

# Sutton Housing Partnership

London Borough of Sutton

January 2010



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# Arm's Length Management Organisation (ALMO) Inspections

The Audit Commission is an independent body responsible for ensuring that public money is spent economically, efficiently and effectively and delivers high-quality local services for the public.

Within the Audit Commission, the Housing Inspectorate inspects and monitors the performance of a number of bodies and services. These include local authority housing departments, local authorities administering Supporting People programmes, arm's length management organisations (ALMOs) and housing associations. Our key lines of enquiry (KLOEs) set out the main issues which we consider when forming our judgements on the quality of services. The KLOEs can be found on the Audit Commission's website at [www.audit-commission.gov.uk/housing](http://www.audit-commission.gov.uk/housing).

This inspection has been carried out by the Housing Inspectorate using powers under section 10 of the Local Government Act 1999 and is in line with the Audit Commission's strategic regulation principles. In broad terms, these principles look to minimise the burden of regulation while maximising its impact. To meet these principles this inspection:

- is proportionate to risk and the performance of the Council/ALMO;
- judges the quality of the service for service users and the value for money of the service;
- promotes further improvements in the service; and
- has cost no more than is necessary to safeguard the public interest.

This service was inspected as part of the Government's arms length housing management initiative, which encourages councils to set up ALMOs to manage, maintain and improve their housing stock. The Government decided that councils pursuing this option can secure additional capital funding if the new arm's length body has received at least a 'good' rating from the Audit Commission's Housing Inspectorate.

An ALMO is a company set up by a local authority to manage and improve all or part of its housing stock. The local authority remains the landlord and tenants remain secure tenants of the authority. An ALMO does not trade for profit, and is managed by a board of directors comprising Council nominees, elected tenants/ leaseholders and independents.

The Housing Inspectorate has published additional guidance for ALMO inspections:

- 'ALMO Inspections and the delivery of excellent housing management services' (March 2003); and
- 'Learning from the first housing ALMOs' (May 2003).

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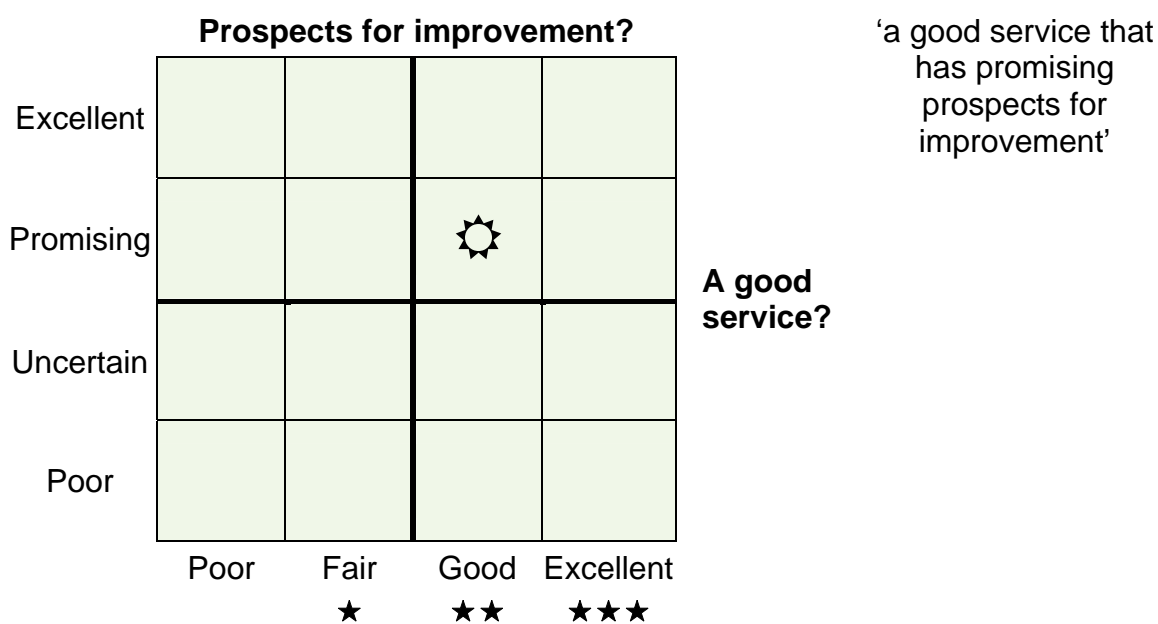
# Summary

- 1 Sutton Housing Partnership provides a good housing management service that has promising prospects for improvement.
- 2 The service has a number of strengths. Services are easy to access with high quality written information and an informative website. Residents are involved in improving services and their views are actively sought and acted upon. Complaints are responded to promptly and are used to improve services. Tenants' communication and other needs are understood and services are tailored to meet them.
- 3 A good level of choice is offered to tenants as part of major works improvements to their homes and satisfaction with the works is high. The needs of disabled and other vulnerable tenants are being met and environmental sustainability issues are being addressed. Tenants are involved in the procurement and programming of works and receive clear information about what is planned and when. Gas safety, asbestos, fire and other health and safety risks are well managed. Repairs are carried out quickly and usually to a good standard, properties are re-let quickly, and adaptations for disabled tenants are delivered to a high standard.
- 4 Vulnerable tenants are well supported, including those who experience domestic violence, although some victims wait too long to be seen initially. Estates are generally kept in a good condition and anti-social behaviour is being addressed well in partnership with other agencies, with support for victims and initiatives to promote community cohesion. Rental income is being efficiently collected and tenants with arrears and other debt problems are given advice and support. Sheltered housing and leaseholder services are good with high levels of satisfaction.
- 5 However, there are also some weaknesses that need to be addressed. Almost half of properties do not meet the decent homes standard, the energy efficiency of many tenants' homes is comparatively low. Many properties have not had external painting and other maintenance work carried out, and the lettings standard is not meeting tenants' expectations. Telephone calls are not always responded to quickly, and tenant satisfaction with estate services and opportunities to participate in decision making is low. There is no policy or service standards for aids and adaptations to ensure all that tenants receive the same level of service. Outreach work to more marginalised sectors of the community is underdeveloped.
- 6 The prospects for improvement are promising. Improvements that matter to residents have been delivered effectively. There is strong leadership and performance, budgets and risks are generally well managed. The organisation is investing in, and developing, its staff, IT and partnerships and is improving its approach to value for money.
- 7 There are still some barriers to improvement. Tenant satisfaction with estates services and opportunities to participate in decision-making has declined. Performance monitoring and the use of benchmarking data are under developed in some services, and performance reporting to residents is limited. Financial resources for major works to improve tenants' homes are uncertain.

# Scoring the service

- 8 We have assessed Sutton Housing Partnership as providing a ‘good’ two- star housing management service that has promising prospects for improvement. Our judgements are based on the evidence obtained during the inspection and are outlined below.

**Figure 1 Scoring chart<sup>1</sup>**



Source: Audit Commission

- 9 We found the service to be good because it has a range of strengths:
- it is easy for customers to access the service. Good quality information is provided and customers' communication needs are being met effectively;
  - residents are actively engaged in monitoring and improving services;
  - there are effective support arrangements for vulnerable tenants, including those experiencing domestic violence and hate crimes;
  - planned works are delivering improvements and tenant satisfaction with the work is high;
  - health and safety risks, such as gas safety and asbestos, are well managed;
  - responsive repairs are delivered promptly with high levels of tenant satisfaction;

<sup>1</sup> The scoring chart displays performance in two dimensions. The horizontal axis shows how good the service or function is now, on a scale ranging from no stars for a service that is poor (at the left-hand end) to three stars for an excellent service (right-hand end). The vertical axis shows the improvement prospects of the service, also on a four-point scale.

- empty homes are re-let quickly and new tenants are given a wide range of information about their home and tenancy conditions;
- adaptations are being installed to a high standard that tenants are satisfied with;
- arrears levels compare well with those of similar organisations and satisfaction with the service is high;
- partnership working and diversionary activities are tackling anti-social behaviour effectively and estates are kept in a good condition;
- sheltered housing tenants are receiving a high standard of service and care; and
- reviews of services and service level agreements (SLA) are delivering savings and improved value for money.

**10** However, there are some areas which require improvement:

- performance against service standards is not consistently high and not all complaints are being captured;
- information about domestic violence services is limited;
- outcomes from diversity work with residents' groups have been limited;
- tenant satisfaction with opportunities for participation in decision-making and estate services is low;
- almost half of homes are not of a decent standard;
- there is no policy and few service standards for the aids and adaptations service;
- former tenancy arrears are high and collection of leaseholder charges is low; and
- not all services have yet been reviewed for value for money.

**11** The service has promising prospects for improvement because:

- change has been successfully implemented, and there is a track record of improvement in many service areas, including better value for money;
- there is a focus on improvements residents want based on customer feedback;
- there are clear priorities and plans, with robust arrangements for service planning and review, performance monitoring and risk management;
- there is strong leadership, good relations with partner agencies and effective team working; and
- SHP is investing in its staff and IT systems.

**12** However, there are a number of barriers to improvement. These include:

- future funding for decent homes works is uncertain;
- tenant satisfaction with opportunities to participate and estate services is declining;
- some plans are not sufficiently measurable or outcome focused to drive improvements and performance is not adequately reported to residents; and
- performance management and use of benchmarking data is not yet robust in all service areas.

# Recommendations

**13** To rise to the challenge of continuous improvement, organisations need inspection reports that offer practical pointers for improvement. Our recommendations identify the expected benefits for both local people and the organisation. In addition, we identify the approximate costs<sup>2</sup> and indicate the priority we place on each recommendation and key dates for delivering these where they are considered appropriate. In this context, the inspection team recommends that the organisation shares the findings of this report with the ALMO Board, the local authority and customers; and takes action to address all weaknesses identified in the report. The inspection team makes the following recommendations.

### Recommendation

**R1** Strengthen tenant involvement and influence by:

- making performance data accessible to residents, including how well the service they receive compares with other landlords;
- publicising the Sutton Standard, or an accessible guide to the standard;
- reviewing and publicising the sounding board outcomes and learn from other providers about new approaches to consider with residents; and
- ensuring service reviews and investment decisions consider with residents the full range of options for service delivery, with a robust appraisal of the costs and service implications.

The expected benefits of this recommendation are:

- tenants will be more empowered with better information and knowledge to better influence decisions at a strategic level; and
- tenants will have more opportunities to participate in decision-making.

The implementation of this recommendation will have high impact with low costs. This should be implemented by 31 March 2010. The final part is an ongoing approach which should be adopted as part of service reviews and resource allocation decisions.

<sup>2</sup> Low cost is defined as less than 1 per cent of the annual service cost, medium cost is between 1 and 5 per cent and high cost is over 5 per cent.

### Recommendation

**R2** Address existing areas of tenant dissatisfaction by:

- reviewing the lettings standard with tenants, to identify what they expect as a minimum standard;
- evaluating the level and usefulness of decoration vouchers;
- identifying and assessing a full range of options for improving the standard of décor in ready to let properties;
- involving more tenants in inspecting estates, grounds maintenance and cleaning; and
- ensuring all informal and formal complaints about all services are captured and analysed to identify and learn from trends

The expected benefits of this recommendation are:

- Tenants will receive better services and be more satisfied.

The implementation of this recommendation will have high impact with medium costs. This should be implemented by 30 June 2010.

### Recommendation

**R3** Improve the standard of service tenants receive by:

- regularly reviewing service standards and targets with residents so that they are sufficiently challenging to drive continuous improvement;
- continuing to analyse and review call patterns and arrangements for telephone answering to identify ways for improving the service; and
- reviewing response times for reports of domestic violence and hate crimes

The expected benefits of this recommendation are:

- Services will be more accessible and responsive to customers.

The implementation of this recommendation will have high impact with low costs. This should be implemented by 31 March 2010

## Recommendations

### Recommendation

**R4** Ensure the aids and adaptations service offers high quality and equitable service to all tenants by:

- undertaking a full service review that involves a wide range of vulnerable residents and their carers;
- adopting a clear corporate policy and procedures for the service;
- developing service standards and challenging targets for all stages of the service including an overall waiting time; and
- improving information to explain the service clearly to tenants.

The expected benefits of this recommendation are:

- More tenants will understand and be able to access the service.
- Tenants will receive a more efficient service with less overall waiting time.
- Service levels will be equitable for all tenants and better meet their expectations.

The implementation of this recommendation will have high impact with medium costs. This should be implemented by 30 June 2010.

### Recommendation

**R5** Improve value for money by:

- reviewing targets and practice for pre- and post-inspection of repairs;
- analysing reasons why repairs are not completed first time and implementing changes to improve performance;
- ensuring that all projects, pilot schemes and diversionary activities are planned with the intended beneficiaries, and include clear objectives and specific, measurable outcomes and evaluation techniques that are used for rigorous evaluation; and
- reviewing arrangements for recovering former tenants arrears and the criteria for writing off debts

The expected benefits of this recommendation are:

- The repairs service will be more cost effective.
- Resources will be invested into initiatives that have more positive outcomes.

The implementation of this recommendation will have high impact with low costs. This should be implemented by 31 March 2010.

### Recommendation

#### **R6** Improve performance management by:

- introducing systems to check that appraisals and supervision are regularly carried out to a good standard;
- developing staff skills in project development and service planning;
- reviewing plans so that they have measurable aims and objectives that are outcome focused and drive improvement; and
- improving how benchmarking data is used, and incorporated into performance reports.

The expected benefits of this recommendation are:

- Staff will have clearer objectives and higher performance.
- Improved performance across all service areas.

The implementation of this recommendation will have high impact with medium costs. This should be implemented by 30 June 2010.

We would like to thank the staff of Sutton Housing Partnership and London Borough of Sutton who made us welcome and who met our requests efficiently and courteously.

Dates of inspection: 19 October to 29 October 2009.

# Report

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## Context

### The locality

- 14 The London borough of Sutton is a south-west London borough bordering the Surrey Downs to the south, Croydon to the east, and Merton to the north. It is relatively prosperous by national standards being ranked 234 out of 354 on the government's index of multiple deprivation of local authorities in England (where 1 is most deprived). However, there is marked inequality between the northern and southern areas of the borough. The northern parts and some areas towards the south-east share many of the characteristics of inner London: pockets of social deprivation, environmental problems and limited access to employment, social infrastructure, community facilities, housing and transport services. In contrast, the southern parts of the borough are relatively affluent low-density residential areas built around former Surrey towns and villages such as Cheam, Wallington, Carshalton and Sutton.
- 15 There are approximately 187,600 people living in the borough, 20 per cent of which are Black and minority ethnic (BME) people, compared with the London average of 42 per cent. The largest minority ethnic groups are: White Other (4 per cent) and Indian (3 per cent). The number of migrant workers and asylum seekers is low. Projected population growth is consistent with that of other London boroughs, with the greatest increase being among the 65 to 74 years olds over the next ten years.
- 16 There is a high proportion of owner occupied households in Sutton. As with most London boroughs, high house prices are high and there is a lack of affordable housing.

### The Council

- 17 The Council has been a Liberal Democrat controlled authority since 1986 with a Leader and cabinet model. It has 54 councillors: 31 Liberal Democrats, 21 Conservatives, 1 UKIP and 1 independent councillor.
- 18 There are four scrutiny committees which hold the Executive to account and contribute to policy development. The Conservative Party chairs the Council's Audit Committee and the Health and Well-being Scrutiny Committee. Six local committees promote community engagement and take the lead in delivering the Council's public realm programme.
- 19 The Council was awarded four stars in the Audit Commission's Comprehensive Performance Assessment (CPA) in 2008 and assessed as 'improving strongly'.
- 20 The local strategic partnership, the Sutton Partnership, is driving delivery of the Sutton Strategy 2008-2020, and Sutton's Local Area Agreement (LAA) targets to 2011. The partnership's activities are coordinated by the Sutton Partnership Board which is chaired by the Leader of the Council.

