



# Protecting you and your environment

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.

This leaflet contains information on five indicators relating to councils' services in 1995/96 affecting the environment. These are:

- the percentage of food hygiene inspections undertaken on time
- the quality of the water
- the percentage of household waste recycled
- the time taken to deal with planning applications from householders
- enquiries and complaints made about trading standards.

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.

In 1995/96, services such as inspecting shops and restaurants for food hygiene, and other environmental services such as refuse collection, were provided by the 53 district councils and three islands councils.

Local planning, which contributes to the quality of the environment, was primarily a district and islands council responsibility. However, in Borders, Dumfries & Galloway, and

Highland it was undertaken by the regional councils.

Trading standards and water and sewerage services were provided by the nine regional councils and the three islands councils.

Since the reorganisation of local government in April 1996, water and sewerage services have been the responsibility of the three newly established water authorities.

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

**Food safety hygiene inspections: the number of premises in each of four categories requiring inspection during the year, and the percentage of premises in each category which were inspected within the target time.**

### What the indicator reports

The purposes of food hygiene inspections are to:

- identify potential risks to the health of the public arising from the processing, cooking, handling and storage of food
- confirm that food preparation processes meet the requirements of the Food Safety Act 1990.

Business premises dealing in food are categorised according to the frequency with which they should be inspected, depending on their level of food safety risk. This risk is determined on the basis of:

- the type of premises
- the confidence the council has in the management of food processes at the premises.

There are four categories of premises, defined according to the

target time between inspections:

- within 6 months
- between 6 and 12 months
- between 12 and 24 months
- more than 24 months.

The 'within 6 months' risk category is for premises which have the highest risk of food hygiene problems and so require the most frequent inspection visits. The 'more than 24 months' risk category is for premises which have the lowest risk and require fewest visits.

For each category of premises, the indicator provides information on:

- the number of premises that the council intended to inspect during the year
- the percentage of targeted premises inspected within the target time.

Therefore, the indicator reports the council's food hygiene inspection workload and its success in achieving its own inspection targets for the four risk categories.

No comparative information for 1993/94 is available because performance information for environmental health services was introduced for the first time in 1994/95.

## Points to bear in mind

Each risk category is defined according to the maximum time between inspections. Some premises, particularly in the 'within 6 months' category, may be visited more frequently due to the assessed level of risk, but these additional visits are not counted.

Some products have an inherently higher risk with respect to food poisoning than others. These include all high-protein foods such as meat, fish, milk and dairy products.

Factors that will influence a council's decision on the required number of inspections are:

- the likely risk according to the type of food
- the extent to which food is handled, and the risk of cross-contamination where a process involves both raw and cooked food
- the method of processing. Particular emphasis is placed on inspecting any high-risk product where the conditions can allow the growth of food poisoning organisms - for example, canning, vacuum packing and any process where temperature is a controlling factor
- the number of consumers likely to be put at risk if there is a failure in food hygiene and safety procedures
- the cleanliness, layout, lighting, ventilation and structural condition of the premises
- the attitude and technical knowledge of the management on hygiene and safety matters.

## Commentary

In 1995/96 there were 29,864 establishments due for inspection by the 53 councils for which information is available. Of these:

