent Homes programme, repairs and complaints. The relationship is a strong one.

### 3. Method of Review

#### 3.1 Summary of Review Meetings, External visits and Surveys

Meeting	Witnesses	Evidence Gathered
13 <sup>th</sup> January 2011	<p>J Richards – Director of Strategy and Change A1 Housing</p> <p>D Spittlehouse – Director of Technical and Housing Services, Deputy Managing Director A1 Housing</p> <p>C Frost – Strategic Housing and Renewal Manager Bassetlaw District Council</p>	<p>Provided an overview of customer care, handling of repairs and complaints. Engagement activities and consultation.</p> <p>Provided an overview of the Decent Homes programme and the repairs service.</p> <p>Provided an overview of how the relationship works with A1 Housing.</p>
26 <sup>th</sup> January 2011	M Bowler- A1 Housing Repair Manager	The repairs polic, time limit , the repairs process and performance
3 <sup>rd</sup> February 2011	J. Linacre – Chair of Bassetlaw Tenants and Residents Association (BATRA)	The Tenants and residents perspective of the repairs and complaints service provided by A1 Housing.
16 <sup>th</sup> February 2011	Visit to A1 Housing Call Centre – Carlton Forest	Provided an operational view.
24 <sup>th</sup> February 2011	<p>S. Roberts/S. Vernon – A1 Housing Complaints</p> <p>S. Carter – Complaints and Consultation Officer, (Ombudsman Liaison Officer), BDC,</p>	<p>History, process, developments and future improvements to A1 Housing complaints system.</p> <p>The BDC complaints process for A1 Housing complaints that are referred to the Ombudsman.</p>

Meeting	Witnesses	Evidence Gathered
10 <sup>th</sup> March 2011	M. Bowskill – Chair A1 Housing Board	Recent Developments to the Decent Homes Programme and response to the Audit Commission A1 Housing Inspection published February, 2011.
15 <sup>th</sup> March 2011 Overview and Scrutiny Committee	B Coleman, Managing Director, A1 Housing Chair of Panel attended as an observer and information circulated to the Panel.	Audit Commission, Best Value Inspection, February, 2011.
23 <sup>rd</sup> March 2011	Draft Recommendations J Richards – Director of Strategy and Change A1 Housing D Spittlehouse – Director of Technical and Housing Services, Deputy Managing Director A1 Housing M. Bowskill – Chair A1 Housing Board	A1 Housing response to Audit Commission Recommendations
4 <sup>th</sup> April 2011	Draft Recommendations	Draft Recommendations Agreed
21 <sup>st</sup> April 2011	Draft Final Report	Draft Recommendations Agreed

### 3.2 Visit to the A1 Call Centre and Back Office

On 16<sup>th</sup> February, 2011, Members of the Panel visited the A1 Housing Call Centre at Carlton Forest to see how calls for repairs were handled. The Call Centre is currently moving from its present location to join the Customer Services Team. The Call Centre Manager explained there were 6 posts, including a job share post. There was an electronic display showing the number of calls received during the day, the number of calls currently active and the number of calls abandoned. At the time of the visit it read 147 calls received and 14 abandoned. Once the two teams merge there will be a golden number for clients to ring which will mean that more advisors are available at peak time to take calls.

The 8am – 12 noon Saturday service ceased in mid-March, 2011. The entire out of hours service is going to be handled by the contractors Tunstall who already deal with the out of hours service. Customers will be able to access information and make appointments for non-emergencies.

The Members saw the script provided to help staff ensure the correct job is logged. They visited the back office to see the software system for planning the jobs. There is a one full time planner but four are trained to cover leave and sickness. Jobs are colour coded by type and status. Using the software system the planner can click on the job to see the location of the operative and on completion of the job can then send his next job through to his handset electronically. This allows flexibility for emergencies. The system was not used for Saturday appointments.

If a job is not completed satisfactorily, the operative would be sent back to complete it. A1 Housing carry out post inspection surveys of the work carried out.

The Members met two operatives to ask them about the system and their views. They both agreed that the new system was an improvement to the previous system of job slips. The Opti-time system gives operatives all the information that they need through the handset including customer passwords, customer needs and information dogs in the property. They explained that no two days are the same and they are no longer interrupted when on a job to see if they can attend an emergency as the system allows better planning. Operatives can start work from home as vans have stock or it is delivered to the property for the job.

There was a discussion about the effect of the extreme winter weather on the repairs system and A1 Housing reported that lessons had been learnt during this period and would be considered in the future.

### 3.3 Councillor's Survey

Every BDC Councillor was asked to complete a survey (See Appendix 6.2) over a two week period of the number of complaints that they dealt with that were related to A1 Housing. There was a limited response to the survey and as could be expected the Councillors that had the largest number of A1 Housing properties in their ward had the largest number of contacts by constituents. The table below provides the number of A1 Housing properties by ward.



The response to the survey indicated a small number of repairs complaints (single figures). Most were ongoing problems lasting several months but were usually resolved satisfactorily by the Repairs Manager. Dealing with repairs and complaints was time consuming taking between 1-3 hours of Councillor time. There were also general comments about customer service. Tenants do not always have a positive response and can be put off reporting a repair which in the long term can have a negative effect as new repairs are not reported. Also tenants do not speak to the same person each time they ring which can be frustrating. There also needs to be a consistent approach to communicating decent homes policy and the need for the use of plain English in documents to be understood. There are still some tenants who do not understand fully the definition of Decent Homes and do not understand why they have not received new fitments and this can be a source of complaints.

### **A1 Properties by Ward**

04/03/2011	Occupied	Void	Sum:
Beckingham	80		80
Blyth	51	1	52
Carlton	498	7	505
Clayworth	37	1	38
East Markham	56		56
East Retford East	537	2	539
East Retford North	573	5	578
East Retford South	501	3	504
East Retford West	29		29
Everton	78	1	79
Harworth	589	8	597
Langold	192	2	194
Misterton	122	16	138
Rampton	33		33
Ranskill	141	1	142
Sturton	54		54
Sutton	46		46
Trent	235	1	236
Welbeck	70	1	71
Worksop East	773	6	779
Worksop North	228	2	230
Worksop North East	464	4	468
Worksop North West	409	2	411
Worksop South	22		22
Worksop South East	1,047	9	1,056
<b>Sum:</b>	<b>6,865</b>	<b>72</b>	<b>6,937</b>

## 4. Addressing the Scope: Evidence Gathered for Recommendations

### 4.1 Analyse and compare the repairs policy with other similar areas.

The Panel wanted to ensure that A1's Housing Repairs Policy was comparable to other similar organisation.

As part of this review we looked at the repairs policy of St Leger Homes, Doncaster, and Sandwell Homes, both were recognised as excellent by the Audit Commission Inspections. When looking at the Repairs Policies, the first point of note was the approach that had been taken to the policy and what was included. St Leger Homes' policy included Decent Homes, Preventative maintenance, Environmental consideration, Asset management and Complaints. Whereas A1 Housing have focused entirely on repairs, Sandwell have taken the approach of a process or procedure for repairs. They all provide a comprehensive handbook to tenants.

