

Housing

HOW YOUR COUNCIL PERFORMED IN 1995/96

Introduction

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

For 1995/96, councils were required to report information for nine performance indicators for their housing service. This leaflet contains information on five of those indicators:

- the time taken to do repairs to council houses
- rent lost due to empty houses
- the level of tenants' rent arrears
- the time taken to sell council houses
- the time taken to process housing benefit applications.

The information in this leaflet covers the years 1993/94 to 1995/96 and is important for two reasons. Firstly, it shows what performance standards have been achieved in the years leading up to local government reorganisation in April 1996. Secondly, it shows standards against which to measure the work of the new councils following reorganisation.

The Commission has published a comprehensive report on the information for all the services for which there are performance indicators. This provides more detailed analysis of the information over the three years 1993/94 to 1995/96.

Using the information

For each activity we have set out why some of the differences in performance may have arisen. We also highlight particular features of the information - for example, the range in performance achieved by different councils. However, we do not explain why a council has achieved a particular level of performance or what should be regarded as 'good' or 'bad' performance.

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

Before the reorganisation of council services in April 1996, housing services were provided by the 53 district and three islands councils. However, during 1995 Berwickshire District Council sold its housing stock to Berwickshire Housing Association and is therefore not included in this report.

Information on services provided by Inverness, Kincardine & Deeside and Perth & Kinross district councils had not been provided to the Commission at the time of the preparation of this publication.

Some of the information referred to in this pamphlet is not shown in either the tables or the charts. It is, however, available in the Commission's full national report.

INDICATOR 1

The length of time the council allows for carrying out council house repairs and the percentage of repairs completed within the council's target time.

What the indicator reports

This indicator shows the number of response repairs undertaken by each council and the level of success in achieving its target timescales for these repairs.

Response repairs are maintenance jobs which a council has agreed to carry out within a set timescale. Councils classify repairs into various priority categories, each with its own target time for completion. For example, a council may undertake to repair a burst pipe within 24 hours, while it may allow two to six weeks to repair a window-sill.

The indicator also shows the percentage of repairs treated as emergencies. Emergency repairs (i.e. those where danger would arise or damage could be caused) generally cost more than work done under other categories. Therefore, treating a high proportion of repairs as emergencies is likely to increase costs.

Information on each of the separate categories of repairs undertaken by councils and their achievement in meeting their targets for repairs is available in the Commission's full national report.

Points to bear in mind

This indicator does not include repairs or maintenance work which councils:

- chose to undertake as part of a planned programme of improvements
- advised tenants would not be carried out due to financial constraints
- undertook to improve the condition of empty houses.

The target time set for undertaking repairs covers the period of time between a repair request being received and the work being completed satisfactorily. The council has to notify the contractor what work should be done. This means that meeting the target time requires both the council and the contractor to work effectively.

Repairs have to be completed to the council's satisfaction, and so the information reflects on both the efficiency and the quality of the repairs service.

Commentary

All repairs

During 1995/96, 2,187,413 repairs were carried out to council houses by the 51 councils that reported. The average number of repairs carried out varied between councils from 0.2 to 6.9 per dwelling (Figure 1a).

Thirty-four councils completed at least eight out of every ten repairs within target, and 15 of these councils completed at least nine out of ten within target (Figure 1b). At the other extreme, only one council, Argyll & Bute, completed less than 60% within target.