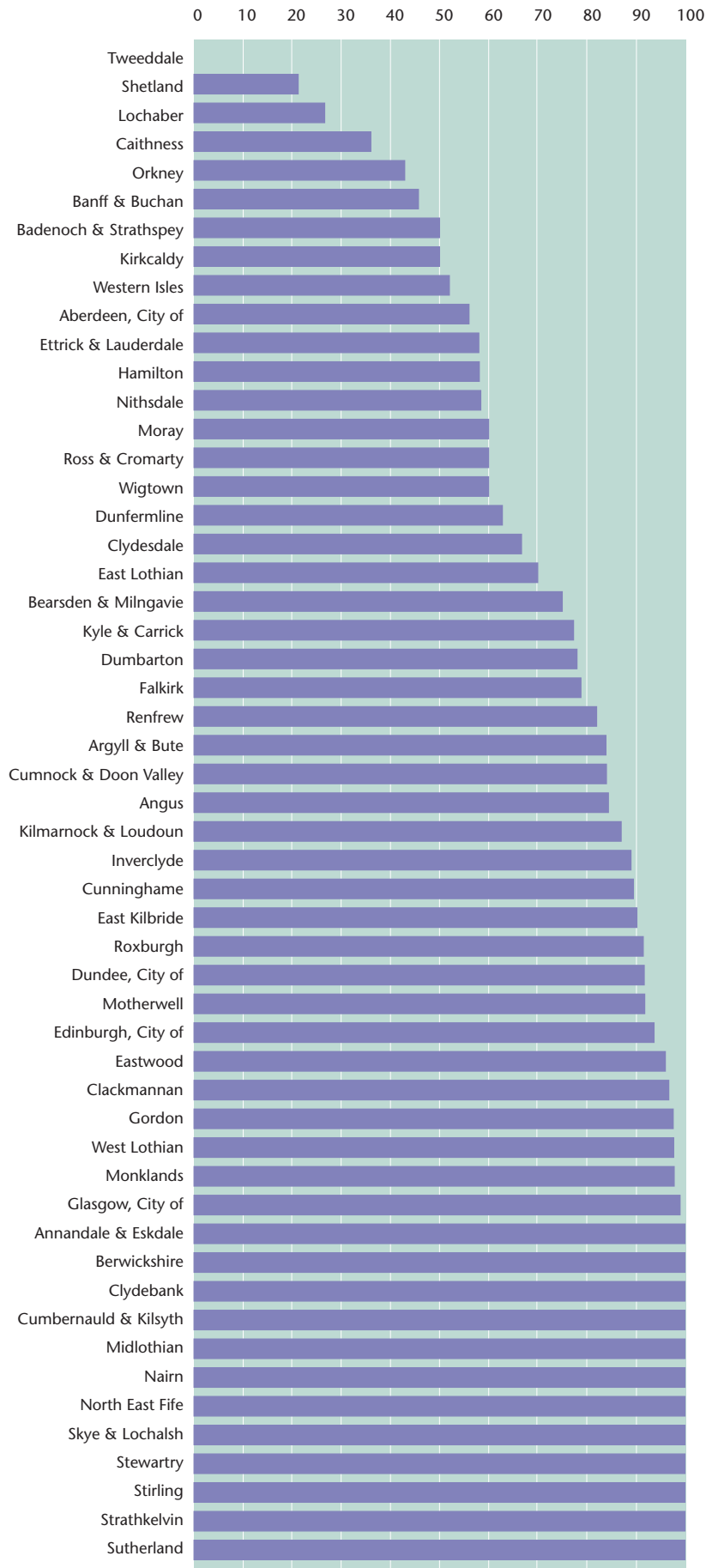
- 8.1% (2,414) were in the 'within 6 months' inspection category
- 39.6% (11,829) were in the 'between 6 and 12 months' category
- 43.8% (13,088) were in the 'between 12 and 24 months' category
- 8.5% (2,533) were in the 'more than 24 months' category.

Across Scotland, councils inspected within the target time between 0% and 100% of the premises for which they planned inspections in the 'within 6 months' category. Half of all councils (26) managed to inspect at least 85% (Figure 1).

For the other categories, the variations in the percentage of premises inspected within the target times were:

- 'between 6 and 12 months' - 17% to 100%. Twenty-six councils inspected at least 88%
- 'between 12 and 24 months' - 14% to 100%. Just under half of the councils (25) inspected at least 90%
- 'more than 24 months' - 8% to 100%. Half of the councils providing information for this category of premises inspected 100%.

Figure 1: The percentage of premises in the 'within 6 months' category inspected within target time



# INDICATOR 2

The percentage of water samples which met required standards for:

- chemical quality
- microbiological quality
- colour quality.