#### Comparisons of Repairs Policies.

A1 Housing	St Leger Homes	Sandwell Homes
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• 24 hour Freephone telephone number</li><li>• Fax</li><li>• In person</li><li>• In writing</li><li>• Online</li><li>• Email</li><li>• Facebook</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• 24 hour Freephone telephone number</li><li>• Fax</li><li>• In person</li><li>• In writing</li><li>• Online</li><li>• Email</li><li>• Via an operative or employee of St Leger Homes</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Monday - Friday 8.00am - 8.00pm Repairs Centre telephone number</li><li>• Fax</li><li>• In person</li><li>• In writing</li><li>• Online</li><li>• Email</li><li>• Emergency repair Freephone number for out of hours</li></ul>
	Answer calls within 25 seconds	

<b>A1 Housing</b>	<b>St Leger Homes</b>	<b>Sandwell Homes</b>
Appointment made with tenant, acknowledgement sent in post with job number	Appointment made with tenant	Acknowledgement letter for each repair reported, with appointment details.
Morning Afternoon Evening, School run and Saturday morning appointments	Morning Afternoon Evening, School run and Saturday morning appointments	Morning afternoon and evening appointments
Emergency repairs attended within 4 hours The rest of the scales are the same	Emergency repairs attended within 2 hours The rest of the scales are the same	Emergency repairs attended within 24 hours The rest of the scales are the same
Right to Repair provides a list and time frame. The process if the work is not completed in time and the compensation	Right to Repair provides a list and time frame	Right to Repair provides a list and time frame. The process if the work is not completed in time and the compensation
Comprehensive list of categories and time frames	Not as comprehensive	Comprehensive list of categories and time frames
£50 charge levied for misuse of Emergency service	Unknown	Cost of visit charged for misuse of emergency service
Post inspection on 10%	Pre & Post inspections	Pre & Post inspections 10% telephone survey
	Stats on jobs completed on first visit	
Vulnerable persons policy	Vulnerable persons policy	Vulnerable persons policy

A1 Housing	St Leger Homes	Sandwell Homes
Property's that have not had any repairs for 12 months are scheduled an occupational visit by housing managers.  Every 2 years all tenants have a caring for you, caring for your home visit	Annual property MOTs are used to complete minor repairs to dispersed properties on a programmed basis.	Property MOT's for homes that have not had any repairs in 2 years

The Panel noted the comparison of A1 Housing Repairs Policy with other areas policies. The A1 Housing Policy compares well. The Audit Commission Review identified repairs as a strength for A1 Housing. It also considered that the information provided to tenants was of a good standard. Refer to 2.1.

## 4.2 Review the procedure, definitions of essential/ non-essential work and timescales

The Repairs Policy is the responsibility of Bassetlaw District Council and is approved by Cabinet. It is monitored by the A1 Housing/Bassetlaw District Council Strategic Housing Group.

The key aims and objectives of the repairs policy include:

- Customer focussed
- Value for Money
- Best in Class
- Excellent service
- Completing repairs on time
- Within cost standards
- Ensuring equality of access for all tenants

A1 Housing highlighted the importance of involving tenants in decision making and target setting. Listening to residents enables the organisation to understand their aspirations and to respond to their needs. Tenants are consulted on a range of topics from the materials used in the Decent Homes programme to changes to the emergency and urgent repairs.

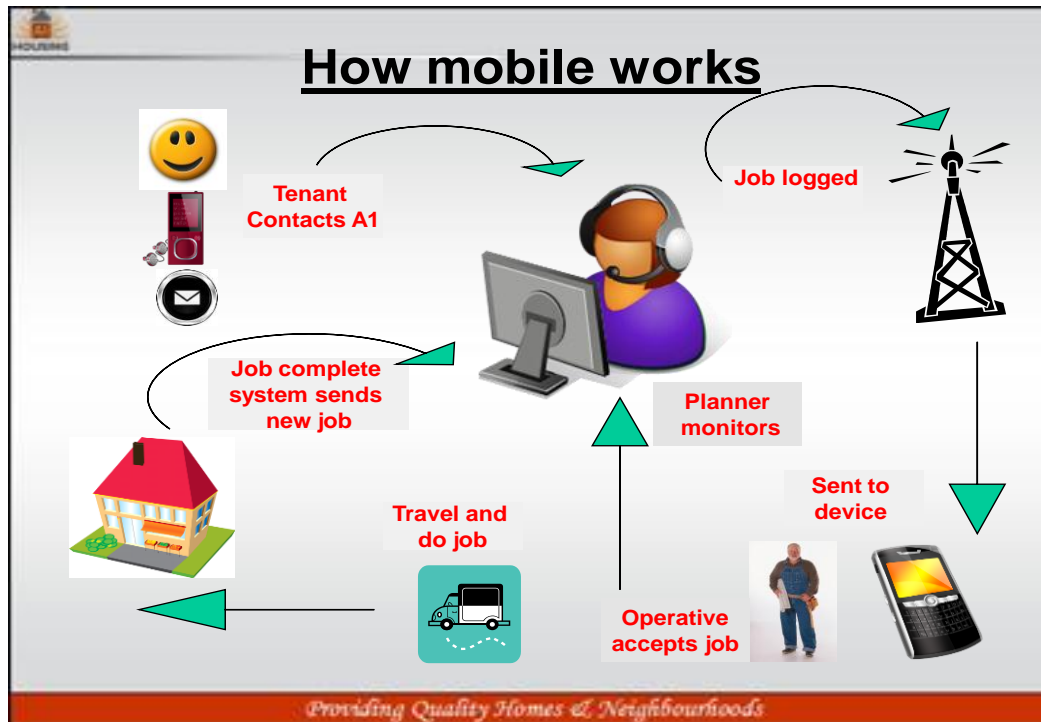
Residents are able to report a repair in a number of ways, telephone, online, or in person. The majority of repairs are reported to the Call Centre, the advisors have a script so they can identify the nature of the repair and the materials necessary. This is an important stage as it could affect the planning process. Once the repair has been identified and the category it falls into, the advisor will then arrange an appointment, rather than giving an actual time to the tenant, they are offered a morning or afternoon appointment. Following customer feedback A1 Housing have now introduced all day appointments for those people who are happy to be home all day and a school run appointment which is between 9.30am–2.30pm so that parents are able collect their children from school. They also offer 2 evening and Saturday morning appointments if required. All non – emergency works are now completed via appointment. In 2009/10 99.54% of appointments were kept and 99.56% in 2010/11.

Once a job has logged it then goes into the system for planning. A1 Housing has now moved to the Opti time software programme that enables the job to be sent to the operative's handset. The Planner plans in the jobs for the day, giving a time estimate for each job. The jobs are planned geographically and marked up as types of job.

A1 Housing has introduced home start for operatives, real time scheduling and mobile working which reduces down time for each operative. This enables the planner to know where each operative is and can plan the next job, rather than giving each operative a handful of job cards for the day. It allows the work to be planned more effectively. There is stock on the vans and larger items are delivered to site.

Each operative has a mobile phone and the job details are sent to the phone, once the job has been completed the next job is sent. They are able to take photos for evidence for recharging. It diaries their work geographically so if an emergency occurs A1 Housing can call out an operative who is in the vicinity. This has removed the conflict between planned jobs and emergencies and improved customer service.

This visit to the Call Centre allowed members to view the progress and gave them an opportunity to talk to A1 Housing Operatives about the new Opti time software which appears to have improved service delivery. (Refer to 3.2 ).