## The service

- 21** The Council established an Arm's Length Management Organisation (ALMO) called Sutton Housing Partnership (SHP) in April 2006. SHP manages around 6,670 rented properties including 606 sheltered housing units over 27 schemes, plus 1,370 leasehold and 86 freeholder houses (where a service charge is payable). There is a relatively small number of large estates - the largest being St Helier - with the rest of the stock distributed relatively evenly across the borough.
- 22** The ALMO has delegated responsibility for providing housing management and maintenance services, for which it receives a management fee. It manages the Council's £6.4 million repairs and maintenance budgets and £13.1 million capital programme.
- 23** The functions delegated to the ALMO can be summarised as:
- stock investment decisions and repairs ordering;
  - rent collection, dealing with arrears, debt counselling;
  - consulting and informing tenants on matters which are the ALMO's responsibility;
  - promoting tenant participation, including involving tenants in monitoring and reviewing service standards;
  - enforcement of tenancy conditions;
  - similar functions for leaseholders;
  - managing lettings, voids and under-occupation; and
  - estate management, caretaking and housing related support services under the Supporting People programme.
- 24** The Council has retained a number of functions relating to housing. They include:
- its statutory role in relation to homelessness and housing advice;
  - housing strategy and enabling ensure housing need continues to be met;
  - improving housing conditions in private sector housing;
  - administration of the housing register and choice- based lettings scheme; and
  - administration of the Right to Buy scheme.
- 25** The ALMO is governed by a Board that is made up of three tenants, one leaseholder, four council nominees and four independents. The day-to-day running of the company is delegated to an executive management team, headed by a Chief Executive. The ALMO currently employs 173 staff, of which approximately 14 per cent are from BME groups and 65 per cent are female, with 3 per cent having stated they have a disability.
- 26** In November 2007 we inspected Sutton Housing Partnership and judged it as a fair, one star service with promising prospects for improvement. When SHP meets Government two star criteria, the Council will be eligible to receive some or all of its bid for 'supported borrowing' to bring all of its homes up to the Decent Homes standard.

# How good is the service?

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## What has the service aimed to achieve?

- 27** The Council's vision is to 'build a community in which all can take part and all can take pride'. Together with its partners, it wants to make the borough fairer, greener and safer. Its values are:
- Working in PARTNERSHIP with the people who live or work in the borough.
  - Making our services open and accessible so that everyone is listened to and treated with RESPECT.
  - Seeking INNOVATIVE approaches in order to provide better services.
  - Promoting DIVERSITY and ensuring that we recognise and celebrate difference within the context of fairness and equality.
  - EMPOWERING everyone so that we can all 'take part and take pride' as active citizens and employees.
- 28** Both the Sutton Plan and the Sutton Strategy identify improving housing as a key priority, setting out a commitment to meet increasing housing needs and improve the standard of Council-owned homes. The Sutton Partnership has included targets relating to both these commitments in the Local Area Agreement.
- 29** SHP's mission is to deliver excellent, customer-focused and cost effective housing services to all its residents, and this is underpinned by its five priorities:
- Putting customers first.
  - Making services accessible to all.
  - Achieving value for money.
  - Providing quality homes.
  - Creating safe, welcoming neighbourhoods.
- 30** The ALMO also has the following values:
- Committed: We are here for the long term.
  - Enthusiastic: We bring energy and passion to our work.
  - Green: We care for the environment.
  - Harmonious: We are positive in our dealings with everyone, recognising and appreciating differences.
  - Honest: We do the right things in the right way and learn from our mistakes.
  - Open: We are approachable and receptive to the varied needs and aspirations of each of our customers.
  - Progressive: We are innovative and efficient in all we do.

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**Is the service meeting the needs of the local community and users?**

**Access and customer care**

- 31** In 2008, we found that weaknesses outweighed strengths in this area. SHP (SHP) did not have an effective approach to ensuring customer access. Customers had not been fully consulted on access arrangements and received inconsistent levels of service when contacting the ALMO. Customer satisfaction was not consistently high. The service standards that were in place were not effectively monitored. Although customers had generally sufficient information, the language used was not always customer focused and SHP handled customer complaints poorly. However, services from the main offices were easy to access and SHP valued customer feedback.
- 32** In this inspection, we found that strengths outweigh weaknesses. Customer care is now embedded across the organisation and services are accessible with clear service standards. Information is well produced and readily available including an informative website. Complaints are being responded to quickly and learnt from. Residents' feedback is being used to improve services. However, not all service standards are being met and not all types of complaints are being captured.
- 33** A strong corporate approach to customer care is now embedded across the organisation, led by the Board and supported by a clear customer focus strategy. Customer focus is one of four key corporate drivers and there are Board 'champions' for customer focus, involvement, complaints and information. The Board is also tracking areas of underperformance, such as telephone answering. Customer care training has enabled staff to demonstrate a clear understanding of the importance of good customer service and the Customer Service Excellence charter mark was recently achieved. A clear focus and leadership is important for successfully embedding customer care into the organisation's culture.
- 34** Service standards, with mostly challenging targets, have been developed with residents and are routinely monitored and reported on. Performance against the targets is regularly fed back to tenants via the website, a reception TV screen and in reports to a residents' service improvement group (SIG). Other performance information including comparisons with other landlords is also published on the website. Information showing performance against agreed standards keeps residents informed of how good services are.
- 35** The service is easy to access through the main office, by telephone, by email or via the website. SHP has one office in a central location in Sutton. It is fully accessible and opening hours are agreed with customers. A high quality reception service and a range of information are provided. Over 99 per cent of customers surveyed are satisfied with the reception. Telephone access is available from 8.00am until 5.00pm on weekdays, extended to 7.00pm on one evening. There is a free phone number and a new lo-call number for mobile phone users. Customer service staff provide a range of services such as rent payment and repairs reporting, and improvements have been made in response to tenant mystery shopper's feedback such as a touch screen customer survey. The out-of-hours contact number is clearly displayed and publicised. It is easy for customers to access services they require.

## How good is the service?

- 36** Published information is of a high quality, clearly written, and mostly offered in different formats and languages with translated 'straplines' in seven languages. A range of service leaflets, posters and handbooks cover most issues that customers would need to know about. The quarterly newsletter 'HomeFront', and the tenants' and repairs handbooks are well produced and include useful information about services and tenancy issues and diagrams to help tenants report repairs (although the latter lacks any translations). Publications are now being checked by a tenant reading panel before being printed. High quality information helps customers to access services.
- 37** A new website with 'Browsealoud'<sup>3</sup> facilities is user-friendly and informative. Residents have been involved in improving the site through focus groups and email. Residents with a known email address were contacted to ask for their views. This led to a number of changes such as using quick link icons to make navigation easier. Colours and text size can be changed to help those with visual impairments. Although there is some information about how to get information translated it is not obvious how to access it, but most residents can access a wide range of information.
- 38** The complaints process has been revised and is now robust. Complaints are usually resolved quickly, on average within eight working days. A clear procedure sets out the three stages and timescales, and a clearly written leaflet makes it easy for tenants to make a complaint, including an easy read version for people with learning disabilities. 'Case conferences' for complaints covering several service areas are held by the relevant managers to ensure a comprehensive and co-ordinated response. The complaints form also includes compliments and 68 compliments have been received since April 2008. Residents are getting a swift resolution to their complaints.
- 39** SHP views complaints as an opportunity to learn and improve its services. For example, as a result of complaints, repairs to communal lighting have improved and there is more publicity about tree pruning and maintenance. Complaints made to SHP are well-documented and managed; a learning log is completed for each complaint to identify improvements or training needs, and letters to complainants advise them what they can do if they are not satisfied with the response. Compensation is explained in the complaints leaflet and letters and a total of £5,594 has been paid to 17 customers since 1 April 2007. Residents' complaints are improving services.
- 40** Residents' views are actively sought and acted upon to improve services. Satisfaction surveys are routinely conducted across all services, and residents were actively involved in the customer care review, including those who had not previously had any contact with SHP. Resident mystery shoppers work to a programme that has included the reception area and estate cleaning and their feedback is acted on. For example, a new touch screen customer survey replaced a three-page paper survey and response levels have increased. A web site survey also polls residents' views on particular issues. Resident satisfaction with consultation is comparatively high. Residents are influencing the way services are delivered.

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<sup>3</sup> Browsealoud is 'text to speech' software that reads out the content of a web page to the reader

- 41 However, performance against service standards is not consistent and some targets are not challenging. For example, all customers without appointments are seen within 15 minutes but the target is not challenging. Only 80 per cent of telephone calls are answered in 20 seconds. About 4.5 per cent of calls are abandoned against a target of 3.5 per cent. Only 90 per cent of correspondence is responded to promptly against a target of 100 per cent. Not all customers receive a high level of service.
- 42 Not all complaints are being captured to provide a complete picture of residents' concerns and problems. Tenant complaints made directly to the repairs and gas servicing contractors are not captured by SHP. Complaints are reported on at monthly contractor meetings but are not incorporated and monitored as part of SHP's complaints management. SHP data shows that only 59 complaints were made about the repairs service in 2008/09 and 15 in the current year to the end of September. Neither SHP nor the contractors record informal complaints, such as a service failure or expression of dissatisfaction, so the contractor is also recording a low number of complaints – four in the first six months of this year. Without comprehensive data opportunities to learn and improve can be missed.

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### Diversity

- 43 In 2008, we found that weaknesses outweighed strengths. The ALMO did not have a strong strategic approach to diversity. It lacked clear targets to ensure either that its staff and board make up reflected the local community or that it delivered equitable services. It did not comply with current good practice and had not ensured accessibility to schemes for all its customers. Black and minority ethnic (BME) customer satisfaction was lower than for non-BME residents. However, its offices were compliant with the Disability Discrimination Act (DDA) and it was making progress in understanding and using its customer profile. This was supported by good diversity training.
- 44 In this inspection, we found that strengths outweigh weaknesses. A clear commitment to diversity is helping to drive forward improvements. Staff training is in place and SHP has a good understanding of its tenants and is starting to use data to tailor services effectively. Diversity monitoring of service take up and equality impact assessments are identifying barriers to the service. A good range of support for vulnerable residents, including victims of domestic violence, is in place. SHP complies with the DDA. However, the approach to domestic violence has some weaknesses and the diversity strategy is not robust. Outreach work to marginalised communities and diversity outcomes from contractor monitoring are limited.
- 45 SHP has a clear commitment to equality and diversity. Making services accessible to all is a corporate priority and a corporate strategy has been developed in conjunction with residents. Equality impact assessments are completed on all new strategies and across 16 service areas to date. Outcomes have included targeted debt advice, extended opening hours and religious festivals are taken account of when programming maintenance work. Diversity is one of four corporate key drivers and diversity implications are reported on in all reports to the Board. A Board diversity champion chairs the diversity committee that monitors the programme of equality impact assessments. A strong corporate commitment helps to drive forward improvements.

## How good is the service?

- 46 A diverse staff group broadly reflects the community it serves. SHP's staff profile is 57 per cent female, 15 per cent BME and 7 per cent disabled people. 45 per cent of managers are female and 3 per cent are BME. A focus on diversity in recruitment has had positive outcomes such as more BME staff employed in external services. A diverse workforce helps to promote the service to all sectors of the community.
- 47 Staff training is increasing awareness and understanding of diversity. Corporate diversity training for all staff and additional training on lesbian, gay, bi-sexual and transgender issues has further developed awareness. Easy to use information booklets on aspects of diversity such as faith, cultural and communication needs are being rolled out through team meetings providing opportunities to discuss the issues and develop understanding. Increased awareness can help staff deliver more tailored and sensitive services.
- 48 SHP has a well-developed, although not yet comprehensive, understanding of its tenants' profile and needs. It continuously collects data about the profile and needs of tenants' households including information on the six diversity strands and communication and other needs. A comparatively high level of data is captured. For example, 99 per cent on gender, 87.5 per cent on ethnicity, 65 per cent on religion, 57.5 per cent on disability and 34 per cent on sexuality. However, the level of data held on age is comparatively low at 87.9 per cent. By understanding tenants and their needs, services can be tailored more effectively.
- 49 Profile data is being used to tailor services and identify barriers to access. The data is accessible to staff and is used, for example, to provide and promote enhanced services to disabled tenants including contacting those who have had no contact in 12 months and to send large print documents. Take-up of services is monitored by the six diversity strands and has identified, for example, that BME residents are less likely to make a complaint, but have lower levels of satisfaction with the repairs service. In response to this, specific residents were contacted to explore their concerns and SHP is planning to target information about the complaints process. Understanding and removing barriers to access ensures equality of service provision.
- 50 A good range of floating support services is available for vulnerable residents. Vulnerable residents are supported through a number of services provided by partner agencies. It is easy for staff to refer a vulnerable resident, and referrals have been made for example to drug and alcohol outreach teams and a project for people with mental health issues, although there is no framework for evaluating the effectiveness of the referrals. Support services can help vulnerable tenants sustain their tenancies.
- 51 Most residents' communication needs are being met. Staff and contractors access a telephone interpreting service and have information translated at the residents' request. Many documents offer translations in other languages and there is a language identification poster in the reception area. This is also carried by contractors so that an interpreter can be contacted immediately. A credit card size 'VIP' card is available for visually impaired people to identify their needs in a confidential manner. Residents find it easier to access services when their communication needs are met.

- 52** A well developed domestic violence service is delivering positive outcomes for residents. Domestic violence (DV) is prioritised (along with hate crime and threatening behaviour) and is usually responded to quickly. Support includes a sanctuary scheme<sup>4</sup> with 17 referrals in 2008/09, and a floating support service for both male and female victims that has supported 101 people to date. Its service users have formed 'Breath' a survivors' self-help group which SHP supports, and survivors and the DV Coordinator provide training for staff. Residents reporting DV are effectively supported.
- 53** SHP works well with partners in responding to hate crime. SHP's anti-social behaviour (ASB) policy and procedures prioritise hate crime and how to report it is well promoted. Reports can be made to a number of organisations and SHP coordinates and maps all reports across the borough with its partners to identify 'hot spots' and areas with potential community cohesion issues. Residents in minority groups can be confident of a supportive response if they report a hate crime.
- 54** SHP is now compliant with the DDA and the Code of Practice for Racial Equality in Housing. The main office, surgeries and sheltered housing communal areas comply with the DDA, and compliance with the Code of Practice is audited by the Council. This ensures that any potential discrimination in the SHP services is identified and addressed and that SHP meets its statutory obligations.
- 55** Diversity is actively promoted to tenant and residents' associations (TRAs) but with few outcomes to date. Equality and diversity training for involved residents has been well received. SHP has given diversity briefings for TRAs that includes the diversity profile of their estate. Groups are developing action plans to involve a more diverse range of residents. However, as this is a relatively recent initiative there are few outcomes to date. Diverse TRAs will be more effective in representing tenants concerns.
- 56** There are some weaknesses in dealing with domestic violence and hate crimes. Domestic violence is responded to under the hate crimes policy rather than under a policy that is geared specifically to domestic violence issues and the needs of victims. A 48 hour response target for DV and hate crimes is too long and only 83 per cent of victims were interviewed within 24 hours. Information about DV is inadequate; there is none in the office and a limited amount on the website. It may not be clear to residents how to report DV or get initial advice, or what will happen if they do.
- 57** The diversity strategy action plan is not outcome focused. The plan contains a range of activities and the outputs from them, but does not indicate the expected outcomes for residents. As a result it is not clear what it intend to achieve and how its success will be measured.
- 58** Outreach work with community organisations is underdeveloped. SHP has not systematically identified marginalised sectors of the community who are not accessing its services to develop its approach to working with them. Some partnership work, for example with Sutton Racial Equality Council, has helped to review services, but little outreach work to different faith or minority ethnic communities has taken place. This may result in some residents not receiving the same levels of service.

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<sup>4</sup> A sanctuary scheme provides additional security measures to allow those experiencing domestic violence to remain in their own home where it is safe to do so and where it is their choice to remain in the accommodation.

## How good is the service?

- 59 Information about residents' needs is not adequately flagged up for staff to use and translated information is not consistently offered in publications, or easy to find, on the website. Key documents such as the repairs handbook have no translated straplines. The IT system may indicate to staff if a tenant is disabled, but not what the residents' needs are. However, this is to be addressed by a new customer relations management system in 2010. Without easily accessible information some needs may be overlooked, and residents with limited English may find it more difficult to access services.
- 60 Outcomes from diversity monitoring of contractors have been limited. Contractors are required to comply with SHP's diversity policies and diversity is discussed at monitoring meetings. However, not all report on their workforce profile and positive action to address imbalances is limited. There are two female gas service engineers but this is not promoted to tenants. Greater diversity can help to ensure that services meet all tenants' needs.