### What the indicator reports

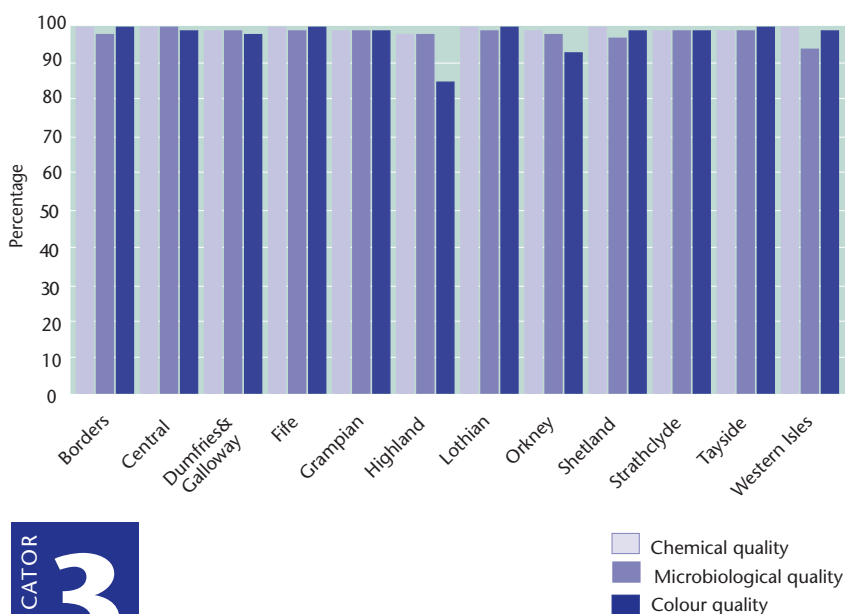
The indicator provides information on three aspects of the standard of mains water supply.

Sampling is undertaken in accordance with the requirements of the Water Supply (Water Quality) (Scotland) Regulations 1990, which set out standards to be met for each of the three aspects of water quality.

### Points to bear in mind

The three parts of this indicator measure different aspects and should not be added together.

 Fig 2: The percentage of water samples which met standards 1995/96



## Commentary

### Chemical quality

The percentage of samples that met the standard for chemical quality varied from 97.9% to 99.8%, with ten councils reporting at least 99.0% of their samples within the standard required (Figure 2).

### Microbiological quality

The 1990 Regulations require that 95% of samples contain no organisms indicating potential contamination. All but one council met this standard, with performance levels varying between 97.1% and 99.6%. However, Western Isles reported that only 94.4% of samples met the quality standard.

### Colour quality

The percentage of samples that met the required colour quality standard ranged from 85% to 100%, with seven of the 12 councils reporting over 99% of their samples within the standard required.

# INDICATOR 3

The percentage of household waste recycled.

### What the indicator reports

This indicator shows each council's estimate of its achievement in recycling household waste.

Councils obtain waste material for recycling by:

- collections at recycling centres (e.g. bottle banks, paper banks)
- separate house-to-house collection of recyclable materials

- separating waste after collection.

There is a government target that by the year 2000 councils should recycle 25% of household waste.

**Points to bear in mind**

Councils control the expenditure on promotional campaigns and collection and the investment in recycling plant. However, recycling is also affected by:

- the level of public awareness of the value of recycling
- the willingness of the public to participate in recycling household waste
- fluctuations in market demand for recycled materials.