In the bad weather conditions of winter 2010/11 there was a large number of properties with damaged guttering and waiting times rose to 13 weeks because of the exceptional circumstances. The cost of the repairs is an additional £500.000 and has to be met from within existing budgets. A1 Housing needed to use all the staff available and it was possible that there was flexible use of staff. However A1 Housing invest heavily in training so that they are able to increase their range of skills with recognised qualifications. 90% of the operatives are multi- skilled. This not only benefits A1 Housing but adds to the individual's personal development and long term future.

There is an apprenticeship scheme, where apprentices get to work alongside various types of tradesman and attend college one day a week. A1 Housing also works with schools such as Portland on a 52 week Construction Diploma which allows students to work in every area of the organisation throughout a year by attending A1 Housing one day a week.

The number of houses in the stock has reduced because of the Right to Buy Scheme and the number of repairs has fallen because of the improvements made through the Decent Homes Standard. The number of operatives doing repairs has reduced and A1 Housing has improved the service. The window factory has closed and outsourced windows, doors and fencing to external suppliers.

### **Payment for Repairs**

If a person has damaged the property they have to pay for the repairs. A1 Housing has a strict repay policy but provides a weekly payment scheme for tenants to pay the costs back over a period of time. Even if the Police raid a property and have to force entry it is the tenant who is responsible for the repairs. The charges were at the cost of the work to A1 Housing plus administration and VAT added. The debt recovery team at Bassetlaw District Council recover the charges and there has been a good return rate.

### **The appeals process for recharge repairs.**

A recharge letter is issued, this provides the costing for the work. The tenant has to sign a form agreeing to pay for the work before the job goes ahead. Tenants are able to telephone and speak to the Repairs Manager or they can write in to appeal. This is separate from the complaints process but runs alongside.

### **Policy for vulnerable people**

A1 Housing also has a policy for vulnerable people, The definition of vulnerable for the purpose of this procedure is a local and not a national definition **“An individual or household living in sheltered or supported housing or experiencing difficulties with everyday living on account of financial, educational, health, employment, learning, language behavioural, family, social or other circumstances/issues or any combination of these while lacking abilities and/or resources to cope with these difficulties.”** This policy means that some jobs are done quicker because there is a direct effect on a person's health for example showers are normally a 3 day repair but for a disabled person this could be done in a day, because of their needs. The number of repairs that are carried out under this policy is around 30 repairs per quarter. This does not cost a lot in terms of money but improves the quality of life for these customers.

The Panel identified that there are currently no female operatives employed by A1 Housing to carry out repairs. This may be needed for female tenants who have experienced domestic violence. A1 Housing has tried to encourage female representation in the workforce working with Serlby Park School and has run courses for females but so far there has been no response. Currently there are 3 females working on the Decent Homes programme who attended Valley and Portland schools in Worksop. A1 Housing knows its tenant profile and the In House team can identify tenant needs such as disability. A female member of staff can attend with a male worker if required by a client.

**Recommendation:**

- Encourage A1 Housing with their initiatives to increase the number of women in skilled trades.

**Tenant responsibility**

This includes internal doors, draught excluder, light bulbs, and washing machine fitting. The fitting of internal doors is now the tenants' responsibility as there had been a lot of cases of people damaging internal doors. However, if people buy the doors, A1 Housing can arrange to fit them. Obviously there are some cases that need discretion and the Repairs Policy for Vulnerable people allows a tailored service.

The Panel considered that the Repairs Policy was effective and the process for the production of the policy included tenants. With reference to 2.5, Panel agreed that the roles of the two organisations needed clarifying to strengthen the policy as A1 Housing implement the policy that is approved by the Council.

**Recommendation:**

- Bassetlaw District Council needs to provide stronger guidance about what is included in both the Repairs and Complaints Policy.



## **Audit Commission Inspection Report Comment on Repairs Policy**

This was identified as a strength by the Audit Commission and the evidence strengthened the findings of the Panel. Good progress has been made in improving properties to meet the Decent Homes Standard and an effective repairs service. Strengths now significantly outweigh weaknesses in this area.

Repairs are carried out in a customer-focused way with a friendly repairs handbook. Operatives are polite and tidy. All non-emergency repairs are done by appointment and over 99 per cent of appointments are kept. Acknowledgement letters are used to confirm appointments and reminders are sent by text or 'phone 24 hours before the appointment. This has helped to reduce the number of cancelled and 'no access' appointments, from 2.9 per cent in 2006/07 to 1.67 per cent in 2009/10. Rechargeable repairs are identified and prices quoted at the point of reporting, with follow-up confirmation in writing. Operatives require the customer to sign to say s/he will pay for the work before it is completed and payment plans are available if the customer cannot afford to clear the debt in one payment. This means customers receive a good quality service throughout the process, whatever the type of repair required, and has contributed to high levels of satisfaction in 2009/10 (95 per cent) and in the first six months of 2010/11.

The service is now delivered more efficiently. A1 Housing reduced the number of repairs carried out on an emergency basis from 28 per cent in 2006/07 to 14 per cent in 2009/10 and 12 per cent in the first six months of 2010/11.

There is a strong approach to meeting the needs of vulnerable residents. A vulnerability strategy ('Something doesn't look right') provides guidance for staff on potential indicators of vulnerability and referral to appropriate services.

### **4.3 Review the customer care element**

As referred to in 2.2, A1 Housing has an overarching Customer Care Strategy to have consistent standards for all services.

The Panel also focussed on a specific part of the Customer Care services by conducting a visit to the Call Centre. The Panel recognised that A1 Housing provides comprehensive information for its tenants. The Panel believed that access to services and confidence in the reporting system was important to tenants. The A1 Housing Call Centre handles 300-350 repairs a week with 90 classed as emergencies. A1 Housing are using a mystery shopper to monitor the standards of the Call Centre.

Around the same time the Panel visited the Call Centre the Audit Commission Report was in circulation. It was clear that some of the issues highlighted in the Audit Commission report were already being addressed, such as:

- Golden Number
- Relocation of Call Centre staff to co-locate with Customer Services
- Increase staff for peak times by sharing roles with Customer Services. A1 Housing has responded to this by focusing resources on the times of heaviest demand such as Monday mornings.

A1 Housing has developed service standards in consultation with tenants, which are published quarterly in the tenants' newsletter and presented to the Bassetlaw Association of Tenants' and Residents' Associations (BATRA). All documentation provided to customers is presented to the A1 Housing Hundred Club as part of the consultation process and the Easy Reading Group (group of tenants) to check that it is in plain English.

The Panel looked at the processes that A1 Housing have in place to deal with residents who have low literacy levels regarding repairs and complaints as this may be a barrier to reporting.

### **Repairs Process**

- A Fix It DVD on how to do repairs
- The repair handbook has pictures in it. The call operators' scripts have the same pictures on their screen so they can talk it through with the customer
- If a customer has not had a repair during the previous 12 months then the customer is contacted to make sure there are no repairs needed
- Every 2 years all tenants have a caring for you, caring for your home visit

### **Complaints Process**

- No one is expected to write in

- Complaints can be taken over the phone
- Everyone is offered a home visit

Customer satisfaction for repairs is high but tenants also have high expectations. The Chair of Bassetlaw Tenants' and Residents' Association (BTRA) explained that A1 Housing communicates with its tenants to inform them about its policies so that they can understand the complaints and repairs policy. There is an annual Tenants conference held in Retford and Worktop for exchange of information. There are 13 local TRA groups which are run by 13 unpaid volunteers who work for their local community. Tenants do bring repairs complaints to their local TRA but they are referred to A1 Housing if they have not contacted them. The TRAs also liaise with the local ward councillor on complaints. The Councillor survey in 3.3 identified a low level of complaints reported to members. Most complaints are dealt with by the Call Centre and only a few go into the complaints process and to Board level for resolution.