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## Stock investment and asset management

### Capital improvement, planned and cyclical maintenance, major repair works

- 61 In 2008, we found that strengths and weaknesses were balanced. The ALMO had good information on the condition of its stock on a robust database. It used this to make sound short-term investment decisions, which had been delivered to budget and offered reasonable choices to customers. It had a sound approach to asbestos and relevant service contracts were in place. However, significantly, its asset management strategy was not robust and levels of stock failing the decent homes standard were high. Customers had limited involvement in determining priorities, and they received insufficient information about the programme. Customer satisfaction was mixed.
- 62 In this inspection, we found that strengths outweigh weaknesses. SHP has a fully costed 5-year major works programme, including decent homes works and 30-year projections based on comprehensive stock condition data and a robust sustainability model. Environmental issues are being actively addressed and residents are involved in programming and procurement decisions. Major works are being tailored to tenants needs and a range of improvements are being delivered. Asbestos and other health and safety risks are well managed. However, the level of decent homes and energy efficiency are comparatively low, and tenant involvement in investment decisions is limited. The five-year cyclical maintenance programme is not published and the asset management strategy has some gaps.
- 63 SHP takes a clear and structured approach to stock investment. Its asset management strategy sets out the types and condition of stock and contains a fully costed five-year capital works programme that includes all decent homes works and other works such as external improvements and estate works. The strategy is informed by comprehensive stock condition data that is used to identify priorities and to batch works by street to ensure a fair and cost effective approach. This means that there is a clear framework for making investment decisions.

- 64 Comprehensive and up-to-date stock condition data is being used effectively to inform investment decisions. Since the 2004 stock condition survey, almost a third of the stock has been re-surveyed and data is updated as work is carried out. A full range of information including decent homes elements, energy efficiency ratings and HHSRS<sup>5</sup> criteria can be easily interrogated to provide useful management reports and to identify programme priorities. A robust sustainability modelling tool uses the data along with socio-economic data such as levels of crime and ASB, local facilities, attractiveness and parking to develop 30-year cost projections and to inform the 2009-14 decent homes programme. This identifies four areas where detailed option appraisal is required, and in these areas studies have been commissioned and completed. Data is to be re-validated at the end of this year when the cost modelling and programme is to be updated. Up to date stock condition data ensures that funding is put to the most effective use.
- 65 Environmental sustainability is actively addressed and is having a positive impact for SHP residents and the wider community, although SHP is yet to consult on a draft environmental sustainability policy. All works projects are recycling materials removed from properties and only around 5 per cent of waste goes to landfill. Non-recyclable components are sent to a local bio-mass production unit to be reused as energy for electricity production. SHP is positively contributing to the Councils' sustainability assessment framework to meet local environmental priorities.
- 66 Residents have been involved in procurement and programming decisions and receive clear information about the programme. Residents groups are involved in identifying priorities for the programming of works, and in how to present programme information to residents. All residents are given the opportunity to feedback their views when they receive the programme and the appeals process is explained though there have been none to date. Decent homes steering group members have been involved in interviewing contractors, preparing tender briefs, scoring tenders and selecting the choice of fittings and materials to be offered to tenants. At estate level residents are actively involved in window replacement programmes and external refurbishments. Residents know where they are in the programme and outcomes are more likely to reflect tenant preferences.
- 67 There is a strong customer focus in delivering major works and the needs of disabled and older residents are being addressed. Individual mobility, communication and religious needs and cultural preferences are accommodated. For example, frailer tenants with mobility needs are offered walk in wet room style showers and particular bathing requirements for religious needs are considered. Kitchens are individually designed with the tenant and there is a cooling off period to allow the tenant to change their mind. On site work in sheltered housing has a completion target of 10 days rather than the usual 15 days to minimise disruption to older residents and on-site Resident Liaison Officers are in daily contact with all residents. Residents are receiving a sensitive and responsive service.

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<sup>5</sup> Housing Health and Safety Rating System criteria is used to identify and assess risks in residential property

## How good is the service?

- 68** Major works programmes are delivering positive outcomes for tenants and satisfaction is high. During 2006-09, 174 kitchen and bathroom replacements, 455 door and window replacements, 186 boiler replacements and 123 central heating installations were completed. Almost 1500 properties have been upgraded with digital aerials and 750 have had gas mains renewals, and a number of blocks have been rewired, had communal redecoration and roofing upgrades. 94 per cent of tenants were satisfied with major works in 2008/09. Major works are improving conditions for tenants.
- 69** SHP has an effective approach to managing asbestos. Specialist contractors are used to remove asbestos and a database indicates whether asbestos is, or presumed to be, present based on actual or cloned survey data. It can produce full asbestos reports on a property and be searched by risk type. The register is integrated with the repairs system so that asbestos is automatically indicated on works orders and engineers can access the register to find further details. Staff and contractors receive asbestos training and a useful leaflet for residents gives advice on the safe disposal of asbestos materials. Asbestos risks are being minimised.
- 70** Other health and safety risks are well managed. Ten per cent of properties per year have electrical tests. Communal area lighting, lightning conductors and electrical appliances are annually tested. All lifts are serviced monthly and inspected annually by insurance inspectors. There is an out of hours number for lift breakdowns with a three-hour response time. Fire risk assessments are undertaken by an external contractor in all blocks that identify risks which are being addressed, and legionella testing in communal water tanks is carried out annually. Acute risks not being addressed by the works programmes are reported to the risk and audit committee and Board, but fire risk assessments are yet to be reported. Risks to health and safety are being minimised.
- 71** However, despite the major works that have been completed, the overall level of decent homes is low and has recently declined further. The level of decent homes has increased from 34 to 56 per cent since the ALMO was set up in 2006, but it is still low. At June 2009 the level of non-decent homes is in the worst 25 per cent of ALMOs and is now lower than at the end of 2008/09. The number of tenants living in poor standards of housing is still comparatively high and increasing.
- 72** The energy efficiency of tenants' homes is comparatively low. The average SAP<sup>6</sup> rating improved from 67 in 2006 to 71 in 2009 and has met SHP's target, but this is still low when compared with other ALMOs and London landlords in 2008/09. A partnership programme with a national gas supplier worth up to £2 million for roof and cavity wall insulation is being rolled out to improve the energy efficiency of tenants' homes. Combined with recent upgrades to the mains gas supply and individual meters, tenants will benefit from significant reductions in their energy bills.

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<sup>6</sup> SAP is the standard assessment procedure used to measure how energy efficient a property is

- 73** Tenant engagement in stock investment decisions is limited. Consultation on the Sutton Standard<sup>7</sup> has been limited to the decent homes steering group which involves only a small number of residents. The Standard was reviewed in 2008 and includes double glazing, loft insulation and communal door entry systems but improvements such as bathroom showers which can reduce water consumption are not included, and tenants have not been asked about some design features which may improve the security and attractiveness of the area. Limited engagement restricts residents' influence over investment decisions and opportunities to improve their quality of life can be missed.
- 74** The cyclical works programme is not published or integrated with the main stock condition database and some staff are unaware of it. A five-year cyclical maintenance programme was re-introduced in 2007 and 473 properties have had works completed. Prior to the ALMO, cyclical maintenance was not being carried out resulting in a significant backlog of overdue work. Due to this backlog and funding uncertainties, only an annual programme is published for tenants. The spreadsheet is not integrated and readily accessible to customer service staff and some property service staff are unaware of the programme. As a result, many tenants will not know when their properties and communal areas are to be painted and upgraded.
- 75** The asset management strategy is not comprehensive and the action plan is not fully SMART<sup>8</sup>. It sets out the general condition of the stock and the plans and resources for the five years to 2014, but does not provide a clear overview of supply and demand issues and has not been updated to include the outcomes of recent appraisal work for garages and low demand housing or plans for sheltered housing. It does not include the five-year cyclical maintenance programme. There are no measurable targets for the performance and the action plan is not fully SMART. Without a comprehensive and measurable strategy, residents will not have a clear understanding of what is planned.
- 76** Tenants are not offered the opportunity to have additional works undertaken, at their own cost, at the same time as other improvements. Also, leaseholders are not offered the opportunity of improvements which could present significant cost savings on a kitchen or bathroom installation. Opportunities for residents to make improvements to their homes in a cost-effective way are not being maximised.
- 77** Lift repair response times are not advertised to residents and are not monitored closely. As worksheets do not contain the time of the call out it is not possible to monitor the three-hour response time. Residents may wait longer than necessary and can be inconvenienced by lifts that are not repaired quickly.

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<sup>7</sup> The Sutton Standard sets out general principles around environmental impact, energy efficiency and security, and determines the 'Decent Homes Plus' standard

<sup>8</sup> A SMART plan is specific, measurable, achievable, resourced and timed

## How good is the service?

### Responsive repairs

- 78** In 2008, we found that weaknesses outweighed strengths. Performance on response times and customer appointments remained comparatively low. The level of repairs carried out right first time was not effectively monitored and too many repair orders were varied. Customer focus in repairs recording was not consistent and customer satisfaction had fallen. The ratio of responsive to planned repairs was low and the ALMO had not considered introducing a handyperson service. However, management of repairs and contractors was improving, and the out-of-hours service was effective. Inspection performance and the ratio of emergency repairs to other work were good.
- 79** In this inspection, we found that strengths outweigh weaknesses. A review of the service at the end of 2008 has delivered improvements and tenants receive a prompt and good quality service. Tenant satisfaction with the service is high. Communal repairs are carried out quickly and a cost effective approach is taken to planned and responsive repairs. However, the level of pre- and post-inspections is too high and it often takes too long to carry out the inspections.
- 80** A service review in December 2008 is now resulting in significant service improvements. A range of improvements have been introduced, such as ensuring vans are fully equipped for the most common jobs, using composite rates and monitoring subcontractors more closely. All repairs over £500, plus a further 10 per cent of all other repairs are routinely checked and in 2009 the pass rate has not been below 94 per cent. Satisfaction is routinely measured and overall satisfaction has increased from 68.9 per cent in 2008/09 to 94.3 per cent at September 2009. The number of appointments made and kept has increased from 83.5 per cent in 2008/09 to 98 per cent at June 2009, comparing favourably with other ALMOs. Tenants are receiving an increasingly good quality and responsive service.
- 81** Reporting repairs is easy for most tenants and the service is customer focused. Tenants can report repairs on a widely publicised freephone number, by email or via the website. Call centre staff are trained in diagnosing repairs, and both tenants and staff have a pictorial guide to help report and record repairs accurately. Appointments are offered when a repair is reported with two hour appointment slots, including two evenings a week and Saturdays. Appointment reminders are now sent by text message the day before. Staff use information held on vulnerability and communication needs to make appropriate arrangements for access.
- 82** There are clear response times that in most cases are being exceeded. Repair timescales are publicised in the repairs handbook and on the website. In 2008/09, 97.7 per cent of emergency, 96 per cent of urgent and 95.5 per cent of routine repairs were completed on time, exceeding the targets. Compared with other providers these times are at, or just above, average. Since the 2008 service review response times have improved further with 98.6 per cent of repairs at June 2009 being completed on time, so tenants' repair problems are now being resolved quickly.

- 83** Communal repairs are carried out quickly and resident satisfaction is increasing. In 2008/09, 96 per cent of communal repairs were completed in time and this has increased to 99.5 per cent at September 2009. A new 'man in a van' scheme is being trialled where a multi-skilled operative pro-actively inspects communal areas for repairs and carries out smaller jobs immediately, to date saving 20-30 per cent in labour costs. Resident inspectors are carrying out post-inspections of communal repairs and satisfaction rates are improving, increasing from 66.6 per cent in 2008/09 to 81.7 per cent at September 2009.
- 84** A cost effective approach to responsive repairs is evident. Since the review, common replacement orders are 'batched' to secure savings, for example on window replacements. This year a £250,000 budget has been ring-fenced for planned responsive repairs. New composite schedules of rates are reducing variations and increasing the number of jobs completed at first visit as over 60 per cent of operatives are multi-skilled. A cost effective ratio of 70:30 for planned and responsive repairs is being achieved and less than 20 per cent of expenditure is on emergency and urgent repairs. This approach improves customer service and overall service efficiency.
- 85** However, the level of pre and post inspections of repairs orders is high and inefficient. Around 18 per cent of repairs are pre-inspected with only 71.77 per cent completed within the target ten days in 2008/09 (since improved to around 90 per cent). SHP's reason for pre-inspecting so many jobs is to help manage tenants' expectations, as tenants increasingly want replacements rather than repairs. In 2008/09 15.3 per cent of repairs were post inspected and 13 per cent at September 2009. However, these inspections result in delays to work being carried out or add to the overall costs.
- 86** The number of repairs that are completed right first time is still comparatively low. In 2008/09 performance was at 84 per cent and while this has increased to 90.3 per cent at June 2009 this is still low compared with 95 per cent achieved by the best 25 per cent of ALMOs. Multiple visits are costly and inconvenient for tenants.

### Empty (void) property repairs

- 87** In 2008, we found that weaknesses outweighed strengths. Performance had deteriorated and was not effectively analysed. The quality of void works was inconsistent. Customers did not receive timely information on void standards and decoration assistance was not suitable for everyone. However, there was a reasonable approach to bringing properties up to the decent homes standard, decoration vouchers provided customers with good value and the use of metal sheeting was minimised.
- 88** In this inspection, we found that strengths and weaknesses are in balance. Empty homes are being re-let quickly, rent loss is low, and the condition of properties has benefited from an increased budget. However, the lettings standard has not been reviewed despite ongoing tenant dissatisfaction, although some recent changes have been made without consultation. Average void costs are high and new tenants' satisfaction with the condition of property is low.

## How good is the service?

- 89** SHP is now re-letting empty properties quickly. Performance has improved from an average of 26 days in 2008/09 to 24.4 days by the end of June 2009 which is among the best 25 per cent of ALMOs. An analysis of the process has resulted in better coordination between teams and more efficient practice. For example, rehousing officers focus on advertising the property at the same time as repairs are being arranged. Where a property does not meet the decent homes standard there is flexibility to bring work forward depending on where it is in the programme. Repairs now take an average of 14.5 days including major repairs such as re-wiring and asbestos removal, and lost rental income due to empty properties is low at 1.1 per cent. Re-letting properties quickly is an efficient use of resources.
- 90** A basic lettings standard is in place and appropriate checks are made before a property is re-let. Checks are made against the lettings standard and those we inspected were in reasonable condition. Gas supplies and energy performance are checked and incoming tenants are given gas safety and energy performance certificates. About 12 per cent of properties that are ready to let are inspected, but before this year, SHP was not always able to meet the letting standard. The voids repairs budget has been increased by £250,000 to resolve this problem. New tenants are given a list of all works that should have been completed which they are asked to confirm. More tenants are being let homes in a satisfactory condition.
- 91** However, the lettings standard is not regularly reviewed with tenants and satisfaction among new tenants with condition of the property is low. The promotion of the standard has increased but it has not been reviewed with tenants since 2007 despite low levels of satisfaction with the condition of property and décor over the past two years. Only 80 per cent of new tenants are satisfied with the condition of their property in 2009/10, a decrease from 86 per cent in 2008/09. Much of the dissatisfaction is around the standard of decoration. Very recent changes such as the inclusion of grass cutting have been made without consultation. The standard may not be meeting tenants' expectations or ensuring that tenants move in to homes in good condition.
- 92** Arrangements for re-decorating empty properties are unclear and decoration allowances are inadequate. Tenants have been consulted on the use of vouchers but not on their value. £25 is allowed for rooms with a 'poor' standard of decor, which tenants have not been consulted on and is not an adequate amount to buy paint and other materials. SHP will re-decorate by exception if a property does not fall within the criteria set out in the lettings standard (for example where a room is badly nicotine stained) but this is at the surveyors' discretion and is not publicised. Benchmarking of decoration allowances has been ad hoc and not used effectively. Tenants may be receiving different levels of service and many may be unable to re-decorate.
- 93** The average cost of voids is comparatively high. Average void costs in 2007/08 and 2008/09 were £2,617 and £1,983 respectively which in 2008/09 was among the second lowest 25 per cent of ALMOs.
- 94** The level of pre-termination visits is low and the importance of undertaking the visits is not effectively promoted to tenants. Approximately 15 visits per month are undertaken although this is not closely monitored. Where they are undertaken outgoing tenants are advised about re-charging and what is to be removed. Tenants are not always informed about likely re-charges when they terminate their tenancy.