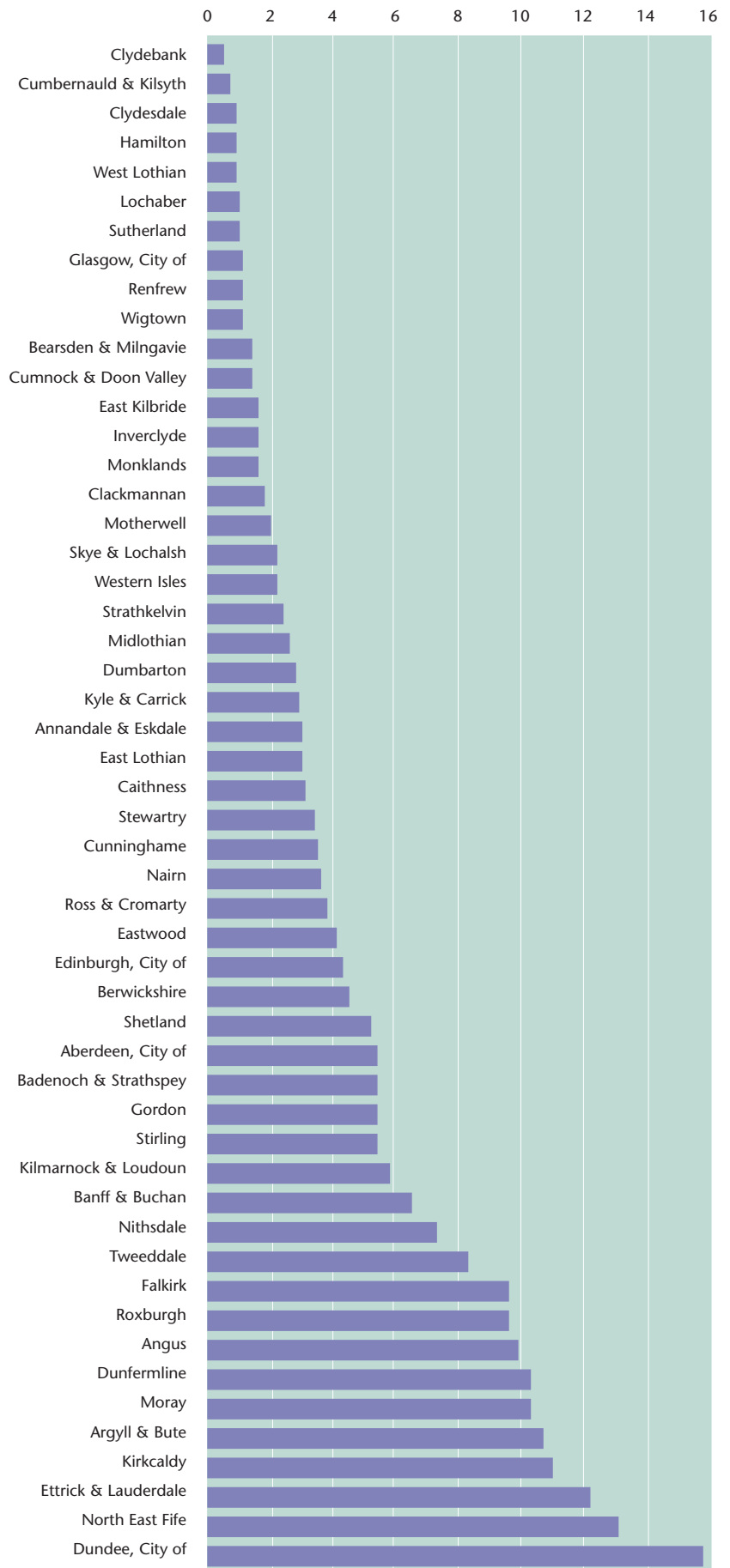
**Commentary**

The percentage of household waste recycled by councils varied from 0.5% to 15.8%, and only seven exceeded 10% (Figure 3).

Just under half of the councils (27) recycled 3% or more of household waste.

In comparison with 1993/94, 36 councils increased the proportion of household waste recycled.

Figure 3: The percentage of household waste recycled



Orkney did not provide the required information.

## INDICATOR 4

### The percentage of planning applications by householders dealt with within eight weeks.

#### What the indicator reports

The indicator provides information on how long it takes each council to deal with planning applications by householders seeking approval to build extensions to their homes, or to make other alterations to their properties which need permission.

In dealing with planning applications, councils:

- take a number of steps to consult on and assess the application
- decide whether to approve the application
- notify the applicant of the decision.

People have to notify their neighbours that they have submitted an application and councils are usually required to carry out only limited consultations before a decision is reached. Many of the applications are straightforward and result in permission being granted.

This indicator does not deal with applications by builders and developers.