A1 Housing uses its website for sharing information with tenants. The Audit Commission recommended improvements to the website which A1 Housing is currently implementing.

The Panel also agreed that it wanted A1 to consider options other than the website for information sharing as not all tenants will have access to the Internet.

#### **Recommendation:**

- A1 Housing to consider options other than the website for information sharing as not all tenants will have access to the Internet.

### **Audit Commission Inspection Report Comments on Customer Care**

The Audit Commission report found that there could be a long wait for calls to be answered by the Call Centre and performance had deteriorated since the last inspection. The telephony system is unable to measure the percentage of calls answered within the target time and the abandoned call rate is not monitored or reported. Staff resources in the call centre did not match the peaks and troughs in demand. There has been limited analysis of the reasons why people are 'phoning or

action taken to prevent the need for their calls. This means that customers are waiting for long periods before speaking to staff, and in some cases are abandoning their calls.

There is no regular monitoring of satisfaction with the Call Centre or out-of-hours service. This means that the quality of advice and information provided is not always satisfactory. The Audit Commission were unclear why the ALMO carries out some duplicate satisfaction survey work on repairs or what use is made of this data.

The Councillors 'survey showed that some tenants do not always have a positive response and can be put off reporting a repair which in the long term can have a negative effect as new repairs are not reported. Also tenants do not speak to the same person each time they ring which can be frustrating. There also needs to be a consistent approach to communicating Decent Homes policy and understand the need for plain English in documents.

The Audit Commission commented that A1 Housing maintains a strong focus on frontline services such as day to day repairs, gas and has continued to work effectively to meet residents' needs. Services are generally easy for customers to access, despite the dispersed and rural nature of much of the stock. A1 has a strong strategic approach to customer care with a high standard and range of information available for customers.

The Audit Commission made a recommendation on the Call Centre.

R1. Improve the focus on customers by:

Improving the speed of telephone answering by the contact Centre and the quality of advice provided by telephone.

The Panel wanted to monitor progress on this recommendation in the A1 Housing Action Plan as the review had identified similar issues.

**Recommendation:**

- That the Managing Director of A1 Housing report back to Overview and Scrutiny Committee in October 2011, to inform Members of progress in monitoring the A1 Improvement Plan produced in response to the Audit Commission review.

The Inspection reported that the strengths of Customer Care outweigh weaknesses and has a strong strategic approach.

#### 4.4 Review number of complaints linked to repairs

As previously stated, A1 Housing introduced a revised Complaints Policy and procedure from January 2010 following consultation with its customers. It has a dedicated Complaints Officer as part of the Customer Services Team and this will be reviewed and tenants consulted on the benefits of a permanent post in 2011/12.

A1 Housing produce an Annual Complaints report which provides details of the number of complaints, a profile of the customers who have complained and what was learnt from the complaints. Evidence from the Councillors' survey showed that there are still some tenants who do not understand fully the definition of Decent Homes and do not understand why they have not received new fitments and this can be a source of complaints.

A1 Housing prides itself on listening and learning, as a result the process has been streamlined. Each month the Customer Services Manager meets with the Tenant Chair of the Customer and Performance Group to look at each complaint and to see if there are any ways to improve the service. If there are any recommendations for service improvement, these are discussed with the Service Management Team. If agreed a lead officer is assigned and a date for completion of the report.

The Panel raised concerns about the balance of representation on the Complaints Panel. Subsequently A1 Housing recommended that a District Councillor should be included on the Complaints Panel.

Outcomes from the Customer and Performance Group and Service Improvements 2009/10 from Customer Complaints include:

YOU SAID	WE DID
Shouldn't go on property unannounced	Calling Card for operatives to remind them that customers need to know what they are doing
Staff rude/unprofessional	All A1 staff to receive training and frontline staff to NVQ level
Should not turn up unannounced for annual gas servicing	Letter revised

Not aware about tenant responsibilities for repairs	Produced a frequently asked questions booklet
Not happy with complaints procedures	A dedicated officer and streamlined procedure introduced

A1 Housing learn from the outcome of complaints to improve the service provided to tenants. Forthcoming developments include

- A Councillor Board Member on the Appeals Panel
- Fast Track for complaints about Decent Homes
- Introduce a goodwill payment system for upheld complaints where a customer has been inconvenienced
- Training for Appeal Panel members

The Panel supported the proposed development of a Councillor Board Member on the Appeals Panel.

**Recommendation:**

- Bassetlaw District Council supports the inclusion of a Councillor Board Member on the Complaints Appeal Panel.

The Panel were provided with the complaint figures for the current year seen as below: This clearly shows an improvement in previous years.

Complaint figures for the year (1<sup>st</sup> April 2010 - 18<sup>th</sup> Feb 2011).

Team	Attitude	Information	Policy	Quality	Timeliness	Total
BRS (Repairs)	1	13	6	14	12	46
Housing Management	10	7	6	3		26
Supported Housing	2			1		3
T&D Improvements		21	9	13	2	45
Call Centre	3					3
Customer Services				1		1
<b>Total</b>	<b>16</b>	<b>41</b>	<b>21</b>	<b>32</b>	<b>14</b>	<b>124</b>

The number of reports associated with repairs equated to 0.6% of all the repairs carried out. Over 1,600 repairs are carried out each month. Most of the complaints in the Technical and Design category are linked to Decent Homes and the complaints are about not getting an improvement rather than the work carried out.

The impact of the changes made to the complaints process has meant that 96% of complaints are dealt within 10 days, with the average being resolved in 5 days. Customer satisfaction has increased. A1 Housing is a member of the Housemark performance management system which is part of the National Housing Federation and Chartered Institute of Housing. As a bench mark out of 250 Arms Length Management organisations (ALMO) across the country, A1 Housing is in the top 5 for resolving complaints at Stage One. In its peer group (Similar size and type ALMO) A1 Housing is in the top 3. The number of

complaints about repairs that were up held was 22. A number of these were linked to the gas servicing contractor GMT, this has been addressed and they now have to provide a report. Refer to Appendix 6.6:

#### Complaints Housemark Data 2010/11

- HMPI 50 - Average time taken to respond to initial complaints Ranked 5<sup>th</sup> out of 35 authorities
- COMP1 - Percentage of Stage 1 complaints upheld- Ranked 5<sup>th</sup> out of 29 authorities.

This national data shows that A1 Housing performs well in comparison to other authorities.

The Audit Commission Best Value Review as previously stated made a recommendation concerning communication of Decent Homes work.

R2. Ensuring that accurate information on future decent homes work is clearly communicated to residents at the earliest possible stage. A1 Housing has an Action Plan in progress with a target date of April 2011.

Since the review took place A1 Housing has been awarded a reduced level of funding available for Decent Homes that may mean that the future works do not meet the expectations of tenants. This will have to be communicated to tenants and it may impact on the number of complaints in future. As a result it may also lead to an increase in the number of repairs. The Panel wanted this situation monitoring so that A1 Housing was aware of potential problems as a result of changes to the programme.