### Gas servicing

- 95** In 2008, we found that strengths outweighed weaknesses. Performance was strong and well managed and the service, which was generally customer focused, was well promoted. Access arrangements were comprehensive and data held effectively. However, servicing arrangements were not offered to leaseholders and there were no effective procedures for tenants who slept in rooms with gas appliances.
- 96** In this inspection, we found that strengths still outweigh weaknesses. The service is well managed with good performance and clear procedures for gaining access and dealing with unsafe situations, such as tenants sleeping in rooms with gas appliances. Quality checks are conducted and the service is widely publicised. It is also promoted to leaseholders, but take up is low. The overdue servicing alert is not on all systems and benchmarking is limited.
- 97** Gas safety and servicing is widely promoted to tenants and appointments are flexible to maximise access. 'Let Us In' posters, reception screens, regular newsletter articles and information displays at resident events promote the service. Daytime, evening and weekend appointments are available and cold calls are also made. At the third attempt to gain access, a copy of the poster is sent with the letter and 'Let Us In' stickers are placed across the keyhole. Good information ensures that tenants are aware of the importance gas servicing.
- 98** Gas safety performance is high and closely monitored. A gas contractor undertakes gas servicing, boiler repairs, communal boiler house repairs and maintenance of water tanks. Performance is monitored at monthly meetings and at October 2009, 99.7 per cent of properties have a valid gas safety certificate. Of the 15 properties with an expired certificate, 3 are less than one week and 10 less than six weeks over due. The longest overdue is 9 months where access has been due to mental health issues, but appropriate legal action is being pursued in all cases. A quarterly partnership board involving residents reviews the service and plans improvements such as reminder calls the day before the appointment. Gas safety certificates are checked for Gas Safe license numbers and properties with expired certificates are closely monitored. Gas related risks to residents' safety are being minimised.
- 99** Clear gas policy and procedures reflect good practice. They cover the approach to gas safety and access for servicing, the use of carbon monoxide (CO) detectors and unsafe situations where a resident is sleeping in rooms containing gas appliances. Tenants are written to at seven weeks and four weeks before the expiry of the safety certificate; and 85 per cent of tenants respond to these first two contacts. CO alarms are installed where specific risks such as open flue appliances are known or as part of a wiring replacement programme and the alarms are serviced as part of the annual gas check. Injunctions are sought where there has been no response to the final letter and service limiters are installed where legal action has been required. Clear policies and procedures help to deliver a consistently good service.

## How good is the service?

- 100** A system of quality checks is robust, gas repairs are carried out quickly and satisfaction is high. Ten per cent of gas services and 5 to 10 per cent of installations are checked by an independent contractor who also surveys for satisfaction which is usually 100 per cent. In addition, the gas contractor post-inspects all boiler replacements. Almost 99 per cent of winter repairs with a 24 hour response target and 95.6 per cent of gas repairs overall are completed on time. Tenants are receiving a high quality service.
- 101** There are a few weaknesses in the day to day operation of the service. For example, engineers are not consistently showing identification to tenants, and overdue servicing is only flagged on the repairs system, and not the housing management system for all staff that may be in contact with the tenant to see. Responsibilities of all staff in assisting with access are not included in the gas safety policy. Opportunities to make appointments for access are not being maximised.
- 102** Promotion of the service to leaseholders is limited and take up is low. No specific literature has been targeted at leaseholders but information is available on the website and is to be included with letters to be sent about decent homes works. A lack of gas servicing in leasehold properties increases the safety risks for all residents.
- 103** Benchmarking in gas services is limited. Comparisons of gas servicing costs with a small number of providers have been made but contractor performance and quality of service have not been compared. Costs for boiler replacement were compared and value for money assessed when the contract was re-tendered in 2008. SHP does not have a full understanding of how this service compares with others to identify further improvements.

## Aids and adaptations

- 104** In 2008, we found that strengths outweighed weaknesses. Adaptations were provided quickly and the service was generally customer focused, reflected in 100 per cent overall satisfaction. It was being enhanced by the secondment of an occupational therapist (OT) and performance was strong, and effectively managed. SHP recycled adaptation equipment. However, it was not always ensuring high quality work.
- 105** In this inspection, we found that strengths and weaknesses are in balance. The service is widely promoted and partners work well together to deliver the service. Adaptations are completed relatively quickly and satisfaction with the works is high. However, there are no policies or procedures, few service standards and no customer involvement. SHP has not considered the level of service to be offered to all tenants and different levels of service are available. SHP cannot demonstrate that the service is delivering value for money.
- 106** The adaptations service is widely promoted. A service leaflet (and audio version for visually impaired residents) is sent to all households known to have a disabled resident, and is widely distributed with a poster to doctors surgeries, libraries and other access points. Residents can self-refer by completing a referral form, online, by calling the social services access team or SHP staff will visit tenants at home. It is easy for tenants to access the service.

- 107** Partners work well together to deliver the service. There is regular liaison between the three partners involved in the service. A dedicated Occupational Therapist (OT) is based part-time in SHP offices to oversee liaison between SHP and the OT service, as well as undertake some of the assessments. SHP also works with 'Sutton Staying Put' that carries out the surveying, design and work specification. The arrangement is overseen by an operational protocol, and regular operational and strategic meetings between the partners monitor service performance. A well coordinated service is available to tenants.
- 108** The service is well resourced and works are carried out relatively quickly. Budgets are based on the previous years' completions and have always been sufficient to meet demand. There is no waiting list for an initial assessment (although some applicants do not receive the initial assessment within the published times). Minor adaptations are delivered on average within 3 working days against a target of 7 days, with 698 minor adaptations completed since April 2007. The average time for major works to be completed is 12 weeks against a target of 18 weeks (2008/09). Tenants' quality of life is improved quickly with a responsive service.
- 109** The quality of works and satisfaction with adaptations is high. All major works are post-inspected by SHP and 100 per cent of tenants surveyed are satisfied with the adaptations made to their home. Tenants' quality of life is being enhanced.
- 110** Adapted properties are being effectively used and adaptations are being re-cycled. A register of properties is kept and matched with disabled applicants through the Disabled Housing Panel (see the Allocations and Lettings section). A specialist chair lift supplier removes, refurbishes and stores chair lifts for re-use, which saves around £900 per installation. Fifteen stair lifts have been installed in the past three years saving approximately £13, 500. This approach is reducing costs and making greater use of properties and equipment.
- 111** However, information for tenants is not clear. The service leaflet is confusing and does not have a process 'map' to clearly explain what happens following an initial enquiry. The self-referral form is not SHP branded and is overly complicated. Without clear information, tenants may not know what to expect and may be deterred from applying.
- 112** There is no policy or procedures for the aids and adaptations service. There is no overarching policy to set out the level of service to be offered or procedures to guide staff. SHP has not explored with its tenants the standard of service and care that could be offered to better meet its tenants' needs'. For example, shower facilities are currently only considered for very severely disabled people, even though such facilities may better meet the needs of other frail or disabled tenants, and tenants receiving adaptations as part of decent homes works are offered level access showers. Tenants and staff may be unclear about what is available and some tenants receive different levels of service.

## How good is the service?

- 113** Service standards and targets are limited. There are no standards relating to the quality of the service, and no target for the overall timescale from initial inquiry until completion of works. Not all stages, such as surveying and approval of works, have target timescales, so while approved works are completed quickly, some tenants wait more than 18 months overall for the adaptation. A lack of standards and targets for all stages of the service means that tenants do not know what quality of service they should receive, or how quickly.
- 114** Resident involvement and satisfaction monitoring is limited. Residents have not been involved in agreeing service levels, standards and timescales, and the only feedback is via satisfaction surveys. While customer satisfaction is positive, it is limited to major adaptations, and customers are not asked about satisfaction with the overall service or overall waiting time. SHP does not have a full understanding of tenants' views of the aids and adaptations service.
- 115** SHP does not know if the aids and adaptations service is delivering value for money. SHP has not tendered its contract with SSP to ensure value for money. Its 15 per cent contract fee has not been reviewed, is not subject to performance measures, and there are no efficiency targets for the service. While some benchmarking data is collected it is not used to review costs and quality of the service to identify improvements.

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## Housing income management

- 116** In 2008, we found that strengths and weaknesses were balanced. Rent accounting procedures were sound and customers were offered a wide choice of payments. The ALMO had a good relationship with housing benefits and had increased customer incomes through money advice. There was an emerging focus on arrears prevention, though this was underdeveloped, as SHP did not have a robust strategic approach to financial inclusion. Information for customers on future rents was poor and service charge uplift arrangements were not robust. Performance was variable and the ALMO was not effectively profiling debts to target resources.
- 117** In this inspection, we found that strengths outweigh weaknesses. It is easy for tenants to make rent payments and clear information is provided about rents and service charges. Rent accounts are set up quickly and arrears levels are fairly low and SHP is working well with partners to provide debt advice. However, the number of evictions, former tenancy arrears and write-offs are comparatively high and the outcomes from targeting services and financial inclusion work are limited.
- 118** It is easy for tenants to pay their rent and service charges and collection rates are high. A range of payment options are provided, including cash at the office, online, by payment card at the post office, by standing order or direct debit. In the three years from April 2006 to March 2009 rent collection has been above collection targets with over 100 per cent being collected each year. Incentive prize draws are held for paying by direct debit and maintaining a clear rent account, although many tenants are unaware of them. Easy payment options reduce the chance of missed payments.

- 119** Tenants receive regular information about their rent accounts. Quarterly rent statements are sent that show a combined amount for rent and service charges. Based on customer feedback the layout of the rent statement and initial arrears letters has been revised to make them clearer. Staff are able to access accounts electronically to provide up to date information and advice, and from January 2010 on-line rent statements will be available which will improve tenants' access to their rent accounts. Regular information helps tenants to keep track of payments and charges.
- 120** SHP provides clear information to tenants about how their rent and service charges are calculated. An itemised 'Tenancy Details Notification' is sent to tenants at the start of each financial year, detailing rent, water rates, service and support charges. Tenants are written to 28 days before annual rent increases and letters set out revised rent, service and heating charges. This year service charges are calculated by block, based on the actual service provided. This has reduced the costs for most tenants, but about 400 tenants now have to pay higher charges. However, the Council agreed to cap the increase to £3.00 per week per year until the actual cost has been increased. Clear information shows tenants what they are paying for.
- 121** Rent accounting processes are sound. Accounts are set up in advance of the tenancy sign up and new tenants are given an estimate of the rent they are to pay if they qualify for housing benefit. Rent payments for the first week are taken at the sign-up and tenants are encouraged to make regular payments. Changes to the rent accounts are made daily and the IT system then balances all accounts over the weekend. This means that there is always up-to-date information available.
- 122** Other debts are accounted for separately and are being effectively managed. A new dedicated garages officer was appointed in August 2009 to manage the provision of garages including income collection. In the first three months garage arrears reduced from £18,362 to £10,752, and the target of reducing arrears to £9,000 by February 2010 is likely to be exceeded. Twenty vacant garages have been let which is generating more rental income. In 2008/09, 13.4 per cent of rechargeable debts were collected which compares well with other landlords and in 2009/10 £20,000 has been collected to date which is above the 20 per cent collection target. SHP is maximising its potential for collecting income from all services.
- 123** SHP has developed effective working relationships with key agencies to support the arrears recovery process. There is a strong relationship and liaison with the housing benefits department and it is easy for SHP officers to resolve issues. SHP also works closely with the courts and court users groups to ensure that legal action is progressed without avoidable delays, and makes possession claims online. This helps to minimise unavoidable rent arrears as court action is completed quickly.

## How good is the service?

- 124** Arrears are being actively managed and are at a satisfactory level. In 2008/09 arrears were 2.7 per cent of the rent due which is among the second best 25 per cent of London ALMOs. Comparatively low numbers of tenants owe more than seven weeks rent (5.4 per cent). The housing management system produces arrears information that includes arrears at or over £25 and indicates the action to be taken. Actions are agreed by income managers before letters are sent to tenants, so that letters and action can be tailored to the tenants' specific situation. Income managers work evenings once a month to contact tenants in arrears, estate surgeries are held and staff help tenants with housing benefit problems and use diary reminders to contact tenants to ensure debt repayment agreements are kept. Tenants are receiving a responsive service that is helping to ensure debts are minimised.
- 125** Prevention action is having an impact. Introductory tenancies and revised sign up procedures focus on the importance of rent payment and income officers are now involved in new tenant sign-ups. Tenants are contacted as soon as they fall into arrears, and a settling in visit six weeks after the tenancy starts reinforces the importance of paying rent. Rent arrears in new tenancies have reduced by almost half since introductory tenancies were introduced, with the average arrears level for new tenancies at around £70 as opposed to £135 previously. New tenants are avoiding building up rent arrears.
- 126** SHP is working closely with partners to provide welfare benefit and debt advice. SHP provides debt advice to tenants with rent arrears including a number of estate surgeries. It also signposts to partner agencies that provide debt advice. Partners are positive about the efforts SHP makes to help its tenants with debt issues. A debt advice leaflet now includes sample letters for tenants to complete and send to companies they owe money to. Tenants have a choice of independent advice and support and are helped with managing their debts.
- 127** Despite a commitment to repossession as a last resort, eviction levels are comparatively high. SHP evicted 26 tenants in 2008/09 (or 0.4 per cent, which is high compared to many other landlords), and 12 have been evicted in 2009/10 to date. While these tenants are offered numerous opportunities to resolve the debt and offered support to manage and maximise their finances, it does indicate that in some cases early intervention and debt advice has not been effective.
- 128** A new focus on financial inclusion and the provision of debt advice has delivered few outcomes to date. A financial inclusion strategy provides a framework for this work, and a credit union is being set up but is not yet operational. A new service level agreement with the Citizens Advice Bureau (CAB) provides fast track access to its services for tenants in rent arrears. Fourteen referrals have been made since April 2009 but only two tenants have attended, so its impact to date has been minimal.
- 129** Targeting services using profile data has also had limited impact. Analysis of tenants in arrears found that some BME groups have higher arrears, so over 300 BME tenants were sent information for specific financial advice and debt counselling, but only five took up the offer, and only two tenants attended a 'managing your money' course. Further courses are planned and under-25 year olds are to be targeted with specialist debt advice, but if services are not being delivered in a way that is appealing to tenants, take up may remain low.

**130** Former tenants' arrears (FTAs) are high. Despite sound processes to recover FTAs they remain high at 3.1 per cent of the rent roll in 2008/09 which is among the worst 25 per cent of London providers. Where repayment agreements are made, these are regularly monitored to ensure that the payment plan is being kept to. SHP uses a tracing agency to contact former tenants and a debt collection agency if no contact is made. Write off is considered when all avenues to reclaim the debt are exhausted or if there are extenuating circumstances and in 2008/09 0.9 per cent of rent was written off which is comparatively high. Loss of income from former tenants affects resources available for current services.

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### Resident involvement

**131** In 2008, we found that strengths and weaknesses were balanced. SHP had started to develop a wider range of involvement opportunities and was reaching out to traditionally hard to reach communities. It showed that it valued and responded to customer feedback. However, it had a weak overall strategic approach and a poor tenant compact. Residents were not sufficiently leading the agenda to decide levels of involvement and satisfaction was not strong.

**132** In this inspection, we found that strengths and weaknesses are still in balance. A high quality involvement compact provides a clear framework and standards for involvement. Residents have a range of formal and informal mechanisms to get involved and their involvement is well resourced and having a positive impact on service improvement. However, there is limited success in engaging a larger and more diverse range of tenants, involvement in strategic decisions is limited and satisfaction with opportunities to participate is low.

**133** SHP has a clear commitment and approach to involving its residents. A high quality involvement compact, recently drawn up in consultation with residents, sets out the ways to get involved and anticipated benefits, and includes the likely time commitment for each activity. It has clear standards for staff supporting activities and is bringing about a culture change as staff are required to be involved in at least one resident activity each year. As a result resident involvement is increasingly seen as an integral part of service improvement.

**134** A good range of formal and informal mechanisms are providing opportunities for involvement to residents. Formal structures include a number of local tenant and residents associations (TRAs), plus the Sutton leaseholders' association (SLA) and the Sutton Federation of TRAs (SFTRA). In addition SHP has a resident-led Service Improvement Group (SIG) that oversees the service improvement plan, a repairs improvement group and a decent homes steering group. A 'sounding board' offers six further activities of repairs inspections, walkabouts, reading panels, mystery shopping, focus groups and community events. By involving residents, service improvements are more likely to meet residents' needs.

