

HQN (Housing Quality Network)

Mock Inspection - Overview

- || A real mixture
 - || Some excellent examples of innovation in almost every service area
 - || But some fundamental basics missing
- || Good progress in repairs and maintenance
- || Disappointing on equality & diversity and access arrangements
- || A traditional and out dated service in need of modernisation
- || Changes have started but much is still “work in progress” – proof of success not yet there
- || Examples of things stalling
- || Prospects for improvement remain very doubtful

The shining stars

- || Staff and managers - open attitudes and eagerness to move forward
- || Involvement – sheltered housing tenants forum, Talkback initiative
- || Access arrangements – potential of electronic imaging, IT and telephony investment
- || Leaseholder service - specialist team knowledge
- || Supported housing service – two star service if looked at in isolation
- || Lettings and allocations – Choice Based Lettings (CBL) potentially a two star service
- || Income management - innovative money advice initiatives e.g. Pre tenancy awareness sessions for under-25s, Pre court initiative to help sustain tenancies
- || Strong partnerships - debt/benefit advice, choice based lettings

The areas that let you down

- || Access, customer care and complaints handling
- || Equality and diversity
- || Void standards and void management
- || Estate standards particularly grounds maintenance
- || Involvement – lack of impact across all service areas
- || Value for money
- || Service charges
- || Lack of service standards
- || Information Technology

Key issues

- || Some (tough) decisions needed – access arrangements
- || Lack of investment evident in key resources:
 - || Properties
 - || Managers/staff - skills, numbers, training and development
- || Effective working relationship between Corporate services and Housing needs to be developed. Currently perceived as a barrier
- || Communications and information generally needs attention – access to information and sharing it is a weakness
- || Customer profiling - essential

Key issues

- II More joined up working needed within housing:
 - II Supported housing
 - II Leaseholder service
 - II Arrears and neighbourhood
- II Lack of policies, procedures and guidelines for staff.
- II Lack of clarity about remits, roles and responsibilities
- II Lack of performance management culture and suite of performance information
- II SMART (Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Realistic, Time-bound) improvement plans with leaders - essential

Customer priorities

Access to services, staff and information:

- || Advertise and promote services fairly to all
- || More consideration for special circumstances – give appropriate help those who need it
- || Complaints should be taken seriously
- || More reliability – some idea when they will get back to you
- || Designated staff, recognisable housing officers who know you
- || Helpful people who are interested in you and the community
- || More and better information

Customer priorities

Tenancy management:

- || Check out what is happening on estates and respond better
- || Clearer response first time on Antisocial Behaviour (ASB)

Moving:

- || Improve and make Home Options work for people without computers
- || Better use of properties – encourage downsizing
'Change the Home' options scheme – give more priority to move families from flats
- || Make sure new properties are clean and decent. 'Leave it Clean' scheme should work both ways

Offices

- II City Hall (undergoing alterations):
 - II Very formal arrangements
 - II Poor provision for disabled and people with children
 - II Noisy area
 - II Not clear how the system operates
- II Area offices
 - II Opening times and locations hard to find
 - II No common NCC identity/branding
 - II Premises and environment (inside and out) uncared for and in need of repair
 - II Weeds, overgrowing ivy
 - II Not Disability Discrimination Act (DDA) compliant
 - II No standard range of posters, leaflets (but generally lots of information)
 - II Poor children's areas
 - II Different arrangements, eg, for exchanges
 - II Some out of order signs e.g. telephone

Priorities

- || Access and customer care:
 - || Establish a lead and clear vision for access arrangements
 - || Link in with corporate initiatives
 - || Improve access to information and communications
 - || Make the IT systems work
 - || Provide training and clarity for staff
- || Complaints handling:
 - || Establish a working group to overhaul procedures
 - || Establish a complaints champion
 - || Link in with Corporate improvements and changes
- || SMART improvement plan required for both areas

Equality and Diversity (E&D) - Overview

- || Lots of enthusiasm and commitment amongst staff but a weak area
- || Lack of a robust, properly resourced framework for implementing E&D
- || Housing is, in the main, dependent on corporate action but this may not meet housing needs, eg, customer profiling
- || Lack of targets and performance information.
- || Lack of information about service users.
- || Sharing of information within/across housing is a key issue to address
- || Greater clarity and guidance is required for staff to ensure consistency and equality of access
- || Aids and adaptations and Home Options need particular scrutiny