#### **Recommendation:**

- That A1 Housing monitors any impact of the revised Decent Homes Standard funding on future performance levels of complaints and repairs to July 2013.

The A1 Housing Service Plan stated that a funding objective for 2011/12 is to extend the contract for Complaints Officer for 12 months. Funding exists within the A1 Housing revenue budget. There will be consultation with tenants on the benefits of a permanent long-term post. It was agreed that a recommendation of the review should be to monitor the decision on the Complaints Officer as the Panel was of the opinion that this was a useful service for tenants. The Panel commented that



since the Complaints Officer has been in post performance has improved and customer satisfaction with the process increased.

**Recommendation:**

- That Bassetlaw District Council, Housing Strategy and Renewal Manager, monitor the impact of A1 Housing's decision regarding the funding of the A1 Housing Complaints Officer post.

**Audit Commission Inspection Report Comment on complaints linked to repairs**

The Audit Commission comments supported the improvements to the complaints process that the Panel had identified. This was an area of weakness in 2007, with some slow and inconsistent responses to complaints.

In 2010 the Commission found that the complaints service is well publicised and easy to access. The Commission also agreed that the management of complaints has been strengthened by the appointment of a designated Complaints Officer from January 2010. Other improvements include: early contact with the resident, a clearer two-stage procedure; and regular liaison between the Complaints Officer and service managers. This has contributed to a significant fall in complaints in 2010/11 from the high level of the previous year. There was a 63 per cent increase in complaints in 2009/10 (to 248), but this fell to 86 in the first half of 2010/11.

The Commission also identified that complaints are being dealt with promptly. The target to send an acknowledgement within three working days was met in all cases in the first half of 2010/11. All but one complaint was dealt with within the ten-day target in the first half of 2010/11 (with an average of four days). The Audit Commission 'phone survey and review of complaints files confirmed that complaints are generally well handled; residents are usually kept informed of progress; and letters to complainants are clear. People who had also made earlier complaints said that the handling of complaints has improved.

However, there are still some areas of weakness concerning the progress of complaints and promises to get in touch had not been kept. Also, A1 Housing's own surveys show that there was only 37 per cent satisfaction with the outcome of

complaints in the first half of 2010/11, compared with a 65 per cent target and 44 per cent satisfaction in 2008/09. This shows a need to keep customers informed and to better understand the reasons for low satisfaction.

However there was praise for complaints and the Customer Insight Programme which was seen as a strength by the Audit Commission. Overall, the Audit Commission found that the strengths still outweigh weaknesses.

The Panel noted the comments of the Audit Commission and the recorded improvements which supported their recommendation on the role of the Complaints Officer.

## 4.5 Review the performance of repairs

### Current Performance

Listed below are key indicators that show the current performance of A1 Housing 2010/2011:

- HMPI 70 - Percentage of all reactive repairs completed within target time – Ranks 9 out of 41 authorities
- GNPI 18 - Percentage of emergency repairs completed within target time - Ranks 11 out of 53 authorities
- GNPI 19 - Percentage of urgent repairs completed within target time - Ranks 2 out of 58 authorities
- BV73 - Average time taken to complete non-urgent repairs - Ranks 5 out of 46 authorities
- GNPI 20 - Percentage of routine repairs completed within target time - Ranks 9 out of 50 authorities
- BV185 (amended) - Appointments kept as a percentage of appointments made - Ranks 3 out of 54 authorities
- HMPI 90 - Average end-to-end time for all reactive repairs - Ranks 17 out of 32 authorities
- HMPI 100 - Percentage of repairs completed right first time - Ranks 2 out of 48 authorities

This performance information shows, that overall, A1 Housing is performing well.

Key Performance Indicators show overtime from 2005 to 2011 that the Direction of Travel has improved on the following:

- % of response repairs where an appointment is made and kept
- Average time taken (days) to complete non-urgent repairs
- % emergency repairs completed on time

- % repairs completed within time limit
- Routine Repairs Target Days
- Urgent Repairs Target Days
- Average SAP rating dwellings
- % Customers satisfied with complaints handling (first collected 2007/08)
- % satisfaction with repairs and maintenance delivered

For more detailed information refer to Appendix 6.6

Also A1 Housing's performance in managing complaints will be monitored in a number of ways and this will impact on repairs complaints. A1 Housing monitors complaints through:

- Complaints Clinic
- Customer Care & Performance Champions Meetings
- Tenant Scrutiny
- Mystery Shopping
- A1 Housing Board Meetings
- Reports to BATRA (Bassetlaw Association of Tenants' & Residents' Associations)

### **Audit Commission Comments on the performance of repairs**

The Audit Commission identified performance management as a barrier to improvement. Overall, the monitoring of performance indicators is mixed, with no improvement in overall tenant satisfaction. Performance management of the repairs service however is generally good. A software package is used to optimise the scheduling of jobs and the routes of vehicles. There are appropriate levels of pre and post inspections. Post-inspections are appropriately risk-based and there are monthly meetings with the in-house and other contractors at which quality and performance issues are scrutinised. A 'points' system is used to track how effectively each operative is functioning and any concerns are addressed in one-to-one supervision meetings.

However, some elements of performance management were identified as weak. For example, no targets have been set against two new performance indicators for 'end-to-end' repair times, despite it being more than six months into the year. Also, there has been consistently weaker performance on planned repairs than for other repairs.

There are also potential weaknesses in the approach to delivering repairs 'right first time', which are not being effectively identified or addressed by performance management systems. Customers contacted by the Audit Commission did not agree with the A1 Housing figure of 96 per cent on this indicator. Evidence gathered by the Panel suggested that this was due to the interpretation of what 'right first time' means. In 2009/10, only 85 per cent of residents surveyed by A1 Housing considered that their repair was done in one visit and only 75 per cent said they had been told when a follow-up visit would take place. In the first six months of 2010/11 these figures stood at 88 per cent and 71 per cent.

The Audit Commission stated that A1 Housing has taken 'right first time' as a definition of repairs which were done in one visit and did not generate a repeat call within five days. This means it is ignoring a range of other factors which might contribute to customers' definition of 'right first time', such as whether the appointment was kept, whether they were satisfied with the work and whether it needed reporting again in the following weeks.

These weaknesses mean A1 Housing is not maximising opportunities to use performance and satisfaction data to drive service improvement.

The Audit Commission recommended that an Area Requiring Improvement was to improve performance monitoring in general but this will include decent homes, repairs and complaints. In response A1 Housing propose to have a new performance framework in place by April 2011.

**Recommendation:**

- That the Managing Director of A1 Housing report back to Overview and Scrutiny Committee in October 2011 to inform Members of the progress in monitoring the A1 Improvement Plan produced in response to the Audit Commission review.

## 4.6 Energy Efficiency

Energy Efficiency is integral to Decent Homes as stated in 2.1. A1 Housing is recognised for its Best Practice in alternative forms of sustainable energy. The Panel wanted A1 Housing to maintain and strengthen its position with the following recommendation:

### **Recommendation:**

- That the Council and A1 Housing continue to introduce alternative forms of sustainable energy into its housing stock, and maintain its position as a leader in the use of alternative energy.