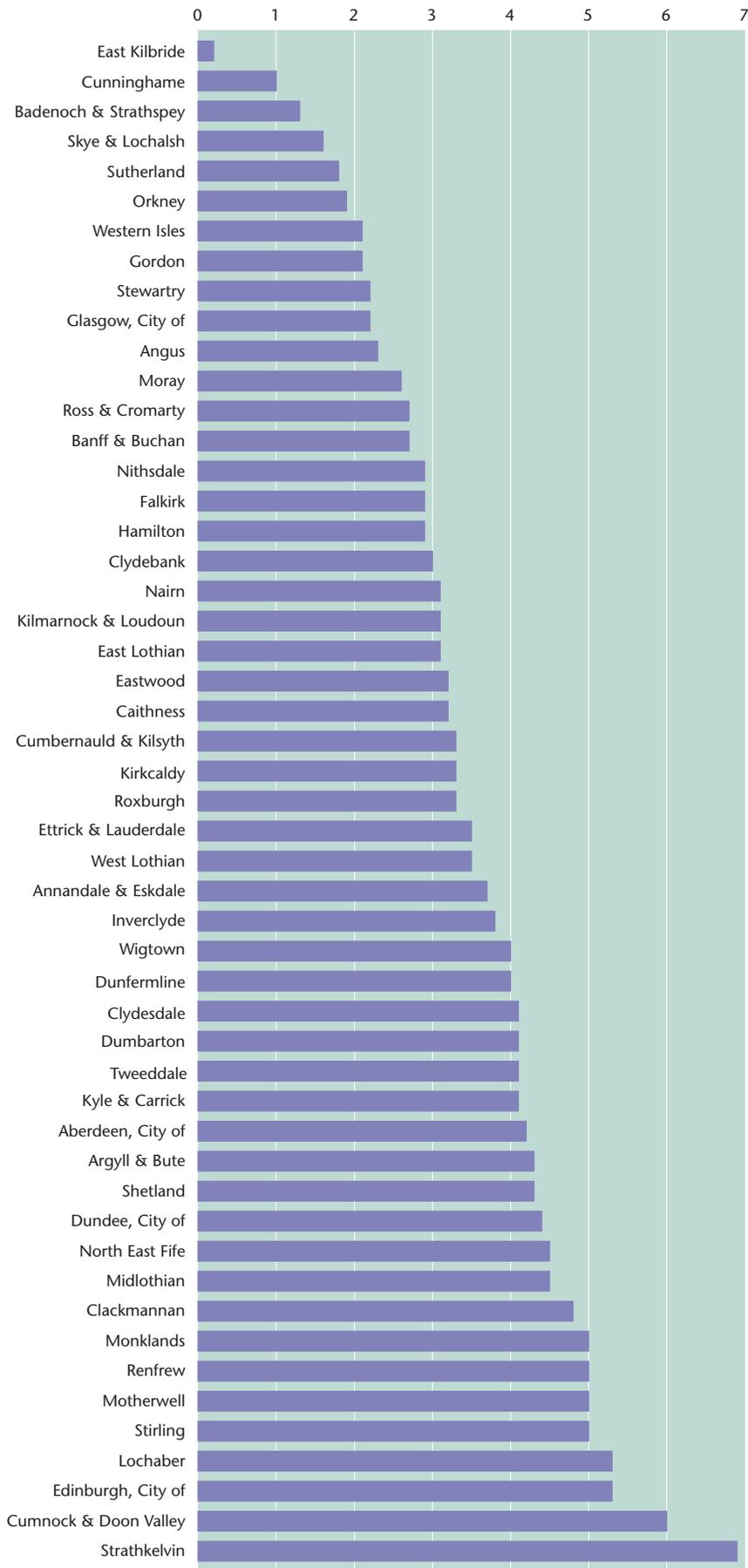
Emergency repairs

No council set a target maximum time for completing emergency repairs of more than 24 hours.

A total of 583,484 jobs (27% of all repairs) were classified as 'emergency' work, an increase of 51,700 on the figure for 1994/95. However, in December 1995 and January 1996 there was a long period of bad weather which resulted in a heavy demand for emergency repairs to houses.

The percentage of repairs classified as emergencies varied between councils from 1.4% to 74.8%. Eleven councils classified 10% or less of all repairs as emergencies. At the other extreme, 18 councils categorised more than 30% of repairs as emergencies.