#### Points to bear in mind

The time taken to deal with an application will be affected by:

- the extent to which councillors have delegated the responsibility for approving applications to staff (greater delegation will generally allow applications to be processed more quickly)
- whether there are any objections to the application (e.g. from neighbouring property owners)
- the proportion of cases where an applicant needs to submit amended plans before the planning officer feels able to recommend approval.

Some cases, particularly those in conservation areas or affecting listed buildings, may take longer to deal with because of the need for additional advertising and consultation. The proportion of such applications varies considerably between councils. A small council may have a large number of conservation areas or listed buildings.

In view of the possible impact of conservation areas and listed buildings on the average time councils take to deal with applications, particular care should be exercised when the performance of councils is being compared.

#### Commentary

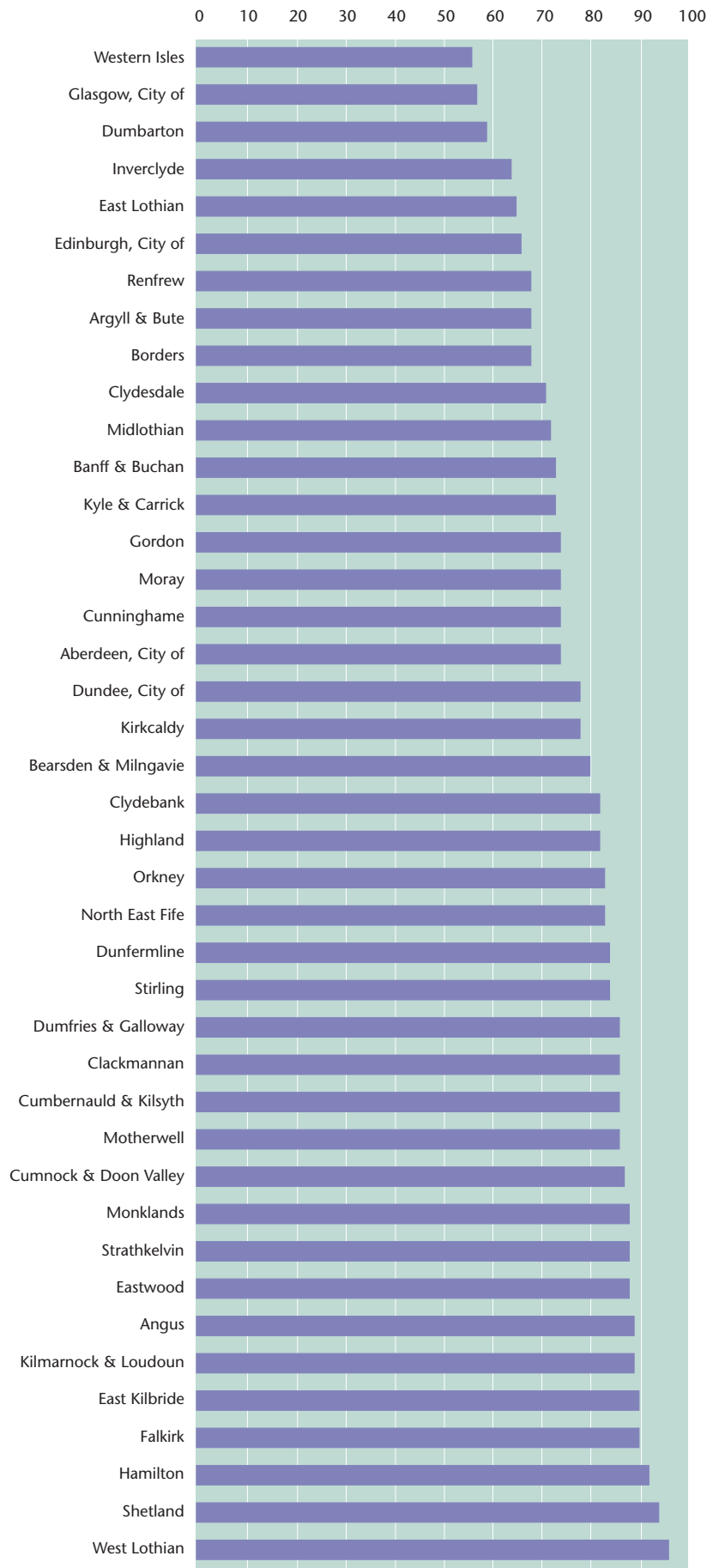
There were 16,380 householder applications dealt with by the councils that reported the information.