## 4.7 A1 Housing's Adaptations Service

If everyday tasks are difficult, adaptations can be made to the home may make life easier. A1 Housing's Adaptation Service can arrange for adaptations such as ramps for wheelchair users, stair lifts, handrails and level access showers for people who need them to live at home more safely. In providing this service A1 Housing works closely with Nottinghamshire County Council's Occupational Therapy Team to make sure that tenants have the right type of help. The Government timescales for completing adaptations are 16 weeks for High Priority Adaptations and 52 weeks for Routine Priority Adaptations. However, A1 Housing have set more challenging targets, these are:

- Fast Track up costing up to £1,000 28 days - these do not require an Occupational Therapist assessment.
- Normal adaptations (Require an Occupational Therapist to assess need). Average 100 days

The Panel questioned the time taken for adaptations to be completed. The performance data indicated an average time of 99 days. This was also identified by the Audit Commission. The figure was an average and it included major works that needed planning permission and construction, which increases the time taken. A1 Housing has stopped charging for jobs under £1000. A1 Housing has the budget for adaptations and is working with NCC Occupational Therapists to be more effective. In 2010 a new Contractor was appointed to undertake the work the three minor schemes were merged to create one for works under £1,000. The target of completing work in an average of 28 days for minor works and 100 days for major schemes. The system of means testing and charging for adaptation requests under £1,000 with the Council will be reviewed during 2011/12.

A1 Housing will continue to undertake adaptation work as part of the Decent Homes programme wherever possible to reduce disruption on the customer and to achieve greater value for money. They will also work with Social Services to improve access to and time taken to undertake tenant assessments by their Occupational Therapists.

Although the adaptations service was not in the original scope of the review, the Panel were interested in monitoring the progress of the Audit Commission recommendation R2- refer to 2.1 of this report.

**Recommendation:**

- That the Managing Director of A1 Housing report back to Overview and Scrutiny Committee in October 2011 to inform Members of the progress in monitoring the A1Improvement Plan produced in response to the Audit Commission review.

## 4.8 Communication

All performance information is reported to the A1 Housing Board and has open access to the public as very few items are confidential. A1 Housing Board has 5 BDC councillor representatives. All the information is put on the A1 Housing website and tenants also receive information. It is reported to the monthly A1 Housing /Bassetlaw District Council Strategic Meeting..

The Panel agreed that this information would be useful to all BDC Councillors and the best way to communicate is through the internal Members Information Bulletin. The A1 Director of Strategy and Change has already implemented this recommendation

The Panel also agreed that the Bassetlaw District Council induction for new councillors should include an introduction about A1 Housing with reference to performance monitoring. This could be followed up with a one to one meeting with A1 Housing representatives if required to discuss specific issues.

There was a discussion about the possibility of A1 Housing holding a Members' Conference in 2012 using the annual Tenants Conference as a model, for information sharing to all councillors. Members will be able to raise issues that are of

concern directly with the A1 Housing Officers who are responsible for service delivery. If it is successful, it can be introduced as an annual event.

**Recommendation:**

That A1 raises Members awareness on the work and performance of A1 Housing by:

- The quarterly performance monitoring reports provided to the A1 Housing Board be included in the monthly Bassetlaw District Council Members Information Bulletin
- providing links to the A1 Housing Board papers on the A1 Housing and BDC websites
- including A1 Housing as part of the Bassetlaw District Councillor induction programme
- A1 Housing to hold a members conference in 2012 using the tenants conference as a model, for information sharing. If it is successful, it can be introduced as an annual event.

## 5. Conclusion

The Panel looked at an extensive range of evidence about progress OF the Decent Homes programme, the Repairs service and the Complaints process. During the course of the review the Audit Commission reported on the findings of its inspection and A1 Housing retained its existing two star rating. The evidence to the Panel supported the findings of the Inspection and as appropriate their evidence and recommendations have been incorporated.

Although the review did not include Decent Homes in the scope, the Panel gathered evidence on the progress in meeting the standard as this has an effect on the number of repairs needed to maintain the housing stock. The evidence suggested that there has been good progress to meet the standard and the number of repairs has fallen overtime.

The Panel concluded that A1 Housing repairs policy is comparable to that offered by other authorities. The Audit Commission also concluded that repairs were carried out efficiently with significantly more strengths than weaknesses.

The Panel identified that A1 Housing has a comprehensive Customer Care Strategy that is responsive to tenants needs. The Panel visited the A1 Call Centre as Members had some concerns about the system and the quality of advice given to some tenants. During the visit the Panel was advised that A1 Housing was beginning to implement improvements to the Call Centre as identified by the Audit Commission. The Panel agreed that this would improve the service to tenants and therefore did not make any specific recommendations.

The Panel looked at the revised Complaints Policy that was introduced in 2010. They found that It is a responsive system with tenant involvement and tries to learn from the complaint to improve the organisation. The system appears to work well and the evidence suggests that the service is improving. A dedicated Complaints Officer was appointed in 2010 and the Panel supported the continued funding of this post.

The Panel wanted the review to identify how well A1 Housing performs in relation to repairs management. The evidence presented to the Panel shows that overall A1 Housing has a good repairs service when compared to other similar organisations. It has a comprehensive monitoring system and reporting system both to the A1 Housing Board and Bassetlaw District Council.

As part of the Comprehensive Spending Review 2010, A1 Housing has also had a reduction in funding to complete the Decent Homes programme and responded quickly to produce an Action Plan to manage the shortfall. The proposed changes to the Decent Homes Programme may have an adverse effect on the number of complaints and the Panel advised that the impact on the repairs and complaints service should be monitored.

The Audit Commission identified A1 Housing as a best practice organisation for introducing alternative sources of energy into the housing stock. This will improve the Decent Homes Standard and reduce fuel poverty. The Panel wanted this best practice to continue.

Although the scope of the review did not include the adaptations service, the Panel supported the recommendations of the Audit Commission to improve the service.

Although the Review scope did not specifically include communication and information sharing the Panel identified that communication to Bassetlaw District Councillors about the policies and the performance of A1 Housing should be strengthened. A1 Housing operates transparently and produces comprehensive performance information which is available



on its website. The Director of Strategy and Change responded before the completion of the review to introduce the recommendation to include the web link in the Bassetlaw District Council monthly Members Information Bulletin.

There is a variation across the district in the number of A1 Housing properties by ward but the recommendation to introduce A1 Housing into the induction process will provide the opportunity for all new Councillors to have a more detailed understanding of the role of the organisation. The Panel also welcomed the suggestion by A1 Housing to pilot an annual Councillors' Conference to raise awareness of key issues and have an exchange of information.

As the review progressed some of the key issues identified by the Panel were addressed such as the service delivery in the Call Centre, balance of the Complaints Panel and information on the Decent Homes Standard.