Figure 1a: The average number of repairs per dwelling



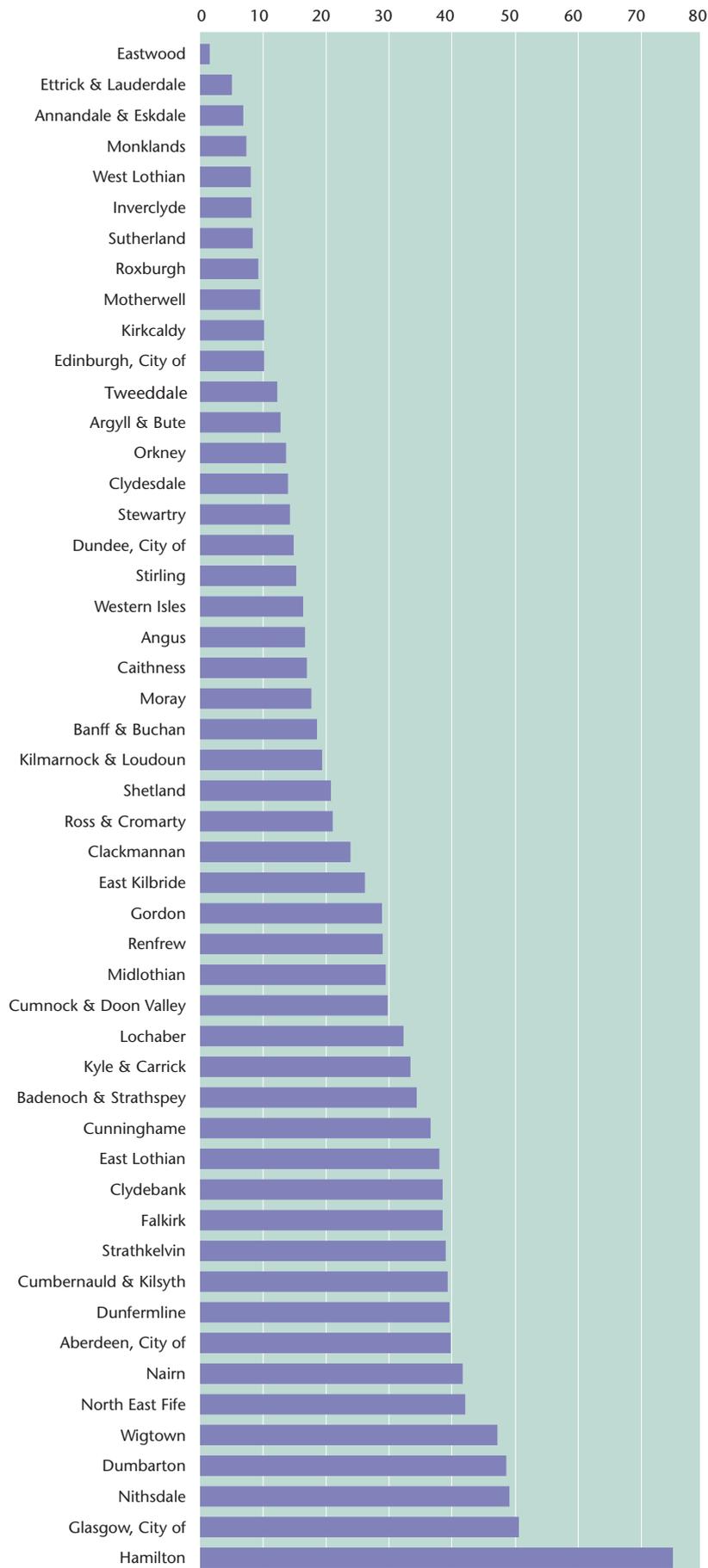
Bearsden & Milngavie did not provide the required information.



Figure 1b: The percentage of all repairs completed within target time



Figure 1c: The percentage of repairs classified as emergencies



Skye & Lochalsh did not provide the required information.

INDICATOR 2

The total annual rent lost due to unoccupied houses, as a percentage of the total amount of rent due in the year.

What the indicator reports

This indicator shows the rent lost because houses remained empty when they were available for letting.

Points to bear in mind

Some properties are less desirable than others, and so will remain empty for longer. Factors which affect a council's ability to re-let vacant property include:

- the condition of the property
- the type of property (e.g. tenement flat, end-of-terrace house)
- the location of the property
- the general level of demand for council housing in an area.

Some councils move tenants into alternative accommodation while improvement works are carried out. This leads to a loss of rental income for the council during that period. Thus, the council's policy on this aspect of modernisation influences its performance measured by the indicator.

