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Sutton tenants get a “good” service with “promising” prospects

The housing management services provided by Sutton Housing Partnership, the arms-length management organisation (ALMO) of Sutton Council, are “good” and have “promising prospects for improvement”, according to an independent report released today by the Audit Commission.

On a scale from zero to three stars, the Audit Commission Inspectors gave the Sutton Housing Partnership a ‘good’ two-star rating. This is because there are accessible services, high standards of information and support for vulnerable tenants. The ALMO also demonstrates strong performance in rent collection and there is effective partnership working to tackle anti-social behaviour. Gas safety, asbestos, fire and other health and safety risks are all well managed. However, there is a backlog of external painting and maintenance and often tenants are not happy with the condition of properties when they are let.

Hugh Boatswain, the Audit Commission’s Lead Housing Inspector for London said:

‘In the range of Sutton Housing Partnership services inspected we found that overall strengths are outweighing weaknesses. Improvements are being effectively delivered including a more responsive repairs service. Risks are being managed and minimised and the organisation is improving its approach to value for money. Strong leadership and performance management are also driving improvements, but the ALMO still needs to involve residents more. There are promising prospects for further improvement.’

Strengths include:

- Repairs are carried out promptly with high levels of tenant satisfaction.
- Empty homes are re-let quickly.
- Partnership working is 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.

Weaknesses include:

- Performance against service standards is not consistently high and not all complaints are being captured.
- Tenant satisfaction with opportunities for participation in decision-making and with estate services is low.

- Former tenancy arrears are high and collection of leaseholder charges is low.

To help the service improve, inspectors made a number of recommendations, including:

- Strengthen tenant involvement and influence by making performance data accessible to residents, including how well the service they receive compares with other landlords;
- Address existing areas of tenant dissatisfaction by reviewing the lettings standard with tenants, to identify what tenants expect as a minimum standard;
- 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; and
- Improve value for money by analysing reasons why repairs are not completed first time and implementing changes to improve performance;

Sutton Housing Partnership manages approximately 6,670 homes. It has delegated responsibility for providing housing management and maintenance services, for which it receives a management fee of £14.4 million, which includes a £6.5 million repairs and maintenance budget, and it manages the Council's £13.1 million capital programme.

Copies of the report are available from Sutton Council or on the Audit Commission website at www.audit-commission.gov.uk

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Notes to editors

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Our work across local government, health, housing, community safety and fire and rescue services means that we have a unique perspective. We promote value for money for taxpayers, auditing the £200 billion spent by 11,000 local public bodies.

As a force for improvement, we work in partnership to assess local public services and make practical recommendations for promoting a better quality of life for local people.

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