## 6. Appendices

### 6.1 A1 Housing Action Plan

The Audit Commission made several recommendations, which are relevant to the review and A1 have produced an Action Plan in response:

Ref No	Details	Improvement Action	Projected End Date
10260	Gas repairs and servicing are currently contracted to an external company and the current contract with GM&T is due to end in 2011	Re-tender Gas contract	30/06/2011
10266	A proportion of A1 Housing's customers are Vulnerable.	To develop a Tenant Complex Needs policy	31/12/2011
10278	A1 Housing currently provides a contact centre primarily for repairs and does not offer a single unified telephone contact point for all services	CRM implemented across all A1 Housing telephony	30/09/2011
10303	Best Value Recommendations February 2011 R2. Improve the approach to stock investment and the suitability of the stock: Some information for customers is not clear or comprehensive.	Working more effectively with occupational therapists to deliver aids and adaptations promptly, and improving information for residents	31/05/2011
10309	Best Value Recommendations February 2011 R1. Improve the focus on customers. Call answering by the contact centre at peak times is slow and the depth and accuracy of some telephone advice is patchy.	Improving the speed of telephone answering by the contact centre and the quality of advice provided by telephone	30/06/2011

Ref No	Details	Improvement Action	Projected End Date
10312	Recommendations February 2011 R2. Improve the approach to stock investment and the suitability of the stock.	Ensuring that Accurate information on future decent homes work is clearly communicated to residents at the earliest possible stage	30/04/2011
10320	Best Value Recommendations February 2011 Additional Areas. Some performance reporting is not as clear or comprehensive as it could be	Improve the Performance Monitoring Framework	30/04/2011

## 6.2 Log of A1 Housing repairs

Name:

Ward:

Please Return to the Policy Unit by 7<sup>th</sup> March

Date	Repair Issue	Who reported it?	Is this a new or ongoing complaint	Action Taken by yourself	Time taken on the issue	Who was it referred to?	Was the matter resolved
<i>Example</i>	<i>Guttering/ if linked to Decent Homes</i>	<i>Tenant/ family member/BATRA</i>	<i>New/ ongoing complaint time period</i>	<i>A phone Call/ letter/visit</i>	<i>30 minutes/ 3 hours over a week</i>	<i>Repairs Manager A1</i>	<i>Yes/No</i>

### 6.3 Performance Indicators

Performance Indicator Description	A1's Performance			Comparison		Future Targets	
	2008/09 Actual Out-turn	2009/10 Actual Outturn	2010/11 Actual Outturn	2009/10 ALMO top quartile	2010/11 Target	2011/11	2012/13
Percentage of response repairs where an appointment was made and kept	99.15	99.54		98.70	99.50	99.50	99.50
Average time taken to complete non-urgent repairs	4.80	7.40		7.12	6.50	6.25	6.00
Percentage of emergency repairs completed on time	100	100		99.57	99.85	99.85	99.85
Percentage of routine repairs completed on time	99.04	98.68		98.54	99.00	99.85	99.85
Percentage of urgent repairs completed on time	99.78	99.66		99.09	99.85	99.85	99.85
% expenditure on planned to responsive maintenance	68.00	69.00		73.00	70.00	70.00	70.00
Emergency Repairs Target	1.00	1.00		1.00	1.00	1.00	1.00
Routine Repairs Target	15.00	15.00		10.00	10.00	10.00	10.00
Urgent Repairs Target	3.00	3.00		3.00	3.00	3.00	3.00

Performance Indicator Description	A1's Performance			Comparison		Future Targets	
	2008/09 Actual Out-turn	2009/10 Actual Outturn	2010/11 Actual Outturn	2009/10 ALMO top quartile	2010/11 Target	2011/11	2012/13
Proportion of homes which are non-decent	46.92	29.60		3.00	27.60	18.70	9.35
Average SAP rating	70.46	72.75		70.81	74.50	76.00	77.50
Percentage of complaints resolved at Stage 1	83.55	93.00		N/A	95.00	96.00	96.00
Percentage of customers satisfied with handling of complaints	44.00	40.00		N/A	65.00	70.00	80.00
Percentage of Stage 1 complaints upheld	36.80	43.15		67.10	50.00	55.00	65.00
Customer Insight Programme							
Responsive Repairs	92.00	94.00		N/A	94.00	95.00	95.50
Gas Servicing	96.00	97.00		N/A	97.50	98.00	98.25
Heating installations	98.00	77.00		N/A	98.25	98.50	98.75
Adaptations	97.00	75.50		N/A	97.50	97.75	98.00
Gas Heating Repairs	91.00	91.00		N/A	94.00	94.00	95.00

## 6.4 A1 Contribution to BDC's Corporate Plan




BDC Corporate Objective	Performance Indicator	2011/12 Target	Comments
<b>Improve customer satisfaction</b>			
Provide accessible and responsive services	Accessible services – Percentage of response repairs where an appointment was made and kept	99.50	To improve customer care and ensure that resources are spent efficiently it is important to provide an appointment system for non-urgent repairs
	Complaints – Percentage of customers satisfied with the handling of complaints	70.00	Learning from complaints is essential to the delivery of services that our tenants want
<b>Regenerate the Area and Improve the environment that people live in</b>			
Ensure a planned and Sustainable built environment	Energy Efficiency - Average SAP rating dwellings	76.00	This figure measures the energy efficiency rating of council properties the higher the figure the better
	Sustainability - Percentage of Homes that are non- decent reduced	18.70	The reduction in decent homes ensures that the estates are sustainable for at least a further 30 years
<b>Delivering Decent Homes</b>			
Achieve decent homes standard	Delivering Decent Homes programme - % change in proportion of homes that are non-decent.	20.27	A reduction in the number of properties failing decent homes meets the governments targets
<b>Improve Customer Satisfaction</b>			
Provide accessible and responsive services	Accessible Services - Percentage of response repairs where an appointment was made and kept	99.50	To improve customer care and ensure that resources are spent efficiently it is important to provide an appointments system for repairs
	Complaints - Percentage of customers satisfied with handling of complaints	70.00	Learning from complaints is essential to the delivery of services that tenants want.

## 6.5 Balanced Score Card




10 Strategic Themes for 2011/12		
Specific Improvement Plan Objectives	Performance Measures	Implementation Date
<b>Aim 1 – To provide high quality, warm and well maintained homes</b>		
<b>Delivering Decent Homes</b>		
Deliver decent homes	CO2 emission reductions from heating systems	March 2012
	Proportion of homes which are non-decent	March 2012
<b>Aim 2 – To be resident led organisation providing fair, accessible and equal services</b>		
<b>Increasing Tenant Involvement</b>		
To increase the percentage of tenants involved with A1 Housing	Satisfaction with handling of complaints	March 2012
	Satisfaction with outcome of complaints	March 2012
<b>Supporting Vulnerable Customers</b>		
To develop a tenant complex needs policy	Complex needs policy for vulnerable tenants in place	December 2011
<b>Aim 3 – To provide an excellent and seamless service</b>		
<b>Accessible and Quality Affordable Housing</b>		
CRM	CRM implemented across all A1 telephony	September 2011
	Average response time to telephones (Call Centre - seconds)	March 2012

	Satisfaction with the service offered by Call Centre	March 2012
<b>Aim 5 – To be ambitious and well</b>		
<b>Delivering Sustainable and Life time Homes</b>		
Re- tender Adaptation Contract	Contract re-tendered	May 2011
	Increased satisfaction with the service	March 2012
	Average time taken to complete adaptation works (calendar days)	March 2012
	Average calendar days to complete adaptations under £1,000	March 2012




## 6.6 Housemark Data 2010/11

HMPI 50 - Average time taken to respond to initial complaints												
	Apr-Jun			Apr-Sept			Apr-Dec					
	Score	Rank		Score	Rank		Score	Rank		Target		
Upper quartile	7.07			6.85			6.77			9.75		
Club median	9.90			9.20			9.00			10.00		
Lower quartile	13.18			11.20			10.81			10.00		
Number in sample	35			33			32			20		
Your result	5.00	3		4.00	3		5.00	5		10.00		