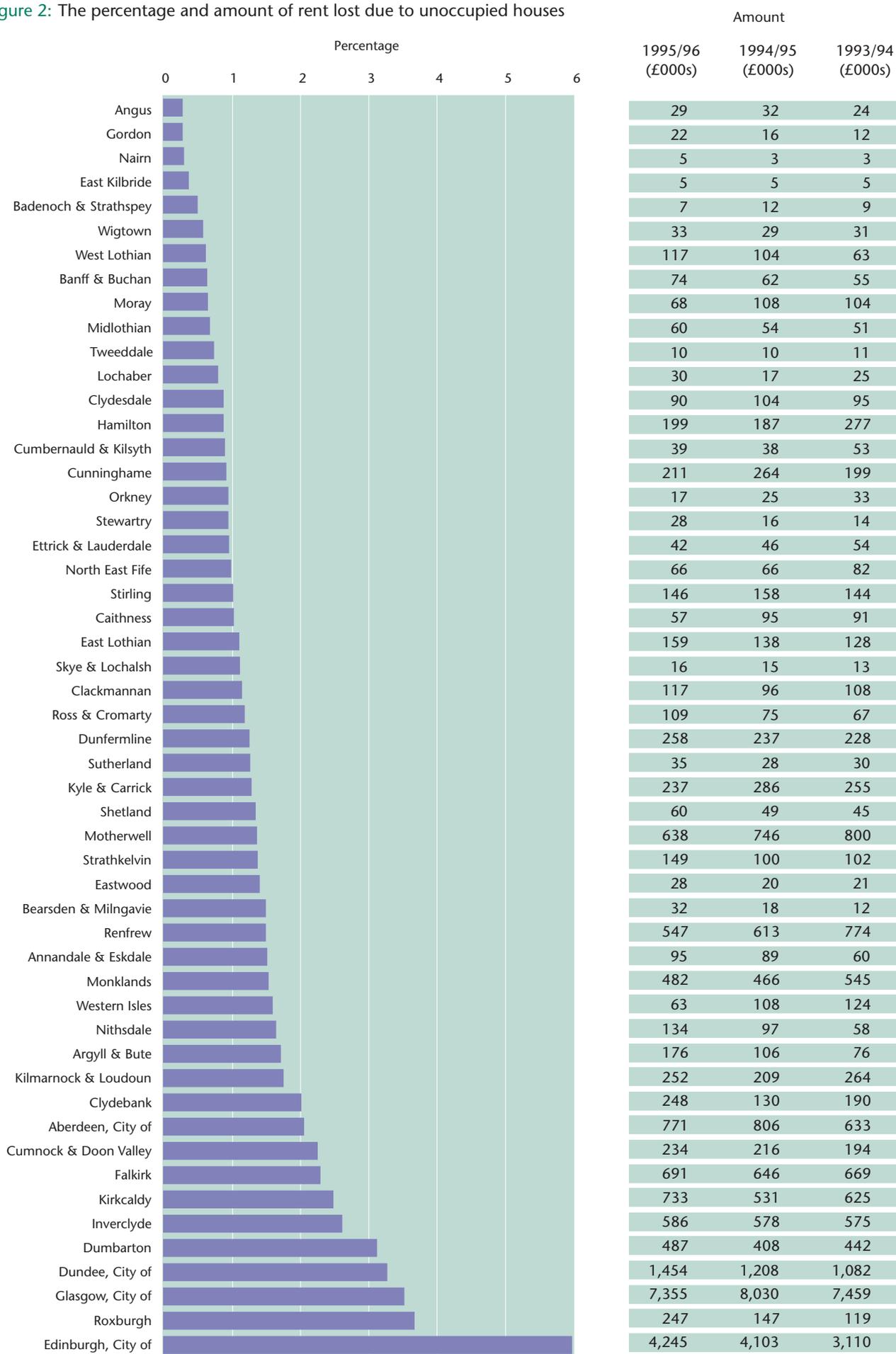
Commentary

The total amount of housing rental income due to councils in 1995/96 was just over £926 million, of which the amount lost due to unoccupied houses was over £22 million (2.4% of the total rental income due).

The percentage of rent lost due to empty houses varied between councils from 0.26% to 6%. Two-thirds of the councils lost less than 1.5% of their rent.

In comparison with 1993/94 the percentage of rent lost increased in 33 councils.

Figure 2: The percentage and amount of rent lost due to unoccupied houses



INDICATOR
3

The level of current tenants' rent arrears as a percentage of the net rent due in the year.

What the indicator reports

This indicator provides information on the council's performance in collecting the rent due to it from its current tenants. It does not reflect the council's success in recovering rent arrears from former tenants.

Points to bear in mind

The net amount of rent due in the year excludes rent which is funded by housing benefit. However, not all those who are entitled to housing benefit actually claim it. Therefore, the uptake of housing benefit may have an impact on the indicator.