## How good is the service?

- 135** There is an open and positive working relationship with SFTRA, the SLA and the SIG. SIG members regularly meet with managers to discuss issues and the Chair of the Board has encouraged SFTRA and SLA to give their views at Board meetings. Managers attend residents' meetings, local estate festivals and fun days and involved residents feel that SHP is a listening organisation and is open to residents' ideas. Having a clear understanding of residents' views helps to inform decisions when allocating resources.
- 136** Resident involvement is well resourced. A team of three staff support involvement work and SFTRA and SLA have a room off of the main reception so residents can easily contact them. The resident involvement budget has increased in 2009/10 from £23,800 to £27,400, resulting in more activities including an extensive training programme, lobbying activities, incentives for mystery shopping and better provision for child care expenses. These resources allow residents to be meaningfully engaged in the organisation.
- 137** Resident involvement is improving services. TRAs have been involved in identifying budget priorities and residents were chose from a list of options at a conference and online. Resident input has influenced improvements such as the box bathroom replacements, extended opening hours, and introductory tenancies to reduce ASB. Resident inspections, mystery shopping and focus groups have led to estate improvements including lighting, fly-tipping removal, and better reception services. SFTRA executive officers represent tenants' interests on the local strategic partnership and attend performance meetings between the Council and the ALMO. It is also involved in campaigning, for example around the deferral of decent homes funding.
- 138** A comprehensive training programme developed with residents, is available, although attendance is not always high. The training budget has increased from £1,000 to £10,000 in 2009/10, and a wide range of courses are on offer and training is held at different times to make it more accessible. Low cost courses in creative writing and IT were held and one young resident is now writing for the 'HomeFront' newsletter. Investing in training develops residents' skills and confidence.
- 139** SHP has had limited success in its efforts to engage a wider and more diverse range of tenants. Formal engagement structures such as the TRAs and the SIG are not representative. The new compact requires resident groups to work towards being representative and SHP has begun to share estate profile data with TRAs, but there are few outcomes for engaging those who have not traditionally been involved. Over 1,000 residents expressed an interest in being involved as part of the 'sounding board' but a far smaller number have actually been involved. While the diversity profile of the 'sounding board' is known, it is not analysed fully to identify and target those who are under-represented. Limited diversity can mean some views and perspectives are not expressed or fully understood.

**140** Wider engagement on key strategic issues is often limited and tenant satisfaction with opportunities for participation in decision making is low. SHP relies on the input and views of a small number of active residents in making key decisions such as investment decisions about 'decent homes plus' work. In 2008/09 only 43.3per cent of tenants overall, which compares poorly with other providers, and only 37 per cent of tenants under 59 years old were satisfied with the opportunities to participate. Without wider engagement, residents' ability to influence decisions which may impact on them for many years ahead is restricted.

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### Tenancy and estate management

#### Tenancy Management

**141** In 2008, we found that strengths outweighed weaknesses. Tenancy sustainability was a priority. Anti-social behaviour (ASB) was given a high profile and cases were generally managed effectively, in liaison with partner organisations. Steps were taken to avoid the need for legal action and to organise diversionary activities. SHP promoted the service well, building customer confidence and its performance was strong, overall. However, it had only just started using introductory tenancies and did not offer a 24-hour responsive service. It was not always using hotspot data to target resources and satisfaction levels had fallen. It showed mixed effectiveness in supporting victims of domestic violence and other hate crime.

**142** In this inspection, we found that strengths still outweigh weaknesses. Tenants are given information and support to sustain their tenancies and introductory tenancies are having a positive impact. ASB is being effectively addressed with partners using a range of methods and diversionary activities. The service is well promoted and easy to access with support for victims and witnesses. However, not all new tenants are receiving early visits and tenancy fraud is not being addressed effectively. The impact of some activities is not effectively evaluated and outcomes are not fully promoted.

**143** Tenants are given clear information about their rights and responsibilities and vulnerable tenants are supported to maintain their tenancies. ASB is outlined in the tenancy agreement and a comprehensive tenant handbook sets out the tenancy conditions and is regularly updated to reflect changes in legislation and regulations. All tenants receive a 'good neighbour agreement' and are to be visited after six weeks of the sign up. Support needs are assessed at sign up stage and at the six week visit and various support services are contacted to offer support where needed and accepted. Good information and support helps tenants to avoid eviction.

**144** Introductory tenancies are having a positive impact. At April 2009, of 90 new tenants, 69 per cent became secure tenants at the end of the 12 month introductory period, 29 per cent had the introductory period extended and 2 per cent have been evicted. Since April 2009 five new tenants with introductory tenancies have been served with notices for possession because of ASB. Introductory tenants are less likely to breach their tenancy conditions and their neighbours are less likely to experience ASB.

## How good is the service?

- 145** There are clear and comprehensive ASB procedures and the service is well publicised to residents and relatively easy to access. ASB procedures are clearly explained in a leaflet and on the website including response times, although there is no reporting facility on the website. Reports of ASB can be made by telephone or in person and customer services officers are able to take initial reports or refer to an ASB officer. Once a case is being investigated residents are issued with diary sheets and contacted on a regular basis to keep them informed. Clear procedures ensure residents know how to report ASB and how it will be investigated.
- 146** A wide range of methods are used to prevent and tackle ASB. There is a clear focus on prevention which has resulted in ASBOs and ABCs rarely having to be used. Mediation is helping to resolve issues at an early stage; since 2006, 25 out of 70 case referrals have reached successful agreements, and all cases were closed following mediation, home visits or other forms of contact. CCTV and spy-hole cameras are used to prevent ASB and collect evidence where it does occur. Community cohesion and diversionary activities are helping to prevent ASB, such as a 'Kickz' football project, trips to an assault course, planting days, mini Olympics and intergenerational IT activities in sheltered schemes. A festival day at St Helier attracted over 2,000 local residents and feedback gathered has been used to inform many service developments. Such activities increase a sense of community and can reduce ASB issues.
- 147** Partnership working is helping to reduce ASB on estates. Partners include the police, children and families, mediation and environmental health services and the local race equality council. The agencies share intelligence to map 'hot spots', to identify issues, assess strategies to deal with them, to target resources and to monitor progress. Positive outcomes include evictions and a premises closure order for drug and alcohol related offences; the re-location of troublesome youths leading to a reduction in ASB on one estate; eradicating recurring graffiti problems through identifying and arresting perpetrators; a dog register and free dog identity chips for pets which has reduced dog fouling, and police liaison helped secure £10,000 for better lighting on another estate. Tenants are clearly benefiting from this coordinated partnership approach.
- 148** A wide range of support services are available to the victims and witnesses of ASB. Where applicable referrals are made to social services, Victim Support, the race equality council and Sutton's women's refuge, with 16 referrals made to the refuge this year. Witnesses are supported to attend court and additional security for the home is provided if necessary. Support is also made available to perpetrators to encourage behavioural change, and some vulnerable people have been supported to move away from the area where they are negatively influenced by others to allow drug taking in their home. Support for those affected by ASB helps to manage and reduce it.
- 149** ASB cases are being responded to promptly, and files are generally well managed. In 2008/09, in 96.4 per cent of the most serious, 'category one', cases, contact was made within the target of 48 hours, and 93.3 per cent of category two cases were responded to within five working days, improving to 100 per cent for both categories in 2009/10. Letters sent to victims or perpetrators are generally well written and most make the next steps clear, including if the case is to be closed. Residents are receiving a prompt response to their concerns.

- 150** Performance for handling and resolving ASB is satisfactory. In 2008/09 75.7 per cent of ASB cases were successfully resolved which is among the best 25 per cent of London ALMOs, though this dropped to 50.8 per cent during April to June 2009. Over 68 per cent of residents were satisfied with the handling of ASB cases in 2008/09 and 59.6 per cent were satisfied with the outcome; these ratings are among the second best 25 per cent of London ALMOs, and performance for both has improved during 2009/10 to around 70 per cent.
- 151** However, new tenants are not all being visited at an early stage. Only around three-quarters of tenants are being visited within six weeks of starting their tenancy, so not all new tenants are systematically receiving support to help with tenancy issues, and vulnerable tenants may be at greater risk of losing their tenancies as a result.
- 152** ASB outcomes are not effectively reported to residents. Information about how effectively ASB cases are being resolved is not being regularly shared with residents in either the newsletter or on the website. Sharing information about how ASB is resolved can encourage residents to report it and deter potential perpetrators.
- 153** Diversionary and other activities are not systematically evaluated for their impact on ASB levels and evidence of specific outcomes from diversionary work is limited. A clear approach with systematic evaluation ensures that resources are used more effectively for activities that are known to have an impact.
- 154** Tenancy fraud is not being effectively addressed. Some checks at sign up and new tenancy visits are carried out but until this year there has been no systematic programme of tenancy audits to help identify tenancy fraud. In 2009/10, 900 tenants who have not had contact with SHP for over a year are being prioritised for tenancy audits, but progress has been slow as only 289 have actually been audited. In the past two years illegal sub letting has only been identified in two properties. Tenancy fraud can reduce housing opportunities for residents in greater need.

### Estate Management

- 155** In 2008, we found that strengths outweighed weaknesses. Estates were generally clean and tidy and caretaking staff were having a positive impact on schemes. Although not yet fully maximised, the way the service was delivered was being enhanced to provide better outcomes, reflected in strong and growing customer satisfaction. However, there was only emerging work to design out crime and there had been limited resident involvement in setting scheme standards. SHP also had no garage management strategy.
- 156** In this inspection, we found that strengths still outweigh weaknesses. Estates are generally in good condition and the introduction of mobile teams has resulted in a more flexible and fast response. Garages and regeneration estates are being well managed and environmental issues are being addressed. However, many aspects of the service are expensive and resident involvement in inspections is inconsistent, information is not reported back to all residents and satisfaction levels are comparatively low.

## How good is the service?

- 157** Estates are generally kept in good condition and are being improved. Grass is cut and rubbish, bulk refuse and graffiti is quickly removed once reported. In 2008/09 racist and other offensive graffiti was on average removed within 24 hours and other graffiti within 10.8 calendar days. Bulk refuse is removed quickly, usually within five working days. Residents enjoy the benefits of well maintained estates.
- 158** A review of estate services in 2008 has led to some tangible improvements. Larger estates have their own dedicated staff teams and smaller estates have flexible estate teams leading to a more responsive service. For example, during heavy snowfall in early 2009 teams were able to respond quickly and focus on clearing areas where the most vulnerable tenants lived. New cleaning schedules allow time for staff to focus on areas with particular issues. Teams are multi-disciplined so a wider variety of estate management tasks can be responded to immediately. Resources are being maximised and residents are receiving a more responsive service.
- 159** Performance on neighbourhood inspections is reasonable and residents are kept informed about performance. Ground maintenance rotas and performance measures are displayed on estate notice boards. Work is signed off when completed and performance is published and contractors often attend TRA meetings to discuss results. In 2008/09 standards were judged to be fair, good or excellent in 95.35 per cent of inspections (just below the target of 95.5 per cent). Over 98 per cent of inspections were completed on time in 2008/09 and scores have steadily improved since 2006, with the most common issues being concerned with rose pruning and weeding.
- 160** Resident consultation and estate action plans are delivering benefits. Quarterly 'enviro-watch' surveys are being conducted by consultants block by block and results are published in estate newsletters. Outcomes for residents include resolving an ongoing drainage problem, clearance of overgrown shrubs and changes in frequency of cleaning. Estate action plans have included bike racks, bollards to stop illegal parking, garage refurbishment, planting areas and picnic benches, improved lighting, dropped kerbs, rotary driers and play areas. Well maintained and attractive estates help to improve residents' quality of life.
- 161** Problems on regeneration estates are being managed well. The largest scheme at Durand Close is being developed in three phases to deliver 825 new homes. Problems that occurred as properties became empty and boarded up have been addressed in consultation with residents. For example, broken windows are being repaired, a graffiti wall has been set up, and the police are enforcing a 'no drinking' zone. A street athletics day was held in 2008 and a fun day in 2009. Disruption and ASB to remaining residents is being minimised during regeneration.
- 162** Problems with garage sites are being effectively addressed. SHP manages 1,509 garages, but a historic lack of investment has resulted in many being run down and neglected, attracting anti-social behaviour such as fly tipping, graffiti and fires. £80,000 has been invested to clear up garage areas and where feasible re-let them. 824 are let with a target to increase this to 900 this year; 20 garages have been let so far and community payback workers have been engaged to clear sites. Well managed garages improve estate security and generate rental income.

- 163** Environmental sustainability issues are being actively addressed. Contractors use low carbon machinery, recycle waste, and use green friendly pesticides. Most blocks have recycling bins, and discarded fridges and TVs are now being recycled in partnership with a local charity. Tree waste is recycled as chippings for use on shrub beds. Local targets for reductions in carbon emissions are being supported.
- 164** Action is taken to help design out crime. Partner agencies are involved in designing out crime initiatives on some estates. For example, £5,000 from the Safer Sutton Partnership was secured to install railings on walls to reduce alcohol-related ASB and £26,000 Council funding fenced off a park which borders onto an estate. Extra street lighting and gated alleyways have increased security on some estates. By improving estate design, tenants can enjoy a safer living environment.
- 165** However, service costs are comparatively high. Direct costs per property and overhead costs for estates services compare well for 2008/09 being in the best and second best 25 per cent of London ALMOs respectively. However, specific service costs are high when compared with all ALMOs. For example, cleaning and ground maintenance services costs per property based on the number of properties receiving the service, were both in the second lowest 25 per cent in 2008/09. The bulk refuse service is also expensive as disposal charges have increased annually since the ALMO was set up, and efforts to improve value for money have had limited impact on overall service costs. Tenants may not be receiving best value for money for this service.
- 166** Residents are not consistently involved in neighbourhood or site inspections and the results and follow up actions and timescales of these and from the enviro-watch surveys are not widely published. The number of neighbourhood inspections that include residents declined in 2008/09 but there has been some mystery shopping of estates with spot checks of cleaning and caretaking. Inspection outcomes are fed back to TRAs where they exist and to any residents attending the inspections but not to the wider resident group. Resident involvement provides independent scrutiny of estates standards.
- 167** Tenant satisfaction with estates services and the area as a place to live is not high compared with the best performing landlords. 73 per cent of residents' are very or fairly satisfied with their neighbourhood as a place to live which places SHP 11th out of 24 other providers (2008 STATUS survey). At 31st March 2009 only 75.7 per cent of tenants are satisfied with estate services. Between December 2008 and March 2009 satisfaction increased for grounds maintenance and cleaning but decreased for graffiti and bulk waste removal. The average time for collecting bulk waste increased from six working days in 2007/08 to 8.6 working days in 2008/09. Some tenants' expectations for their estates are not being met.

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### Leasehold management and Right to Buy

- 168** In 2008, we found that weaknesses outweighed strengths. Leaseholder satisfaction was poor. Information for leaseholders on their service charges was not customer focused and there was no plain English lease. There were significant weaknesses in leaseholder involvement, particularly with regard to future major work proposals and subsequent payment arrangements. However, SHP had responded to most aspects of the satisfaction results and leaseholders now had a single point of contact, improving the response to enquiries. Service charge calculation continued to be robust.
- 169** In this inspection, we found that strengths outweigh weaknesses. Leaseholders receive a wide range of clear information about services and standards and satisfaction with the service is now relatively high. Consultation and resident involvement is improving services. Service charge estimates are reasonably accurate and payment options are flexible. However, service charge bills were sent out late last year, so collection rates are low. SHP does not have a full understanding of leaseholders' needs and does not adequately report on its performance to them.
- 170** Up to date information for leaseholders is widely available and easy to understand. Service charge information for 2008/09 is clearly explained. A plain English guide to the lease, a comprehensive leaseholders' handbook and a leaseholder section on the web site provide good quality information. Leaseholders can access all the information that they may need.
- 171** Clear service standards are in place that are agreed with leaseholders. Corporate service standards apply equally to leaseholders but additional standards specific to leaseholder services, such as pre-assignment enquiries and consultation on major works, are included in the leaseholders handbook. Leaseholders know what level of service to expect.
- 172** Satisfaction with leaseholder services is relatively high and complaints are low. The leasehold management team provides services to 1,367 leaseholders. Satisfaction with the service has improved from 36.2 per cent in 2007 to 45.4 per cent in 2009 which compares well with other landlords. Satisfaction across all areas has improved, including the condition of the blocks, opportunities for participation and value for money of the service. A very low number of complaints are received. Actions taken to address previous weaknesses are having a positive effect.
- 173** Consultation with, and involvement of, leaseholders is now effective and complies with statutory requirements. For example, all leaseholders were consulted about the 5-year major works programme and feedback led to works being reprioritised in the programme. Leaseholder estate inspections are resulting in improvements such as estate lighting. An active leaseholders association is regularly consulted on all aspects of the service through quarterly meetings. Involving leaseholders is delivering service improvements.
- 174** Leaseholders are offered responsive repairs and gas services at competitive, reduced prices compared with market prices. This has been advertised in both the newsletter and on the website but the take up of both services has been very low.