COMP1 - Percentage of Stage 1 complaints upheld											
	Apr-Jun			Apr-Sept			Apr-Dec			Target	
	Score	Rank		Score	Rank		Score	Rank			
Upper quartile	34.09			29.07			32.43			47.50	
Club median	45.50			46.01			47.92			56.70	
Lower quartile	60.00			59.38			62.64			70.05	
Number in sample	29			29			28			4	
Your result	36.59	9		29.07	8		30.77	5		90.00	




## 6.7 Key indicators showing current performance of A1 Housing




HMPI 70 - Percentage of all reactive repairs completed within target time											
	Apr-Jun			Apr-Sept			Apr-Dec			Target	
	Score	Rank		Score	Rank		Score	Rank			
Upper quartile	98.80			98.94			98.88			98.50	
Club median	97.97			98.01			97.80			98.00	
Lower quartile	95.68			95.12			96.17			96.93	
Number in sample	41			40			38			28	
Your result	99.01	9		99.10	8		98.96	9		98.50	
GNPI 18 - Percentage of emergency repairs completed within target time											
	Apr-Jun			Apr-Sept			Apr-Dec				




	Score	Rank		Score	Rank		Score	Rank		Target		
Upper quartile	99.69			99.62			99.58			99.23		
Club median	98.78			98.96			99.10			99.00		
Lower quartile	96.09			96.99			97.00			98.00		
Number in sample	53			55			53			38		
Your result	99.85	11		99.87	9		99.58	14		99.85		




BV19 – Percentage of emergency repairs competed within target time												
	Apr-Jun			Apr-Sept			Apr-Dec					
	Score	Rank		Score	Rank		Score	Rank		Target		
Upper quartile	99.54			99.40			99.21			99.00		
Club median	98.57			98.41			98.42			98.00		
Lower quartile	94.83			95.67			95.70			97.00		
Number in sample	58			57			55			41		
Your result	99.85	4		99.91	2		99.71	2		99.85		

BV73 - Average time taken to complete non-urgent repairs												
	Apr-Jun			Apr-Sept			Apr-Dec					
	Score	Rank		Score	Rank		Score	Rank		Target		
Upper quartile	7.53			7.63			7.67			7.90		
Club median	9.28			9.21			9.15			9.00		
Lower quartile	10.62			12.32			11.42			10.00		
Number in sample	46			44			40			29		
Your result	6.50	9		5.44	4		5.49	5		6.50		

GNPI 20 - Percentage of routine repairs completed within target time												
	Apr-Jun			Apr-Sept			Apr-Dec					
	Score	Rank		Score	Rank		Score	Rank		Target		
Upper quartile	98.73			98.79			98.83			98.66		
Club median	97.93			97.54			97.43			98.00		
Lower quartile	93.61			94.84			95.13			96.50		
Number in sample	50			51			50			35		
Your result	99.00	11		99.55	5		99.22	9		99.00		

BV185 (amended) - Appointments kept as a percentage of appointments made												
	Apr-Jun			Apr-Sept			Apr-Dec					
	Score	Rank		Score	Rank		Score	Rank		Target		
Upper quartile	98.98			99.00			98.89			99.00		
Club median	97.70			97.79			97.37			98.00		
Lower quartile	94.39			94.77			95.12			96.00		
Number in sample	54			56			50			42		
Your result	99.55	5		99.56	3		99.68	3		99.50		

HMPI 90 - Average end-to-end time for all reactive repairs												
	Apr-Jun			Apr-Sept			Apr-Dec					
	Score	Rank		Score	Rank		Score	Rank		Target		
Upper quartile	5.18			5.60			5.20			6.44		
Club median	6.58			7.04			7.70			7.50		
Lower quartile	8.63			8.94			9.18			10.00		
Number in sample	32			31			29			16		
Your result	8.39	23		8.93	23		8.05	17		7.00		

HMPI 100 - Percentage of repairs completed right first time												
	Apr-Jun			Apr-Sept			Apr-Dec					
	Score	Rank		Score	Rank		Score	Rank		Target		
Upper quartile	96.78			96.40			96.77			95.00		
Club median	89.80			90.00			92.82			90.00		
Lower quartile	84.65			83.70			86.95			85.00		
Number in sample	48			49			46			37		
Your result	99.20	3		99.40	2		99.64	2		99.85		

The performance indicators below show the change overtime.

Performance Indicator	PI in Base Year 2005	PI quarter 3 2011	Direction of Travel
% of response repairs where an appointment is made and kept	81.04	99.68	↑
Average Time taken (days) to complete non-urgent repairs	22	5	↑
% emergency repairs completed on time	97.50	99.85	↑
% repairs completed within time limit	97.53	99.00	↑
Routine Repairs Target Days	180	15	↑
Urgent Repairs Target Days	7	3	↑

Average SAP rating dwellings	58.12	72.94	↑
% Customers satisfied with complaints handling (first collected 2007/08)	41.00	71.00	↑
% satisfaction with repairs and maintenance delivered.	68.20	93.00	↑

## 7. Bibliography

1. A1 Annual Complaints Report <http://www.a1housing.co.uk>
2. A1 Complaints, Compliments, Comments and Procedures <http://www.a1housing.co.uk>
3. A1 Customer Care Strategy <http://www.a1housing.co.uk>
4. A1 Governance Handbook - Available from Policy Unit Bassetlaw District Council
5. A1 Handy Hints for Easy Home Maintenance <http://www.a1housing.co.uk>
6. A1 Repairs Handbook <http://www.a1housing.co.uk>
7. A1 Repairs Policy <http://www.a1housing.co.uk>
8. A1 Repairs Policy for Vulnerable Customers <http://www.a1housing.co.uk>
9. A1 Responsive Repairs Procedure <http://www.a1housing.co.uk>
10. A1 Route Planner Handbook - Available from Policy Unit Bassetlaw District Council
11. Audit Commission - Effective Monitoring of the Decent Homes Programme - Newark and Sherwood <http://www.audit-commission.gov.uk/SiteCollectionDocuments/InspectionOutput/InspectionReports/2008/NewarkSherwoodALMOHMS27Nov08REP.pd>
12. Audit Commission- Encouraging Access to the Repairs Process - Sandwell Homes <http://www.audit-commission.gov.uk/housing/goodpractice/Stockinvestmentassetmanagement/Pages/encouragingaccessrepairservice.aspx>

13. Audit Commission Exemplars of ALMO Best Practice  
<http://www.auditcommission.gov.uk/housing/goodpractice/Pages/almobestperformers.aspx>
14. Sandwell Tenants Handbook <http://www.sandwellhomes.org.uk/Documents/documents/TenantsHandbook.pdf>
15. St Ledger Homes Review of the Repairs, Maintenance and Improvement Policy  
<https://www.stlegerhomes.co.uk/pdf/10%20-%20Review%20of%20the%20Repairs%20and%20Maintenance-Improvement%20Policy%20Report.pdf>
16. St Ledger Homes Vulnerable Persons Policy - <http://www.stlegerhomes.co.uk/pdf/11%20-%20Vulnerable%20Persons%20Policy%20Report.pdf>