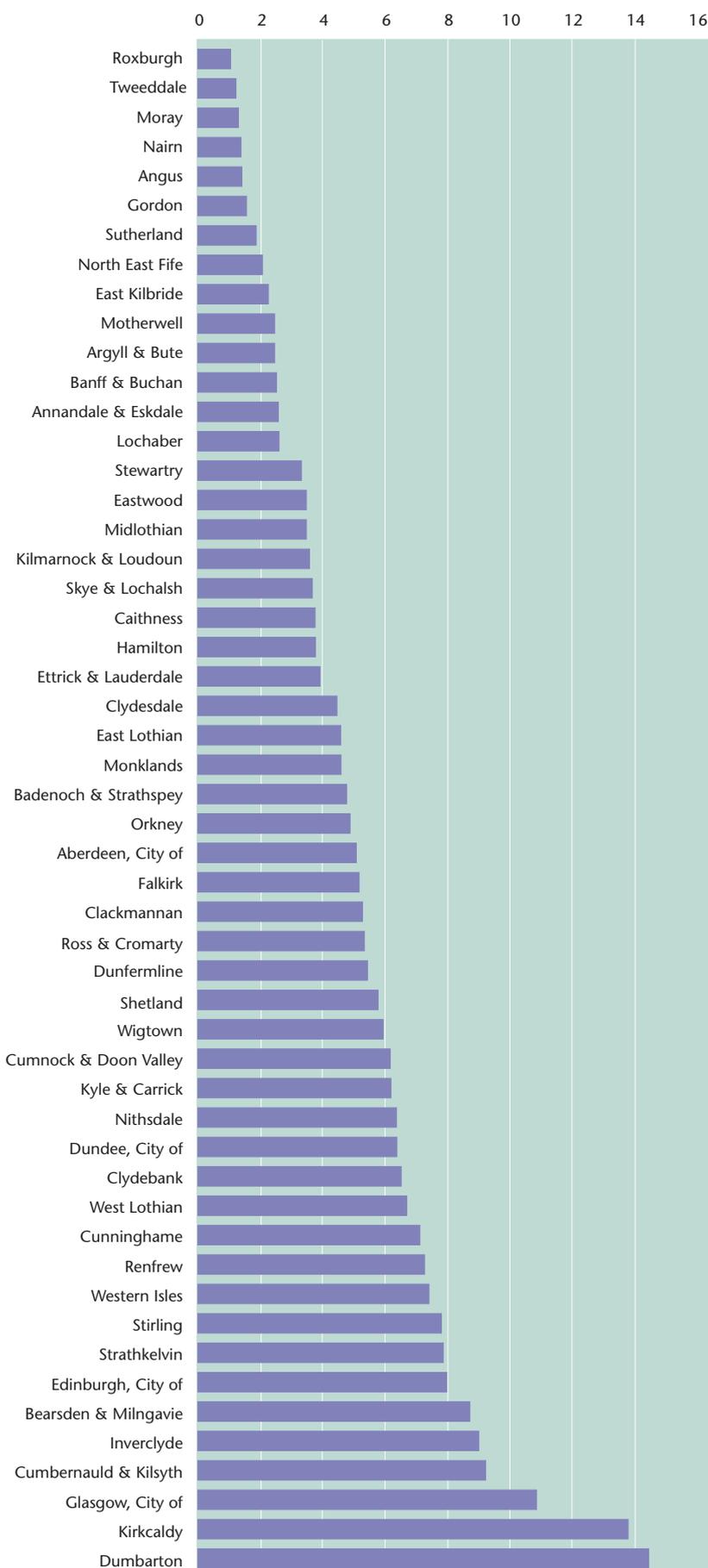
Commentary

The total net amount of rent due to councils in 1995/96 was £403 million. Of this sum, £26.5 million (6.6%) was in arrears.

The level of arrears from current tenants ranged between councils from 1% to 14.5%. Twenty-two councils had arrears of less than 4%. Figure 3 shows that 12 councils failed to achieve the 7% level which was proposed as an achievable target in the Commission's 1991 report 'Tenants' Rent Arrears - A Problem?'.

In comparison with 1993/94, 31 councils reduced the percentage of rent arrears from their current tenants. The percentage increased in 21 councils.

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



INDICATOR
4

The average time taken to complete a house sale.

What the indicator reports

The Scottish Office has set councils a target time of six months for processing the sale of a council house. This indicator shows the extent to which each council achieved the target. All the district and islands councils sold council houses during the year.