E&D - Overview ...(cont'd)

- || Action has to include all six diversity strands with clear links between them
- || E&D needs more resources and focus in housing. There is lack of clarity about leadership and direction
- || There are numerous action plans - which do not help focused action or monitoring
- || A number of issues are outstanding e.g. Disability Discrimination Act compliance
- || A real focus and drive is required to demonstrate how services are taking account of customers

Resident Involvement - Overview

- || Traditionally weak, previously limited to:
 - || CityWide Board
 - || Tenant and Resident Association activity at local level
- || Some limited progress over past few years
- || Change in resourcing and delivery from Tenant Participation Officers to Community Services is unsettling staff and tenants
- || Lack of a robust strategy and good management could hamper service development
- || Some shining stars amongst staff and residents but not cohesive, often conflicting information and views

Repairs and Maintenance - First impressions

- || Qualified, motivated and committed technical staff with strong professional leadership
- || The findings and recommendations of the previous Audit Commission inspection have been taken on board and there has been a structured approach to implementing them.
- || Staff are working to identify and share good practice and deliver improvement and are committed to the process.
- || However, progress as a whole has been slower than might have been anticipated, particularly as regards bedding down the output repairs contract.
- || This may in part be due to the very lean staffing structure in the client partnering team.
- || There is a lack of SMART action plans to deliver improvements

How do tenants view repairs service?

Status Survey 2006/7

- || 68% of tenants had reported a repair in last 12 months
- || But only 64% had had the reported repair completed
- || 15% were dissatisfied with the time taken to start work
- || 8% were dissatisfied with the time taken to complete the work
- || 8% were dissatisfied with the quality of the work
- || Overall 72% were satisfied with the repairs service as a whole

Allocations and Lettings - Overview

- || Staff are experienced, knowledgeable, customer focussed and positive about developing and improving the service
- || Housing Options is a really positive move. A two star service
- || Good example of partnership approach to Choice Based Lettings (CBL) involving other Local Authorities and Housing Association partners
- || Use of IT for Housing Options is admirable, but potentially excluding some applicants/bidders who have problems understanding and using the new system
- || Work in progress - still catching up with some of the reporting and analysis which was in place under the old systems
- || Maintaining three housing registers as part of the partnership seems costly and complicated for applicants

A&L - Overview ...(cont'd)

- || Involvement of different teams and IT systems seems a barrier examples of:
 - || things 'falling through gaps'
 - || competing priorities, lack of clarity
- || Little evidence of customers shaping and monitoring this service. More is needed including on CBL
- || A number of E&D related issues need addressing on CBL
- || Voids are the key weakness – will take some time to address:
 - || Expectations about standards appear to be low
 - || Long term voids – need a clear strategy to deal with these and a more proactive approach
 - || Issues resulting from long term underinvestment need addressing
 - || Little customer involvement
 - || Some basics are not in place – others are not effectively monitored

Void property



Sheltered void

Poor quality kitchen, shabby wallpaper and uneven batons left nailed to wall



Tenancy Management - Overview

- || Lack of service standards
- || No tenants' handbook
- || No programme of tenancy audits
- || Individual tenancy agreements not provided
- || Filing systems a major concern. Access to information is difficult
- || More to be done in identifying tenancies at risk and ensuring support is both put in place and effectiveness of support monitored
- || Weak performance monitoring systems leading to difficulty in tracking trends/direction of travel

Overview - ASB

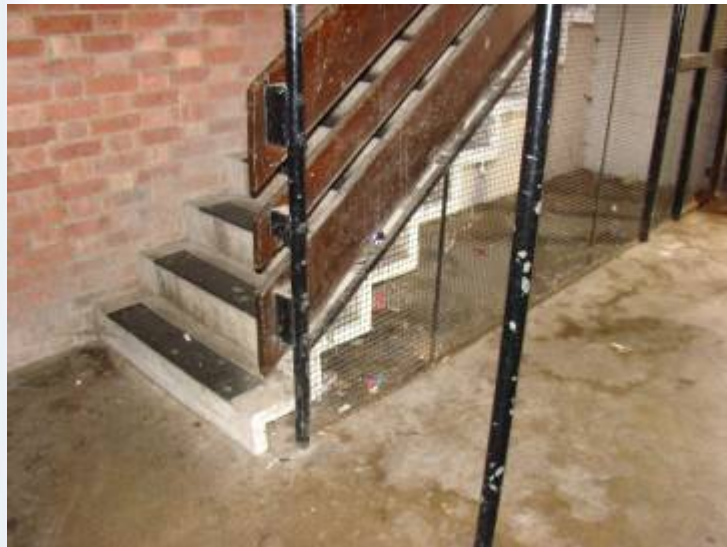
- || Good service being delivered for higher level cases dealt with by specialist teams
- || Very good joint working and partnership arrangements in place at a strategic level
- || Weak initial procedures and performance for reporting and recording of ASB cases via the call centre
- || No robust evidence of customer feedback being used to continuously review and improve performance and develop service standards
- || Absence of case management and performance management systems a major concern