- 175** Service charges are carefully calculated and are reasonably accurate. Charges are clearly accounted for and estimates are varied if particular issues impact on a particular area, for example, a large rise in the price of bulk gas. Leaseholders are also sent repairs schedules ahead of invoices to allow them to query charges they feel are unreasonable before they are billed. The majority of leaseholders' invoices are within £200 of the estimates. This helps leaseholders to budget for and pay their bills.
- 176** Payment options are available to support leaseholders with large works bills. In 2008/09 bills for major works and service charges were sent out late. To alleviate the impact of this and the economic recession, SHP in conjunction with the Council has improved payment options for leaseholders. The interest-free period for major works is extended from one year to two years, the circumstances when a charge can be placed on a property have been extended, and buy-back is offered on regeneration estates. Service charges can also, in exceptional circumstances, be spread over more than 12 months to help with payment. A surgery is held before the start of the SLA meetings to discuss service charge estimates and bills and other issues and leaseholders are referred to the CAB or Benefits Agency for welfare rights and debt advice. Leaseholders are able to budget better to meet the costs of works to their property.
- 177** However, with the significant delays in issuing invoices the collection rate for service and major works charges is low. A new integrated IT system for managing leasehold services was introduced last year but considerable difficulties with implementation resulted in major delays in sending out accounts and created a backlog of work and uncollected charges for 2008/09. Only 52.4 per cent of major works and 70.3 per cent of service charges were collected in 2008/09. A suite of recovery letters are being put in place to recoup these payments starting in November 2009. Collection rates for this years service charges are ahead of target with 22.8 per cent collected against a target of 20 per cent for the first three months. Late invoices can affect leaseholders' ability to pay and SHP loses income.
- 178** SHP does not have a full understanding of leaseholder needs. Diversity profile data, where held, is used to tailor services but the level of information collected is low. For example, where communication needs are known, contact is made by letter, email or telephone. Some information is held for 33 per cent of leaseholders, but information relating to all diversity strands is only held for 12.4 per cent of leaseholders. This means SHP is less able to tailor its service to meet individual needs.
- 179** Performance reporting to leaseholders is poor. Although performance of the leaseholder service team is monitored against a number of service standards and targets, this is only reported internally and not to leaseholders, so they do not have a clear picture of how good the service is against the agreed standards.

### Allocations and lettings

- 180** In 2008, we found that strengths and weaknesses were balanced. Properties were allocated fairly, ensuring transparency in the process and the ALMO had been successful in using its under-occupation transfer scheme to maximise use of stock. It had few hard-to-let properties, but did not have a long-term strategy to manage these. Viewing and sign-up processes were not customer focused and performance management was not robust. We did not inspect administration of the choice-based lettings scheme, housing register and nominations to housing associations, which were retained by the Council.
- 181** In this inspection, we found that strengths outweigh weaknesses. The sign up process is comprehensive, teams work well together to let homes efficiently, and satisfaction with the lettings process is high. Adapted homes are being properly allocated although this often takes too long and satisfaction with new homes is low.
- 182** Sign up interviews with new tenants are customer focused and comprehensive. A comprehensive checklist is used to ensure all issues are explained including rent and service charges, reporting a repair, ASB and asbestos. Tenants receive a practical welcome pack and gas safety and energy performance certificates, and are asked to sign documents as they are explained. The importance of keeping the introductory tenancy conditions is stressed and an appointment for the first tenancy visit is made. New tenants are likely to understand how to manage and maintain their tenancy.
- 183** Lettings processes are efficient with close working between the lettings and repairs teams. Weekly meetings are held with the contractor's voids manager about works in progress and when properties will be ready to let and when they are nearly ready cleaning is prioritised. On average empty homes are now re-let in 24 days and the percentage of rent lost because of homes being empty is 1.07 per cent, which is among the best 25 per cent of all ALMOs. Efficient re-letting helps to address housing needs and maximises rental income.
- 184** Satisfaction with the allocation and letting process and the team is high. In 2008/09, 93 per cent of new tenants were satisfied with the lettings process and 92 per cent were satisfied with the team and this has since increased further to 99 per cent and 97.5 per cent respectively. New tenants are receiving a high quality lettings service.
- 185** SHP is working closely with the Council to make the best use of all properties and has plans to address hard-to-let stock. Feasibility studies have been completed for four remaining sites that are hard-to-let and plans are being put in place to address them. Where properties are hard-to-let, a more detailed property description is included on the choice based lettings system, and multiple viewings are held and all applicants are asked the reasons for refusal. Where all say it is the condition of the property, there is discretion to re-decorate to increase the chances of letting them. Out of area lettings are also considered and some properties are used as temporary accommodation for homeless households. Under occupation is dealt with by the Council through a financial incentive scheme, and 124 households have moved to smaller properties since April 2007. By making use of all possible properties, income is maximised and housing needs are met.

- 186** Adapted properties are being allocated to people with greatest needs, but the process is often slow. A monthly disability housing panel of SHP and council staff meet to assess referrals for rehousing to vacant adapted properties. In 2008/09 94 cases were referred to it, with 74 assessed and 41 accepted with the other 34 refused for adapted housing. However, only 12 of the 41 accepted referrals were rehoused within six months and only 20 were assessed within six weeks. Adapted property is being used effectively but some residents are waiting too long for a decision.
- 187** Satisfaction with new properties is low. Only 54 per cent of new tenants in 2008/09 and 59 per cent in 2009/10 to date are satisfied with their new home. The most common reason for dissatisfaction is with the condition of the decoration when they moved in.

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### Supported Housing

- 188** In 2008, we found that strengths and weaknesses were balanced. Despite not having a robust strategic approach to older persons' housing, SHP was providing options for extra care within its stock. The sheltered housing service met national accreditation standards and satisfaction was high. SHP was also beginning to provide extra support for vulnerable tenants whose tenancies might otherwise have been at risk. However, the quality of the environment in which sheltered housing varied, support was not always matching need, emergency call performance was variable and there were weaknesses in the level of customer involvement.
- 189** In this inspection, we found that strengths outweigh weaknesses. Customer care is of a high standard, residents diversity and needs are understood and responded to, the stock is well maintained and support services are well organised. Plans for remodelling some obsolete sheltered housing stock are in place, but asset management plans for sheltered housing do not include all schemes. Average costs are comparatively high. Tenant satisfaction with opportunities to participate in decision making is low.
- 190** SHP has 606 sheltered housing units in 27 schemes and customer care is of a high standard. Sheltered housing officers are based at schemes between 9.00am and 5.00pm on weekdays with some covering two or three schemes. Where they cannot quickly respond to a call, the mobile response service responds. The mobile response service is on call every day of the year for 24 hours a day, and call outs are to be responded to within 20 minutes between 9.00 pm and 9.00am. Performance and satisfaction levels are continually high, with over 90 per cent of call outs being responded to in time and almost 96 per cent of tenants are satisfied with the speed and quality of response from sheltered housing and mobile response staff. Sheltered housing tenants receive a caring and efficient service and can be confident of a quick response to their calls during the night.
- 191** The cultural and language needs of sheltered housing tenants are actively addressed. Diversity data has been used to identify and work with particular communities, for example SHP organised a focus group in 2007 of Tamil residents which led to an event for the Tamil New Year in 2008 and a list of local Hindu temples is included in welcome packs. Others include a Jewish music event at Passover, and Diwali and Eid celebrations. Staff support residents for whom English is not their first language including help in accessing English as a foreign language classes These activities encourage greater understanding and community cohesion between residents.

## How good is the service?

- 192** Responsive repairs are dealt with sensitively in sheltered housing. Sheltered housing officers inform the repairs desk of vulnerability issues and where necessary will attend to support tenants while a repair is carried out. In 2008 more than 90 per cent of sheltered tenants surveyed were satisfied with the most recent repair completed and 82 per cent were satisfied with the repairs and maintenance service overall. Information is sent out about local charities' handyman services to help with minor DIY such as curtain rails, but SHP does not provide such a service itself. Older tenants are receiving a good repairs service.
- 193** Sheltered housing schemes are generally well maintained. The schemes have secure entrances and are tidy and clean with well laid out and homely communal areas. A rolling programme of redecoration of communal areas is in place and those visited are in a reasonable state. Schemes identified for regeneration are still well maintained. In 2008, 94.6 per cent of sheltered housing tenants were satisfied with the overall quality of their home and 88.5 per cent were satisfied with the general condition of their property (up from 84.9 per cent in 2007). Tenants are living in high quality homes.
- 194** The sheltered housing tenants' forum is having an impact. A scheme to pilot a menu of support levels was suggested and planned through the forum and it was instrumental in securing the choice of having showers or baths installed during decent homes works. It has also asked for communal areas in some schemes to be upgraded which is ongoing. Services are improving as a result of tenant involvement.
- 195** Lettings and allocations in sheltered housing generally works well. All prospective tenants have accompanied viewings and are given an information pack and a viewing form to complete. Empty properties are re-let quickly and carpets in good condition are left in flats. Instructions are left in the property for new sheltered tenants to check the alarm and pull cord. New tenants are receiving clear information about their property and are able to move in quickly.
- 196** Support arrangements are well organised. Support plans are reviewed at regular intervals according to each tenant's level of support needs. An innovative pilot scheme offering a menu of support levels is running for a year in four schemes from July 2009, with a second phase starting in October 2009 in five more schemes. Tenants were consulted at all stages of its development and feedback so far has been positive. The sheltered housing service has achieved Centre for Housing and Support (CHS) accreditation for conforming to the CHS code of practice. A range of social activities and outings are also organised as well as services such as bereavement counselling. Sheltered housing tenants receive appropriate levels of care.
- 197** Plans for remodelling some obsolete sheltered housing stock are in place. Two sheltered housing schemes – Elizabeth House and Milton House –are identified as not fit for purpose and feasibility studies were commissioned. A proposal to demolish Elizabeth House, a 34-bed bedsit scheme, was approved in March 2009, to provide a mixture of one and two bedroom properties, several extra care flats and a variety of sheltered units including wheelchair adapted properties. Plans to re-model Milton House to a smaller number of one-bedroom extra care flats are to be considered by the Board in December 2009. These will bring these schemes up to modern standards.

- 198** However, there is no longer-term strategic overview of sheltered housing to address longer-term needs. Asset management plans for sheltered housing do not include all schemes. Although plans for the two schemes being re-modelled are being progressed, there is no longer-term plan for other sheltered schemes, such as low rise blocks of sheltered flats without lifts. Currently these are being let to more able older people or those over 50 years of age, or through 'sensitive lets' to younger people, but there is no longer term strategic plan for this stock. SHP, in conjunction with the Council may not be able to meet housing needs of its ageing population.
- 199** SHP cannot demonstrate that it is achieving value for money in the sheltered housing service. Average costs are comparatively high and benchmarking is underdeveloped. Benchmark groups have been too small to make meaningful comparisons and work with a new group of eight providers is still in development. The pilot support models of varying charging may reduce costs but currently, SHP is not able to effectively compare costs and quality of service to identify areas for efficiencies.
- 200** Other efforts to involve sheltered housing tenants in service improvements are limited. Traditional activities such as coffee mornings and fish and chip suppers are popular but have not lead to increased tenant involvement. 74 per cent of sheltered housing tenants were satisfied or fairly satisfied with opportunities for participation in management and decision making, suggesting that other mechanisms may be preferred. Sheltered housing tenants may not always have their opinions heard.

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### Is the service delivering value for money?

- 201** In 2008, weaknesses outweighed strengths. SHP did not have robust value for money (VFM) or procurement strategies. Its costs varied when compared to others and had not been robustly addressed by service reviews. It had a weak approach to driving efficiencies, with no clear targets. There was limited use of modern procurement. VFM indicators in repairs were mixed and service and support charge arrangements did not ensure VFM for customers. However, it was beginning to embed VFM within its practices and had considerably improved its understanding of costs. It had begun to shift resources towards resident priorities, which customers were able to influence to some extent. It had undertaken a generally robust review of service level agreements.
- 202** In this inspection we found that strengths outweigh weaknesses. SHP has a good understanding of its costs and how they compare and most direct costs compare favourably. VFM is being embedded, and there is a clear procurement framework and plan that is improving value for money. There are many examples of efficiencies being achieved and savings are being re-invested in tenants' priorities and inward investment is being secured. However, overheads, sheltered housing and some internal services are expensive, benchmarking is not being used effectively and the procurement strategy lacks targets.

## How good is the service?

### How do costs compare?

- 203** SHP has a good understanding of service and unit costs and how they compare. SHP routinely compares itself with other ALMOs through a national benchmarking service. As part of the budget setting process, managers have to consider benchmarking data and receive regular feedback from benchmarking exercises to understand how service and unit costs compare. An understanding of costs is important for identifying efficiencies.
- 204** SHP service costs compare reasonably well in most service areas with the exception of sheltered housing, voids and aspects of estates services. In 2008/09 SHP's direct costs per property were in the best 25 per cent of London ALMOs for ASB, estates services and responsive repairs, and the second best 25 per cent for leasehold, major works, rent arrears and collection, resident involvement and tenancy management. However cleaning and bulk refuse services are expensive.
- 205** As a relatively small ALMO in London, SHP's overhead costs are comparatively high. However, when compared with a group of social landlords with a comparable stock size (34 organisations with between 5,000 and 7,500 properties), SHP's overhead costs in 2008/09 as a percentage of direct revenue costs, costs per employee and per property are all among the second best 25 per cent. SHP tenants bear the higher unit costs as a result of the relatively small number of properties SHP manages.
- 206** The costs of some internal services are high. The costs of office premises, the finance function and IT and communications as a percentage of direct revenue costs do not compare well, with the latter in the worst 25 per cent of ALMOs.
- 207** Benchmarking data is not always used effectively. All service managers have access to benchmarking data, but some are deterred by differences in how costs are reported and have not always used the data to consider costs against quality of service, or to identify learning opportunities and potential for developing more cost effective services, for example in relation to aids and adaptations and void repairs. Benchmarking data in reports to the Board is also limited only comparing quartiles with the previous year. Opportunities to learn from providers who are more cost effective are not being maximised.

### How is value for money managed?

- 208** VFM has a high profile and is becoming embedded in organisational culture. There is a revised VFM strategy and action plan, a VFM Board champion who ensures challenge on VFM issues at Board, service review and budget meetings. All Board reports highlight VFM implications and it is a key element in the balance scorecard performance reporting tool. There is a staff VFM forum to generate and record ideas for improving efficiency. A VFM log encourages staff to register VFM activities, with a quarterly competition for the best initiative. All staff have VFM training and VFM is regularly discussed at team meetings and at supervision sessions and a weekly VFM example is emailed to all staff, to help increase understanding about VFM.

- 209** There is a clear and planned approach to procurement. A new procurement strategy provides a clear framework for procurement decisions with clear criteria for the use of competitive tendering, and it recognises the need for modernising procurement on partnering lines and considers resident involvement and diversity issues. However, it does lack overall measurable objectives and targets in order to assess its impact on service improvements. An annual procurement plan sets out the contracts and service level agreements due for renewal, the procurement process to be used, the time frame and the contract term and value. This approach should help deliver better value for money.
- 210** Procurement of major works is delivering value for money. Capital works for internal programmes have been secured via the LAPN<sup>9</sup> framework and costs have been compared through two benchmarking clubs. External works have been tendered in accordance with OJEU<sup>10</sup> requirements on a 50/50 cost and quality basis. On the current kitchen and central heating programmes savings of £200,000 and £80,000 have been made and £5 million savings are projected on a 5-year box bathroom replacement programme for 750 homes.
- 211** Service level agreements with the Council have been reviewed and are delivering efficiency savings. Only four agreements remain, for legal services, internal audit, cashier services and the out of hours service. Legal services, the biggest of the agreements, has recently been reviewed with a plan to market test various aspects of the service further. Savings of £32,000 have already been made on this agreement since 2006 with the potential for further savings; smaller savings such as £10,000 on internal audit have also been achieved.
- 212** There are a range of further examples of savings and efficiencies including:
- £130,000 savings from taking ICT services in-house;
  - £300,000 savings on restructuring including reducing the senior management team and caretaking services;
  - £600,000 savings on in-house management of major works contracts;
  - £900 per installation by recycling chair lifts saving £13,500 over three years; and
  - £20,000 from the re-negotiation of the estates management contract.
- 213** Clear efficiency targets are driving forward improvements and delivering savings. In 2008/09 there was a 5 per cent overall target which was achieved and the ALMO is on course to achieve this years 4.5 per cent savings (totalling £850,000) which was incorporated into service budgets. There is a provisional target of 6.1 per cent savings for 2010/11 combining the 4.7 per cent reduction in the management fee plus a further 1.4 per cent efficiency savings to re-invest in tenants' priorities.

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<sup>9</sup> LAPN is the London Area Procurement Network that provides pre-tendered services and products for procurement

<sup>10</sup> The Official Journal of the European Union which contains all contracts above a certain financial threshold.