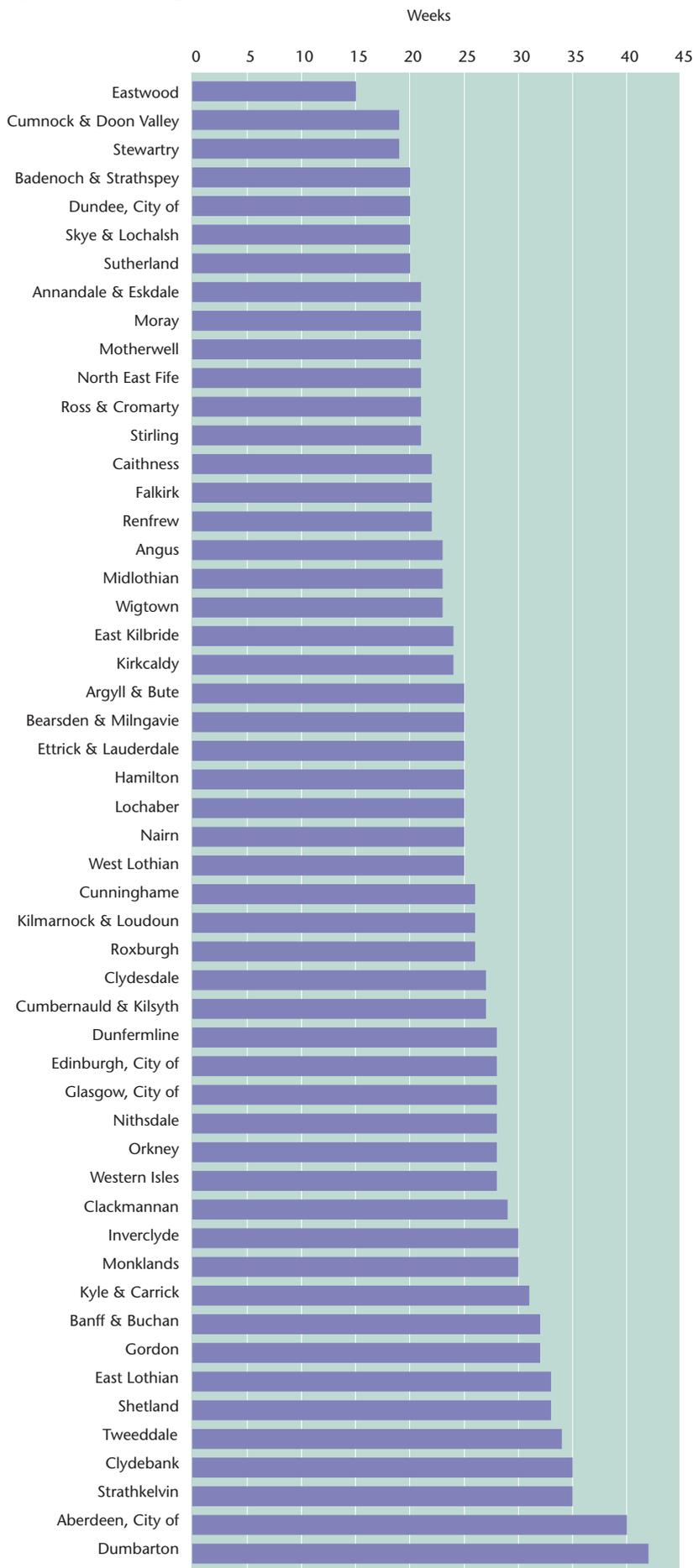
Commentary

Between councils, the average time to complete council house sales varied from 15 weeks to 42 weeks (Figure 4).

Thirty-one councils reported an average time which either met or was within the national target of 26 weeks.

In comparison with 1993/94, 30 councils reduced the average time to complete house sales.

Figure 4: The average time taken for council house sales



INDICATOR
5

The percentage of housing benefit applications processed within 14 days of receipt.

What the indicator reports

The Department of Social Security has set a target time of 14 days for councils to process housing benefit applications. This indicator reports the extent to which each council achieved that target.