The proportion of householder applications dealt with within eight weeks varied between councils from 56% to 96% (Figure 4).

Twenty-two councils processed 80% or more of their householder applications within eight weeks, ten more than in 1993/94.



Figure 4: The percentage of householder planning applications dealt with within eight weeks



**The percentage of trading standards enquiries and complaints completed within 30 calendar days.**

**What the indicator reports**

The indicator provides information on the efficiency of the council in dealing with enquiries and complaints. It shows the time between:

- the date the council receives all the information necessary to allow action (e.g. advice or investigation) to commence, and
- the date on which the council's contact with the consumer and/or the trader concerned finished, i.e. the council provided the information requested, or the outcome of an investigation was reported to the consumer or business making the complaint.

Dealing with enquiries and complaints is one of the most significant of the trading standards services provided by councils. This assistance is provided to two separate groups - consumers (i.e. the general public) and businesses.

'Enquiries' are requests for information from a consumer or a business about any aspect of consumer law or an unfair trading practice. 'Complaints' are requests to the council to investigate the activities of a trader or traders. Both enquiries and complaints relate to goods or services which the consumer or business suspects or believes has been poor, unfair or based on illegal trading practice by a trader - for example, selling faulty, dangerous or wrongly described goods, or

setting unreasonable conditions of sale.

Complaints and enquiries come mainly from consumers, with a smaller number from businesses.

The indicator does not provide information on the quality of any advice or investigation, or on its usefulness to the consumer or business.

**Points to bear in mind**

The indicator will be affected by the number and complexity of enquiries and complaints.

Many enquiries can be dealt with speedily, often on the same day or within a few days. The investigative work involved in complaints means that they often take longer to complete. Councils usually receive more enquiries than complaints.

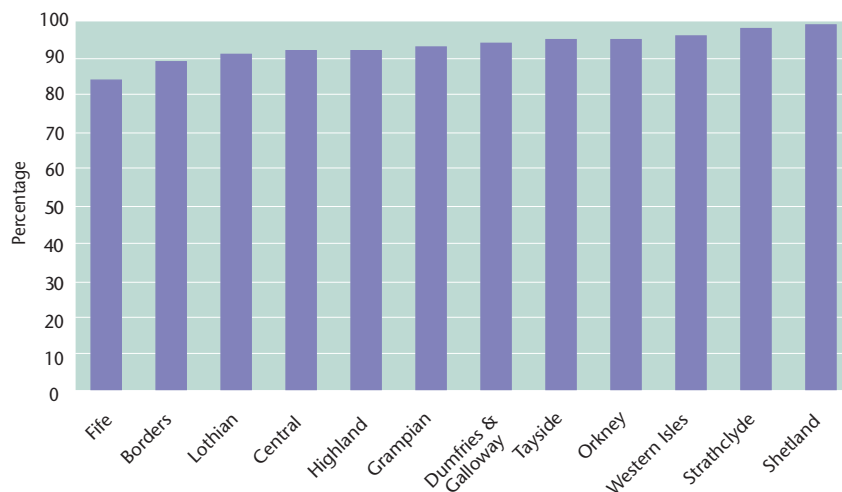
No comparative information for 1993/94 is available because performance information for trading standards services was introduced for the first time in 1994/95.

**Commentary**

Councils dealt with a total of 295,575 enquiries and complaints, a drop of 1.6% on the number in 1994/95. One council, Strathclyde, had 83% of all enquiries and complaints received by Scottish councils.

The percentage of enquiries and complaints dealt with in 30 days ranged between councils from 84% to 100% (Figure 5). Ten of the councils dealt with at least 90% of enquiries and complaints in 30 days.

 **Fig 5: Percentage of enquiries & complaints completed in 30 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:

Education  
Housing  
Social work  
Police and fire services

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.



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