## How good is the service?

- 214** Tenants' priorities for investment are understood and resources are being re-directed to them. Residents were surveyed about their priorities as part of the budget setting process and 127 responses were received indicating priorities as repairs, external decorations, internal decorations and caretaking, followed by neighbourhood management and ASB. In this year's budget, additional resources were put into these areas as well as customer services and void repairs to meet the lettings standard. Tenants are increasingly seeing their priorities being addressed.
- 215** SHP is successfully attracting inward investment to the organisation, and making investment decisions that deliver VFM. Both financial and other resources are being secured to improve services for tenants. For example:
- A Community Payback scheme is being used to clear and paint garages, to bring them back in to use, to improve the appearance and safety of estates and increase rental income for the organisation.
  - SHP brought its IT service in-house and now provides IT services to the Council under a service contract generating income of around £100,000 per year
  - The commission fee for collecting water rates for the water authority was re-negotiated bringing in additional income.
  - An £80,000 investment in refurbishing garages on a 'spend to save' basis has been made. Although the project is too recent to demonstrate net gains to date, it has halved garage arrears within 3 months of set up and let an additional 20 garages and it is expected to generate income over time.
- 216** However, resident involvement in identifying budget priorities and service levels is not fully developed. Tenants have been consulted in the last year about their overall priorities although the information was sent late to TRAs in the 2009/10 budget setting process. The approach to engaging tenants has not yet fully evolved to involve them in higher level discussions about service levels and choices. Some progress has been made in involving residents in determining priorities for local operational budgets such as estates improvements. Residents are not yet influencing the level of service they receive with options to pay for a higher or lower level of service.
- 217** Not all services have been reviewed for value for money, although a programme of reviews is in place. For example, SHP does not know if the aids and adaptations service is delivering value for money and neighbourhood services, voids and allocations are to be reviewed next year. Until all services have been reviewed SHP cannot be sure it is achieving best value for money.

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# What are the prospects for improvement to the service?

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## What is the service track record in delivering improvement?

- 218** In 2008, we found that strengths and weaknesses in track record were balanced. SHP had implemented most recommendations made in previous inspections and its own service reviews, and was starting to challenge the way services were delivered more effectively. This had led to some improvements customers would recognise. Key national PIs were mostly improving and there were emerging improvements in value for money. However, the ALMO had not ensured that implementation of action plans had delivered strong outcomes for customers and lacked consistent customer care when delivering change. Few PIs had improved to top performing levels and both performance and satisfaction at service level were variable.
- 219** In this inspection, we found that strengths outweigh weaknesses in its track record. Nearly all recommendations from the previous inspection have been fully implemented. Service reviews have changed and improved services with the involvement of residents; performance for most key performance indicators (KPIs) is improving and more services compare well against other social landlords in London. However in some areas such as satisfaction with opportunities to participate, performance has deteriorated.
- 220** Most of the recommendations from the previous inspection have been implemented. Details of progress against previous recommendations can be found at Appendix 2.
- 221** SHP has successfully implemented changes that have directly benefited its tenants. For example, the repairs review has brought significant improvements in the quality of the service; changes to the complaints procedure has led to improved performance the restructuring of the estates services to introduce mobile teams has delivered a more responsive service and the review of leaseholder services has led to higher satisfaction levels. A new management team has brought a stronger focus on customer care and value for money which are embedded across the organisation.
- 222** Improvements are customer focused and are supporting vulnerable service users. Residents are routinely involved in improving and shaping services, and SHP focuses on improvements residents want, based on customer feedback. There are numerous examples including extended office opening hours, introductory tenancies, schemes to reduce dog fouling, and improvements to the website. Access is much easier, services are increasingly tailored to residents' needs; works to make homes decent includes a needs assessment to ensure refurbished homes meet current and future needs, and victims of domestic violence and hate crime are well supported. Residents confirm that services have improved since the ALMO was established.

## What are the prospects for improvement to the service?

**223** For most KPIs performance has improved over the past three years (see Appendix 1 for data):

- Performance has improved year-on-year for the level of satisfaction with the overall service, the level of non-decent homes; energy efficiency; average re-let time; rent collection, the number of tenants more than seven weeks in arrears and the number of tenants issued with a notice of proceedings for rent arrears.
- In 2007/08, 3 out of 24 KPIs were in the best 25 per cent performance in London and 8 were in the worst 25 percent. In 2008/09, 8 out of 24 were in the best 25 per cent performance and 5 were in the worst 25 per cent. These five related to keeping repairs appointments, response times for urgent repairs, level of rent arrears written off, the level of former tenancy arrears and the energy efficiency (SAP rating) of homes. Repairs appointments and response times have now improved but the other areas still compare poorly in 2009/10.

**224** SHP has a reasonably good track record of improving value for money. Annual efficiency saving targets have been met and there are ambitious plans for 6.1 per cent efficiencies in 2010/11. Service reviews have delivered more efficient practices such as a greater number of 'right first time' repairs with improved stock systems. Procurement decisions in capital works such as the box bathroom programme is delivering substantial savings and pro-active recycling and environmental sustainability measures, greater use of low cost payment methods and increased inward investment are all improving VFM, and areas of high costs are being addressed.

**225** However, performance has declined in some service areas:

- satisfaction with opportunities to participate in decision making declined from 57.8 per cent in 2006/07 to 43.3 per cent in 2008/09;
- tenant satisfaction with estate services has declined from 82 per cent in 2006/07 to 75.7 per cent in 2008/09; and
- collection of leaseholder service and major works charges has declined over three years from 95 to 70 per cent, and 67 to 52 per cent respectively.

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## How well does the service manage performance?

**226** In 2008, we found strengths and weaknesses were balanced. There were clear links between the ALMO and council plans and the two organisations had a good relationship. SHP was addressing weaknesses in its service plans and reviews, including better involvement of staff, though its long term plans were underdeveloped. Leadership was improving, along with a performance culture and systematic approach to learning, although there were weaknesses, particularly in ensuring a clear strategic approach, incorporating cross-cutting issues. SHP's plans were not fully SMART or prioritised, it did not always have a clear focus on outcomes. Performance management was not robust.

## What are the prospects for improvement to the service?

- 227** In this inspection, we found that strengths outweigh weaknesses. SHP has clear priorities and objectives that staff and residents are involved in developing. Strong planning, performance and risk management frameworks are in place and there is a well developed approach to service reviews. The improvement plan is being delivered with further improvements planned. Strong leadership is driving improvements, performance is closely monitored and SHP is learning from higher performers. However, not all plans are measurable and outcome focused, performance monitoring and use of benchmarking data is not robust in all service areas and reporting on performance to residents is under developed.
- 228** SHP has clear priorities and objectives for the future that reflect and contribute to national and local priorities. The mission, vision, strategic priorities and values are laid out in the ALMO delivery plan which has clear links to the priorities of the Council and local strategic partnership (LSP) and to specific local area agreement targets such as reducing anti-social behaviour, reducing carbon emissions and increasing the proportion of decent homes. For example, SHP is using technology to reduce the need for travel, thus contributing to the sustainable transport and traffic reduction objectives and installing bird boxes and planting for landscape quality, biodiversity and habitats.
- 229** Residents and staff are actively engaged in identifying priorities and agreeing action plans. Residents are consulted via resident events, the newsletter, SFTRA and SLA and the website. SHP received 113 responses for the 2009/10 budget process. Staff are consulted about service developments and are able to make suggestions. Regular team meetings, annual awaydays and service review steering groups involve staff in service improvements. Weekly briefings, a staff newsletter and the intranet keep staff informed of service developments and performance. Involving residents and staff ensures that services address issues for improved performance.
- 230** A clear and well developed planning framework is in place, with a focus on continuous improvement. SHP has overhauled its planning framework and has clear and coordinated strategies and action plans. It has identified and developed a strategy and action plan for each of its key drivers - customer care, diversity, value for money and risk - as well as for most service areas. Actions are divided into operational actions to maintain the service, and improvement action to drive improvements. The latter are collated into a corporate service improvement plan (SIP) which is the key document for addressing weaknesses. Actions are linked to service objectives and indicators, and performance is tracked through regular reports supported by benchmarking and performance data. This framework is supported by specialist software that allows performance reports to track outputs and outcomes against the action plans. The framework allows improvements to be closely monitored and tracked.
- 231** Performance data is routinely audited. There is a quarterly audit plan with LBS to interrogate performance data and original supporting documentation. This is reported to the housing advisory group and ALMO monitoring group. Regular data audits ensure that data is robust and performance indicators are reliable.

## What are the prospects for improvement to the service?

- 232** The approach to service reviews is well developed. A service review toolkit has been agreed in partnership with residents and an annual programme of reviews is led by service managers. The toolkit has widened the range of approaches used to engage residents in the reviews and residents are consulted on priorities for the reviews. A best value approach to understanding value for money within the service is adopted through consideration of the four 'C's'<sup>11</sup> and the use of benchmarking and performance data. When a review is complete any emerging actions are incorporated in to service plans and the SIP for improvement actions.
- 233** Most of the actions in the SIP due for completion have been achieved with positive plans to bring further improvements that will benefit residents. For example:
- developing work with challenging families. The Family Intervention Project has just started which offers tailored support to vulnerable families for up to one year. £93,000 a year funding has been secured for two years to support up to 12 families a year to achieve more stable lives and may help reduce ASB on some estates;
  - a credit union is to start once Financial Services Authority approval has been awarded;
  - extending the sheltered housing mobile response services, with plans to tender for other services in the borough;
  - service charters are being developed for seven service areas to provide more detail than the service standards;
  - text messaging is being rolled out to text tenants with reminders about visits or to inform them about issues relating to their block such as a lift breakdowns; and
  - a new pay point card will increase the number of places to pay rent. This will be easier for tenants and save around £10,000 per year in transaction costs.
- 234** Effective leadership is driving cultural change to focus on customer care, diversity and continuous improvement. The board is using performance information to help in its role of leading and directing the organisation. Through tracking indicators it ensures that underperformance is focused on and resources are in place to resolve the issues. For example, it is tracking performance of leasehold services after performance declined to ensure the IT problems are resolved. It takes a positive leadership role on diversity and the Chair has encouraged openness and transparency by inviting the tenants' federation to attend Board meetings with an opportunity to raise their concerns.
- 235** A clear performance management framework has been developed that is embedding performance improvement and customer care. There is a timetabled performance cycle which sets out the review and planning process from corporate priorities, to service action plans, budgeting, team meetings and individual supervision and appraisals. There are clear links between corporate, service level and individual objectives. Staff receive regular supervision, annual appraisals and a six month review which identifies training and development needs. All staff attend corporate training on customer care and diversity to support their performance and discuss performance at regular team meetings. The Chief Executive and senior managers have robust 360 degree appraisals with input from internal and external stakeholders. Staff at all levels are focusing on delivering the corporate objectives to improve services to residents.

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<sup>11</sup> Challenge, consult, compare, and compete

## What are the prospects for improvement to the service?

- 236** Closer liaison, communication and cooperation between and within teams are helping to drive and embed a performance oriented culture. Regular meetings are held between repairs and customer service staff and maintenance staff and major works. There is now more planning of activities that impact on different teams such as mass mail outs to tenants to avoid an unmanageable level of calls to the call centre at one time. Residents are less likely to be affected by poor coordination between teams.
- 237** Budgets are closely monitored to identify unintended overspends at an early stage. Budget holders are subject to challenge by the finance team. They receive monthly management accounts and meet monthly with the Management Accountant to identify and rectify budget variations. Regular budget reports are made to the executive management team (EMT), the performance management group and the board. Identifying unintended high spending at an early stage ensures that costs are managed and spent in accordance with agreed priorities.
- 238** Performance of contractors is closely monitored. Regular contract meetings are held to discuss performance and works programming, customer care, diversity and value for money issues. For example, in the repairs service performance discussions resulted in the appointment of a subcontractor manager to oversee their performance. This is starting to have a positive impact in getting more jobs completed at first visit. Operational managers also meet weekly to discuss current works.
- 239** Regular performance monitoring meetings are held with the Council and involve residents. Regular partnership and performance meetings with clear agendas have helped to develop a good relationship that allows for robust discussions where there is not immediate agreement or common understanding. Tenant representation at the ALMO monitoring group has ensured tenants' views are heard directly.
- 240** SHP routinely looks to other higher performing organisations to learn and improve, and shares its practice for others to learn from. SHP learns through contacting and visiting other landlords, attending conferences, training and forums and benchmarking. A central learning register is maintained to share good practice among staff. Examples of outcomes include a change from a two-stage to three-stage complaints process and piloting a new model of support in sheltered housing. It has shared some of its practice for example, around the tenant compact and box bathroom programme.
- 241** Risk management is robust. A new strategy identifies four categories of risk and how they are to be managed. Risks are identified at various levels: service and SIP risks, strategic and health and safety risks. All risks are recorded and reported to managers and the risk and audit committee which reviews the risks and recommends actions to the board. The board regularly discusses potential risks and contingency plans. For example to bring forward MRA funds to continue decent homes works when funding was not secured. Risks are being managed and minimised.
- 242** However, some plans are often not SMART and outcome focused. For example, the VFM, diversity and asset management strategies and repairs action plans are not SMART. The expected outcomes are not specific, giving no indication of what is to be achieved in terms of improved VFM, specific outcomes for vulnerable residents, the increase in the level of right first time or the anticipated increases in customer satisfaction. Without SMART plans SHP and its residents do not know what will constitute a success.

## What are the prospects for improvement to the service?

- 243** Performance monitoring and use of benchmarking data is not robust in all service areas. For example, for complaints and aids and adaptations, not all aspects of the service are monitored. Extensive benchmarking data of costs and performance is collected, but it is not always used effectively to drive continuous improvement. For example, in working with the repairs contractor, best performance is considered in setting targets but not to understand differences in practices and potentials for achieving efficiencies. Areas for improvement may be overlooked as a result.
- 244** Reporting on performance to residents is limited. Information about how good services are compared with previous year's performance or with other social landlords is not reported on in the 'HomeFront' newsletter. Satisfaction levels are reported on but not compared with other landlords. Where performance is reported, it is not always easy to access or outcome focused. For example, performance on response times for ASB is reported, but not how effectively ASB cases are resolved. Without regular data that residents can compare with other landlords they will not be aware of how good services are, or how much they could improve.
- 245** Appraisals are not always completed fully or in time, or to a high standard. For example, some are conducted late, targets are not always measurable and only a few have a six month review. HR does not have a formal role in checking whether appraisals are conducted or to a high standard. Staff may not have clear objectives and poor quality records can result in insufficient documentary evidence to tackle ongoing concerns about performance.

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## Does the service have the capacity to improve?

- 246** In 2008, we found strengths outweighed weaknesses. The ALMO was developing the skills of its board and managers, as well as providing a good range of training to staff, who were well motivated and enthusiastic. There was strong human resources performance and service reviews had increased capacity in frontline services. The ALMO maximised resources from the council, had some procurement agreements, had a strong emphasis on partnership working and had improved ICT effectively to improve service delivery. However, there were areas where capacity was limited. SHP could not demonstrate that it had the long-term resources to deliver its plans. Risk management was only partially effective and the ALMO had not had sufficient focus on inward investment.
- 247** In this inspection, we found that strengths outweigh weaknesses in its capacity to improve. There is strong leadership and a skilled staff group that is developing further through appropriate training and support. IT is of a high standard and making services more effective and efficient. Partnerships are bringing in extra resources, the relationship with the council is positive and staff morale is high. Appropriate investment plans are in place, but the financial capacity of the organisation is uncertain and service planning is not always effective.