Overview – estate services

- || Estate walkabouts and inspections in place but lack of a targeted approach at the worst areas
- || Inconsistent approach to service delivery for communal schemes
- || Very poor estate services being delivered in some areas
- || Value for Money (VfM) not addressed or evaluated
- || No evidence of customer feedback being used to continuously review and improve performance and develop service standards
- || Weak performance monitoring systems leading to difficulty in tracking trends/direction of travel

Kensington Place



Income Management - Overview

- || Improved rent collection performance for 2007/08
- || Arrears improvement plan has been developed
- || Involved in NCC's financial inclusion policy
- || Strong partnerships developing for debt/benefit advice through Citizens Advice Bureau and Stonham
- || Innovative money advice initiatives:
 - || Pre tenancy awareness sessions for under-25s
 - || Pre court initiative to help sustain tenancies

But:

- || Lack of clear direction of travel for income management:
 - || No income management strategy
 - || Outdated arrears policy (2002)
 - || Arrears improvement plan is not SMART – does not capture all planned improvements

Income Management - Overview

...(cont'd)

- || Increasing trend in former tenants arrears (FTA) £1.1m = 47% of total arrears
- || Collection performance is lower median quartile and bottom quartile for number of evictions due to rent arrears
Not maximising all income streams, eg, rechargeable repairs, leaseholder service charges
- || Performance management framework is under-developed – no qualitative measures/targets. Much is new and untested
- || Case studies evidenced failure to prevent arrears
- || No analysis of reasons for non-payment of rent
- || No procedures for vulnerable tenants in arrears
- || No rent/service charge setting policy
- || Service charges not fully depooled /disaggregated

Leasehold Services - Overview

- II Dedicated and enthusiastic home ownership team, keen to get it right. Appear well resourced
- II Service improvement plan for 2007/08 in place but:
 - II Not comprehensive
 - II Some targets not met
 - II No 2008/09 plan offered
- II Delivery of the service impeded by lack of recognition by other departments e.g.:
 - II Income recovery is not placed as a priority
 - II Legal advice on lease issues not always forthcoming or definitive

Leasehold Services - Overview ... (cont'd)

- || Limited guidelines in place for staff to work to. There are currently few procedures and policies
- || There is no performance monitoring
- || No diversity information has been collected for leaseholders

Supported Housing - Overview

- || Tenancy Support Manager and service manager have clear focus on future and lead service well
- || Good work in the support service:
 - || Accredited through Centre for Sheltered Housing Studies
 - || Good Quality Assessment Framework levels
 - || Support plans in place (but not an active tool)
- || Some good approaches to supporting people with challenging needs
- || Sheltered Housing Tenants Forum – very well advanced

Supported Housing - Overview

...(cont'd)

- || Examples of being responsive to customers:
 - || Walk in showers
 - || Water meters programmes
 - || Car park repairs for wheelchairs
 - || Approach to arrears
- || Closer relationship with area office starting to bear fruit
- || Much of allocations activity is good (but inconsistent)
- || Good progress towards determining long term future of schemes – some decommissioning already completed
- || Know staffing related costs – addressing as part of strategic review

Value for Money - Overview

- || Split of resources between management and maintenance is consistent with all district peers
- || No service costs (ASB, estates, allocations, etc) to complete comparisons, relative to performance and output
- || Overspend on repairs and voids, despite monthly reporting, highlight absence of controls
- || Little evidence of either strategic or practical VfM activity being planned
- || Little if any evidence of staff awareness around VFM issues