Points to bear in mind

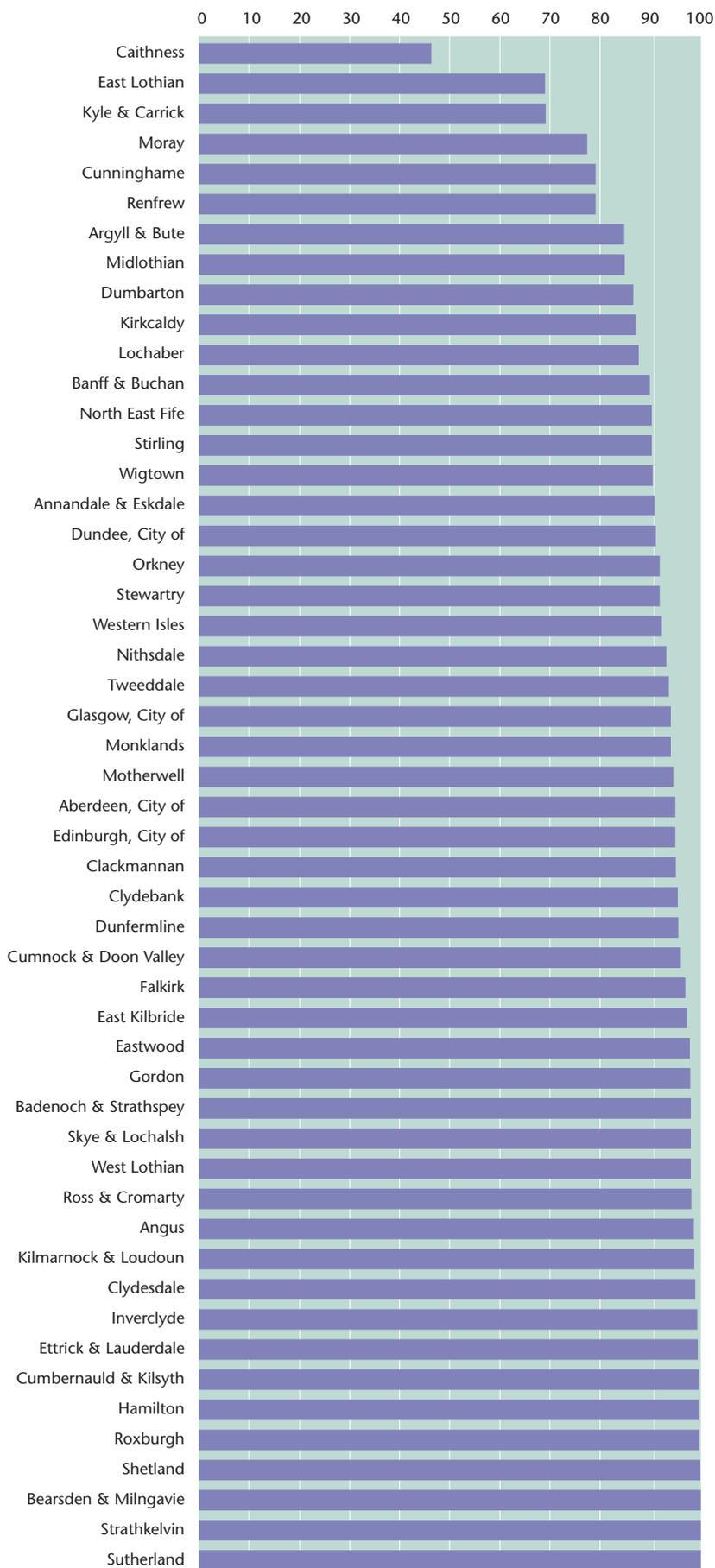
The time taken to process a case covers the period from when the council has all the information needed to determine the claim, to the date of notifying the applicant.

Commentary

Of the 51 councils that reported, 39 processed at least nine out of ten applications within the target time. Three of these, Bearsden & Milngavie, Strathkelvin and Sutherland, processed every application within the target time (Figure 5).

At the lower end of the scale, three councils processed less than 70% of applications within the 14-day target. This is a marked improvement compared with 1990/91, for which year a study by the Commission ('Managing Housing Benefit', 1993) found that 15 councils failed to meet the 70% level.

Figure 5: The percentage of housing benefit applications processed within 14 days



The Accounts Commission for Scotland is a statutory, independent body which through the audit process assists local authorities and the health service in Scotland to achieve the highest standards of financial stewardship and the economic, efficient and effective use of their resources.

The Commission has published similar pamphlets for other services. These are:

Police and fire services
Education
Social work
Protecting you and your environment

Copies of all the pamphlets in this series, and the Commission's national report covering all the performance indicators for a wide range of council services, are available from your council office; your library; or the Accounts Commission for Scotland.



18 George Street
Edinburgh EH2 2QU
Telephone 0131 477 1234
<http://www.scot-ac.gov.uk>