## What are the prospects for improvement to the service?

- 248** There is a strong, competent board in place. Board members have a broad range of relevant skills and experience which has been strengthened by new members since the last inspection, including a new Chair who has considerable experience in financial and risk matters. The board works effectively together, it challenges reports and asks for additional information if necessary before taking decisions, and has taken difficult decisions such as the re-structuring of caretaking services. Strong leadership skills increase the capacity of an organisation to improve.
- 249** The appointment of a new Chair and Chief Executive, and management restructuring has resulted in stronger leadership. The new Chair has a clear customer focus and together with the new (albeit interim) Chief Executive has strengthened leadership and management, bringing a clear ambition to embed a more customer and performance focused culture. The restructuring of the management team from four to three Directors has led to greater cohesion across teams.
- 250** Devolved responsibilities and new appointments have increased capacity. Service heads are now responsible for budgets and service planning which has increased ownership of the service's performance, allowed the EMT to focus on strategic issues and developed the skills and confidence of many managers. Support is in place such as coaching to develop managers' skills in managing change. In the past two years new appointments have brought in a range of relevant experience, for example in the asset management team, which is greatly increasing the capacity to manage projects.
- 251** The relationship with the Council is appropriately challenging and supportive. Performance expectations, ambitions and targets are routinely discussed and agreement is by consensus, recognising the role of the board as the ALMOs governing body. Council nominees to the Board are not serving Councillors which provides for clearer distinction of roles between the ALMO and the local authority with less opportunity for conflicts of interest. A positive relationship with the Council helps to increase capacity, drive performance and secure additional resources.
- 252** SHP has sound IT systems which add to the capacity of the organisation. The in-house support service is of a high quality, with high levels of reliability and staff satisfaction. Hand held technology is being introduced which is supporting staff to work more effectively on estates. Stock condition software is increasing the ability to cost and programme works and a new Customer Relationship Management (CRM) system to be introduced in early 2010 will improve access to tenant information making it much easier for staff to deal with customer issues. Good IT systems ensure staff are able to work productively and effectively, providing a more responsive service to residents.
- 253** Significant investment in staff training and developing is improving skills. A training and development plan is developed from needs identified in annual appraisals. A wide range of opportunities is available including coaching and professional development. New staff attend an induction course and are required to spend time in all sections of the organisation. The training budget is 1.8 per cent of the salary budget which is comparatively high - SHP decided to invest more to boost staff development. In 2008, 81 per cent of staff received some form of training, which increased to 91 per cent in 2009. Staff are now better equipped to provide a quality service.

## What are the prospects for improvement to the service?

- 254** A full range of human resources (HR) policies and procedures are in place to address HR issues, staff morale is high and turnover is low. In 2007/08 turnover at 24.2 per cent was well above average labour turnover, but it has reduced significantly since 2008/09 to 12.6 per cent, including two staff who were dismissed and two who failed their probationary period. Staff say morale is high with a good sense of cross-team working for the benefit of residents. Annual staff and 'employee of the year' awards recognise achievement and provide motivation. Staff feel well supported for example where they have had serious health issues and 92 per cent of staff are now satisfied with SHP as an employer.
- 255** SHP is attracting inward investment, directly and through partnerships to deliver improvements. There are many examples including Public Realm monies to improve play areas and ball parks, £20,000 for a family intervention project to reduce ASB, and, under a government programme, around £2 million of resources have been secured for thermal insulation and energy conservation measures. Involvement in the local strategic partnership economic development board, has secured funding for SHP to promote an apprenticeship scheme to its residents. Additional income directly increases the capacity to make improvements for tenants.
- 256** SHP has clear understanding of its investment requirements and a clear approach to financial planning. There is an appropriate ALMO budget plan to 2010 and a medium-term capital investment plan to 2014. In conjunction with the Council, SHP manages the housing revenue account (HRA) and a HRA business plan has been developed that sets out a detailed five year investment plan plus 30-year revenue and capital requirements based on income and expenditure assumptions. A clear understanding of the investment required helps to plan service improvement programmes.
- 257** However, the financial capacity of the organisation to deliver its works programme is uncertain. A fully costed programme of decent homes works is in place for the five year period from 2009 - 14. This year's £13.1 million programme is being funded from the major repairs allowance (MRA), including £3.4 million brought forward from 2010/11, the regional housing pot and an assumption of decent homes funding for the final quarter of 2009/10. Options of bringing further MRA funding forward are being considered but are not yet approved. SHP is not certain that decent homes funding will be available following changes in the allocation of resources by central government and it does not have any agreed alternative plans in place if the funding is not secured. While this is beyond the ALMO's control it will undermine its capacity to bring the remaining stock up to a decent standard. A significant element of the investment requirement in the next five years are catch-up repairs so investment is overdue and there is an identified funding gap of £35 million which will impact on other assets such as garages, environmental and other capital improvements.

## What are the prospects for improvement to the service?

- 258** Service planning is not always effective. For example, when telephone access was extended to include Saturday mornings, staff who worked were given a day off in the week in lieu which reduced the availability of staff to answer calls and contributed to poor performance. Saturday call answering was abandoned as take-up was low, but the planning of the new service did not take account of all the possible impacts. Likewise cash collection arrangements and the implementation of the new IT system in leaseholder services have not been well managed, the latter resulting in severe delays in sending out accounts, and the subsequent poor collection performance. Although the issues are now being resolved, better planning for the implementation may have minimised the disruption caused.
- 259** Sickness absence has been high but is improving. A robust sickness procedure that all managers have had training in is used but sickness levels have increased from an average of 9 in 2006 to 14.6 days in 2008/09, which is higher than the sector average of 11 days per employee. However, the average sickness days per person is currently 6.5 days, so overall performance is expected to have significantly improved for 2009/10 as a number of staff have been medically retired, dismissed or have returned to work.

# Appendix 1 – Performance indicators

**Table 1 Sutton performance - 2006/07 to 2008/09**

<b>Performance indicator (BVPI ref)</b>	<b>2006/07</b>	<b>2007/08</b>	<b>2008/09</b>	<b>London top 25% 2007/08</b>
63 Average SAP rating	67	69	70	72
66a Percentage rent collected	96.57	97.16	97.38	98.1
66b Percentage tenants with > 7 wks arrears (gross)	6.1	5.65	5.34	6.1
66c Percentage tenants in arrears with NoSP served	26.94	20.32	18.75	16.6
66d Percentage LA tenants evicted for rent arrears	0.36	0.33	0.40	0.2
74a Percentage tenants satisfied with overall service	67.8	71.2	70.1	74
75a Percentage tenants satisfied with TP	57.82	62.9	43.3	64
184a LA homes which were non-decent at start of year	66	46	35	23.8
184b Change in proportion of non-decent homes	18	17.1	14.0	27.9
212 Average re-let time (days)	29	27	26	23.8

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# Appendix 2 – Previous recommendations

**Table 2 Recommendations of previous inspection**

Recommendation	Progress
<b>R1</b> Improve customer focus in service delivery, by:	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>implementing a robust quality checking process at the launch of new initiatives or revised procedures, focussing on how the customer receives the service (after involving customers in their development);</li> </ul>	Partially achieved
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>ensuring procedures are implemented consistently by raising awareness of the importance of customer care, through training and coaching of all staff and implementing quality-checking of all aspects of service delivery;</li> </ul>	Achieved
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>reviewing access arrangements with customers, including those who are not accessing services, to ensure opening times and service locations meet customer needs;</li> </ul>	Achieved
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>reviewing customer information in liaison with residents, particularly where identified in this report, to ensure it is all customer friendly;</li> </ul>	Achieved
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>addressing weaknesses in service standards and ensuring performance is comprehensively monitored and fed back against them;</li> </ul>	Partially achieved
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>ensuring customer complaints are answered on time and in a customer-focused manner and that learning opportunities are identified;</li> </ul>	Achieved
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>ensuring works to void and adapted properties are consistently completed to a high quality standard; and</li> </ul>	Partially achieved
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>providing customers with clear information on the ALMO's five-year proposals for improvement and major works.</li> </ul>	Achieved

## Appendix 2 – Previous recommendations

Recommendation	Progress
<b>R2</b> Provide clearer strategic direction for the organisation, in conjunction with both residents and staff throughout the ALMO, by:	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• setting targets for EMT to take a more strategic leadership role and for managers to take on responsibility for more operationally focused matters than the EMT currently undertakes;</li> </ul>	Achieved
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• addressing weaknesses within existing strategic documents, to ensure they provide a robust approach to delivering service improvements, including meeting diverse needs and providing value for money; and</li> </ul>	Achieved
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• developing robust strategic approaches within services where this is currently weak, as identified in this report.</li> </ul>	Achieved
<b>R3</b> Ensure compliance with the CRE code of practice in housing and improve performance in meeting the diverse needs of the community, by:	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• setting clear targets for board, staff and resident member make-up, linked to action plans to ensure the organisation reflects the community;</li> </ul>	Achieved
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• ensuring diversity is explicitly reflected within service improvement plan actions, to help tailor services to individual needs throughout the ALMO;</li> </ul>	Achieved
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• appointing a board lead member to champion diversity at strategic level;</li> </ul>	Achieved
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• ensuring diversity progress reports to board and the Council are robust in challenging progress against clear strategic objectives;</li> </ul>	Achieved
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• comprehensively monitoring services, against clear targets, to identify any areas where there is disparity, to ensure equitable service delivery;</li> </ul>	Partially achieved
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• undertaking a full audit of accessibility at all housing schemes with communal access and ensuring identified issues are addressed; and</li> </ul>	Almost achieved
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• reviewing decoration assistance in void properties and incentives offered for gas servicing access, to ensure they meet all customers' needs.</li> </ul>	Partially achieved

## Appendix 2 – Previous recommendations

Recommendation	Progress
<b>R4</b> Involve customers more effectively in service design, by:	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>revising the tenant compact, in line with good practice and making it available in accessible form;</li> </ul>	Achieved
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>enabling customers to determine programmes for involvement, which link to service reviews and improvement plans to enable their effective involvement in designing the service that is being delivered; and</li> </ul>	Achieved
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>setting qualitative targets for involvement, within improvement plans.</li> </ul>	Achieved
<b>R5</b> Improve value for money across the organisation, by:	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>both the Council and ALMO setting robust targets for delivering efficiency gains within the organisation, linked to strategic documents and improvement plans;</li> </ul>	Achieved
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>reconfiguring board and council reports, so that these robustly challenge delivery of VFM outcomes, as well as prudent financial management;</li> </ul>	Achieved
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>ensuring service reviews robustly assess VFM within current service delivery and as an explicit part of recommendations for improvement;</li> </ul>	Achieved
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>producing an annual procurement plan, which assesses the risks and benefits of different models of procurement, for board approval;</li> </ul>	Achieved
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>investigating the potential for handyperson or other similar models of delivering repairs services; and</li> </ul>	Achieved
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>addressing weaknesses in service charge uplift arrangements and the flat-rate approach to support charges.</li> </ul>	Achieved

## Appendix 2 – Previous recommendations

Recommendation	Progress
<b>R6</b> Improve the service to supported housing residents, by:	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>reviewing long term proposals for the future of sheltered housing schemes and developing a robust plan, in liaison with residents, in response;</li> </ul>	Partially achieved
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>developing minimum scheme standards, with residents, to ensure a consistent quality of living environment and producing an action plan to address those schemes where the standards are not fully met;</li> </ul>	Achieved
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>developing a timetable to provide greater flexibility in support arrangements by January 2010, so that the level of support and subsequent charge are more aligned to individual needs; and</li> </ul>	Achieved
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>reviewing targets for emergency call response performance and closely monitoring performance to ensure it is consistently strong.</li> </ul>	Achieved
<b>R7</b> Improve the service to leaseholders, by:	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>reviewing proposals for consultation with leaseholders in relation to future major works, to ensure they are fully aware of the scale and costs of works to be undertaken and have opportunity to influence proposals in line with good practice, beyond minimum statutory requirements;</li> </ul>	Achieved
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>in liaison with leaseholders, considering a range of repayment options for major works and the potential for alternative action in exceptional cases, such as the buying-back of leasehold accommodation;</li> </ul>	Achieved
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>consulting leaseholders on the service charge setting policy and buildings insurance arrangements;</li> </ul>	Achieved
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>providing a plain English version of the lease or - at leaseholders preference - a plain language guide to lease provisions; and</li> </ul>	Achieved
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>ensuring maintenance services, including responsive repairs and gas servicing are offered to leaseholders on a par with other residents.</li> </ul>	Achieved

## Appendix 2 – Previous recommendations

Recommendation	Progress
<b>R8</b> Ensure improvements in planning and performance management, by:	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>engaging customers in assessing what 'excellent' services constitute, within SHP's own context, and incorporating milestones and challenging performance targets to achieve this, within the service improvement plan;</li> </ul>	Achieved in most but not all service areas
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>incorporating diversity and value for money explicitly into service improvement plans and ensuring implications for each are consistently analysed and reported within reports made to board;</li> </ul>	Achieved
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>reviewing improvement plan implementation monitoring, so that outcomes for customers and the means to measure them are clearly identified;</li> </ul>	Partially achieved
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>developing a service review plan toolkit to support implementation of the revised review framework;</li> </ul>	Achieved
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>seeking customer views on the proposed service review plan timetable, amending the programme, where appropriate;</li> </ul>	Achieved
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>addressing the weaknesses in risk management identified in this report;</li> </ul>	Achieved
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>addressing performance management weaknesses identified in this report, to ensure more comprehensive monitoring of service delivery; and</li> </ul>	Achieved
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>implementing a robust performance management framework that sets tolerance levels, above which underperformance is systematically reported, incorporating a performance 'panel' that is effective in analysing PIs in detail, addressing reasons for underperformance and learning points for areas where performance is strong.</li> </ul>	Achieved

## Appendix 2 – Previous recommendations

Recommendation	Progress
<b>R9</b> Maximise capacity to deliver further improvements, by:	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>developing a plan for empowering managers and other staff to more effectively take a lead on matters such as leading service reviews and chairing focus groups;</li> </ul>	Achieved
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>reviewing the capacity of service teams to deliver improvements, particularly within the leasehold, resident involvement and external services teams;</li> </ul>	Achieved
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>improving partnership work where this is not currently maximised, by identifying this within improvement plan resources;</li> </ul>	Achieved
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>making better use of IT systems and other data to respond to individual customer needs and to profile debts and identify ASB hotspots to better target the use of resources;</li> </ul>	Achieved
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>maximising the ability of estate services staff to deal with estate management issues such as abandoned vehicles and rubbish dumping through fixed penalty notices and other associated legislation; and</li> </ul>	Achieved
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>incorporating inward investment into service planning arrangements.</li> </ul>	Achieved

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# Appendix 3 – Reality checks undertaken

- 1 When we went on-site we carried out a number of different checks, building on the work described above, in order to get a full picture of how good the service is. These on-site reality checks were designed to gather evidence about what it is like to use the service and to see how well it works. Our reality checks included the following.
  - Observation of reception areas.
  - Telephone calls to tenants who had recently used the service, new tenants and those who had reported a repair or made a complaint.
  - Observation of a Board meeting.
  - Shadowing the call centre.
  - Shadowing a new tenancy sign up.
  - Shadowing the post inspection of repairs.
  - Estates tour and visits.
  - Visits to ready to let empty properties.
  - File checks for rent arrears, complaints, ASB and domestic violence.
  - Review of appraisal and one to one supervision meeting records.
  - Focus group with residents involved in participation structures.
  - Focus group of tenants not involved in participation structures.
  - Focus group of leaseholders.
  - Focus group with partner organisations and contractors, including contractors operatives.
  - Review of the website.

# Appendix 4 – Positive practice

**'The Commission will identify and promote good practice. Every inspection will look for examples of good practice and innovation, and for creative ways to overcome barriers and resistance to change or make better use of resources'. (Seeing is Believing)**

## **Bio mass re-cycling programme**

- 1** For each of its major works sites SHP aims to recycle as many components and materials as possible. It maintains data on the tonnage of waste produced at each site and only around 5 percent of waste goes to landfill.
- 2** Non recyclable components are sent to a local bio mass production unit where it is converted in to bio mass to be re-used as energy for electricity production. Because the production unit is local it does not require excessive transportation and in the long term should reduce costs on waste management.

## **Piloting a menu of support services for sheltered housing tenants**

- 3** An innovative pilot scheme is offering a menu of support levels to sheltered housing tenants. It is running for a year starting in four schemes from July 2009 with a second phase starting in October 2009 in five more schemes.
- 4** Tenants can choose to receive different levels of care for different service charges. More independent tenants can opt for the low support option which includes 21 days per year for higher levels of support if they feel ill or need more support for a temporary period. Each support level has a different service charge with a choice of low, medium and high support. Tenants can change between levels as their needs change over time. Tenants were consulted at all stages of the schemes' development and feedback has been positive.

## **Domestic violence survivors self help group**

- 5** A floating support service for survivors of domestic violence that is funded through Supporting People, has supported survivors to set up a self-help group called 'Breath' that is open to both female and male survivors. It allows survivors to provide mutual support and as a group has secured funding for members to attend training courses and organise day trips to build confidence and self esteem. Group members also participate in staff training to give a survivors perspective and works with the ALMO to raise issues about domestic violence with other organisations.

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# The Audit Commission

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For further information on the work of the Commission please contact:

Audit Commission, 1st Floor, Millbank Tower, Millbank, London SW1P 4HQ

Tel: 0844 798 1212 Fax: 0844 798 2945 Textphone (minicom): 0844 798 2946

[www.audit-commission.gov.uk](http://www.audit-commission.gov.uk)

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