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Proud to be associated with and awarded



Homefront



The newsletter for tenants and leaseholders of Sutton

Issue 06 - 2010

'Two star' rating gives us the green light for home improvements



two star rating



Andrew Taylor
Interim Chief Executive

Sutton Housing Partnership awarded a 'two star' rating

The Audit Commission, the government's independent public sector watchdog, have assessed us as providing a 'good' two-star housing management service that has promising prospects for improvement.

In this issue we will be explaining what the Audit Commission found when they inspected the housing services we provide to you, what they have asked us to do and more importantly what it means for you, our customers.

Last October the Audit Commission spent nearly two weeks with us looking at our services. They reviewed more than 1,025 documents, visited estates and interviewed our managers and staff, Sutton Council staff, tenants, leaseholders and contractors.

We are thrilled to have been awarded these all important two stars and we are extremely proud of what we have all achieved together.

I want to thank all the staff at Sutton Housing Partnership (SHP) for their hard work and dedication and of course you, our residents, for your support and hard work during the inspection whether you were interviewed by the Audit Commission or took part in the various focus groups. You have all helped us to achieve the two stars and together we can share in our success.

We hope you enjoy reading this very special edition of Homefront.



Jean Crossby delighted with the two stars

SFTRA delighted with our two stars

Having heard the results of the inspection Jean Crossby, chair of the Sutton Federation of Tenant and Resident Associations (SFTRA) was over the moon that we'd been awarded a two star rating by the Audit Commission.

Here's what Jean had to say: "SFTRA would like to thank all the staff at SHP for their hard work enabling our ALMO to achieve the two stars. Over the last year staff and residents have achieved a great deal together.

"Services, planning and involvement have improved to a much higher standard and Sutton has an ALMO we can be very proud of. We're delighted with the two star inspection rating and all our hard work has got us the results we deserve.

"I'd like to thank everyone who has taken the time and commitment to be involved, we just couldn't have done it without you. 2010 will be a very good year for all of us. Good luck to Sutton Housing Partnership, Sutton's ALMO."

SHP Board proud of two star rating

Findlay Macpherson, Chair of the SHP Board told us: "Being awarded our two stars is great news and reflects the commitment and effort of all the staff at SHP. They have transformed the way in which housing services are provided and I am extremely proud of their achievements.

"I would also like to pay tribute to our residents, who have not only waited patiently for this event to happen but have contributed greatly to the way we deliver our services."

Praise from Sutton Council

Councillor Sean Brennan, Leader of Sutton Council, said: "This is fantastic news for our council tenants.

"I would like to thank residents and staff for working together to achieve the two star rating from the Audit Commission and we all look forward to an exciting year ahead for Sutton's housing."

What does this mean and what about our Decent Homes funding?

Sutton Housing Partnership was set up by Sutton Council to access government funding in order to bring properties up to the 'Decent Homes Standard'. For many that would mean new kitchens, bathrooms, windows and heating.

Unfortunately changes in the government's priorities during the last year have seen this promised funding, which was expected this year, deferred until 2011/12. As well as ensuring we got the two stars and qualified for the funding, there has been lobbying by SHP, SFTRA, Sutton Council, local MPs and residents both in Sutton and other affected areas.

The good news is that we have received confirmation that rather than a delay until April 2011, £5m of the funding will be available from April 2010. This is less than originally promised, but with other money to be spent on housing, the total available to improve homes in the next financial year will be £9.1m. This will be in addition to redecoration, gas appliance and other servicing and day-to-day repairs.

Last spring we sent you details of the original five year 'Decent Homes' programme based on the promised funding (as shown in the picture to the right). What the recent announcement means is that any works not yet started and in the programme for 2009/10 will commence in the financial year starting April 2010. If works were originally in the programme for the year starting April 2010, these will start after April 2011.



The 'Decent Homes' programme

We will, of course, be sending out further details to all those affected, so you will know when to expect works on your property to start. If you are a leaseholder, you will also get the appropriate statutory notices as required under your lease.



Delivering Sutton's petition to No 10.

SFTRA says 'We won't give up the fight!'

Jean Crossby, chair of SFTRA, has, together with local MPs, Sutton Council officials, SFTRA members and SHP residents, been fighting the government on their decision to defer the Decent Homes funding ever since it was announced.

Jean commented: "Of course this result was meant to unlock the 'Decent Homes' funding we in Sutton so desperately need. We remain disappointed with the government, who have turned their back on not just the council tenants of Sutton but council tenants from all over the country, as only a small part of the money promised will be paid next year."

"The remaining funding we should have received in 2010 will now go to property developers to fund 30,000 new-build houses dashing the hopes and dreams of over 200,000 council tenants. The government never consulted or involved any of the councils or tenants with their decision to 'claw back' our Decent Homes funding and once again some of the poorest people will suffer by their decision."

"As we all know there will be an election this year and one of our top priorities is to make sure that whichever party are in government we as council tenants get a 'Decent Home'."



If you, or someone you know, needs this document in a different language, large print, Braille, CD or audiotape please call us on **Freephone 0800 195 5552** or from you mobile on **020 8915 2000**.

What the Audit Commission had to say

The Audit Commission have now sent us a 66 page report which includes a summary of their findings, detailed comments on all the services we provide and six recommendations to help improve some of our services.

We can't fit everything in, so here are just a few of their main findings:

- * We provide a 'good' two-star housing management service that has promising prospects for improvement.
- * In comparison with other recent housing inspections we are one of the strongest two star organisations inspected in 2009.
- * By saying that we are a two star rated ALMO, the Audit Commission mean that we consistently deliver above the minimum requirements for users, we are cost-effective and that we make a contribution to other services in our community.

That doesn't mean we get everything right all the time, but overall services are good and likely to get better.

A full copy of the report is available to pick up from our reception at Sutton Gate or you can download a copy from our website, please visit www.suttonhousingpartnership.org.uk or if you prefer from the Audit Commission's website at www.audit-commission.gov.uk



Things we're doing well...

The Audit Commission inspectors, in deciding our services were 'good', have identified a number of our strengths, here are just a few of them:

- * It's easy for customers to access our services.
- * Good quality information is provided to residents.
- * Residents are involved in improving our services.
- * Effective support is provided for vulnerable tenants.
- * Planned works are delivering improvements.
- * Responsive repairs are delivered promptly.
- * Sheltered housing tenants are receiving a high standard of service and care.

Things we need to do better...

The inspectors also told us that we need to improve some of our services, here's a snippet of what they had to say:

- * Not all complaints are being captured.
- * Former tenancy arrears are high and collection of leaseholder charges is low.
- * Almost half of homes are not of a 'decent standard'.

The Audit Commission also noted that there were a few circumstances that may get in the way of these improvements, one of the main ones being that the future funding for our 'Decent Home' work is still uncertain.

Our six recommendations...

These are the six recommendations from the Audit Commission and each one carries quite a few suggestions on how we can improve these areas.

Here are those six recommendations:

- * Strengthen tenant involvement and Influence.
- * Address existing areas of tenant dissatisfaction.
- * Improve the standard of service tenants receive.
- * Ensure the aids and adaptations service offers high quality and an equal service to all tenants.
- * Improve value for money.
- * Improve performance management.

We've already started work on these recommendations and all of them will be completed by the end of June 2010.

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