



Response of Mid-Wales Housing Association.

Mid-Wales Housing Association is disappointed that the Welsh Audit Office Inspection undertaken earlier this year did not indicate a higher level of service. However, it does take some comfort that the vast majority of issues identified had already been identified by its senior management, prior to Inspection, and as a consequence its Business Plan already included plans for addressing many of the shortcomings. The Association welcomes the findings of this Audit and the recommendations made as a valuable tool to help it improve key services to tenants.

Since the conclusion of the Inspection the Association has made significant changes in many of the areas identified as requiring “scope for considerable improvement” and fundamentally addressed weaknesses regarding its “processes and performance”. The Welsh Audit Office Lead Inspector stated that he is pleased by the Association’s positive response to the inspection findings and work being undertaken and proposed to address remaining issues.

Processes and Performance.

The Association was particularly concerned that the Inspection concluded that weaknesses in its processes and performance would make it unlikely to meet its own strategic activities. To address this critical issue:

- The Association is already restructuring its corporate services to establish a clear human resources function
- Has already made changes to its staff appraisal system to ensure individual staff targets are established both to improve services to tenants and to ensure corporate objectives are met.

The Association is pleased that its “metrics” performance management report is regarded as good practice and will be developing this further as a management tool to drive improvements in its services.

Relationships with Residents.

The Association has already adopted measures to improve its relationship with tenants including:

- A doubling of the then Tenant Participation budget
- A reorganisation of key services into distinct areas with named staff responsible for developing relationships with tenants within those areas.
- The introduction of “free post” postcards to encourage tenants to complain or compliment the Association.
- Holding local tenants forums to discuss improvements within clearly defined areas. This being an important focus of future tenant liaison which the Association regards as essential so it is able to tailor improvements on each of its estates to the needs of those living there.
- The introduction of an annual performance report intended to inform tenants on all areas of performance.

In addition the Association

- will be consulting with tenants in the new year on a draft “Customer Service Standard”.
- Is in the process of changing it's rules to enable the direct election to it's Board of representative Tenant Board Members.

Equal Opportunities.

The Association accepts that this is an area where it needs to make changes to it's existing processes, and even before the Inspection had joined Tai Pawb and started to introduce practical measures to assist individuals from BME backgrounds in it's area. For instance it now subscribes to “language line” so individuals visiting the office are able to converse in the language of their choice. The Association will continue to work with Tai Pawb to improve it's services.

Again prior to inspection, the Association had volunteered to work with the Welsh Language Board to develop a much needed Welsh Language Strategy and hopes to have this in place before the end of 2006.

Rents Service.

At the time of the Inspection, the Association had recently restructured it's rents service (along with other housing services) into the area approach mentioned above. The Welsh Audit Office Inspection was very useful to identify weaknesses and led to a Best Value Review¹ into the rents service which the Association is confident will identify clear actions for improvement in this important service.

Lettings Service.

The Association is very disappointed by the assessment in this area as it strongly believes that those individuals housed have been fairly selected. Some of the criticism here relates to the operation of it's “Village Lettings Policy” which is designed to ensure scarce housing developed to meet a specific village's need is subsequently allocated to people from that village. Whilst the Association ensures the criteria is always followed there are weaknesses in it's monitoring of the scheme which mean it can not guarantee some “groups” are not disadvantaged. The Association accepts the recommendations and will act to ensure weaknesses identified are addressed.

CONCLUSION.

Over the last two years the Association has worked hard to place services to customers at the heart of it's activities and to improve methods for open and honest communication with tenants in particular.

The recommendations of the Welsh Audit Office Inspection helpfully identify shortcomings which the Association is committed to address over the course of the next few years. Whilst the Association would like to deal with these matters quicker than this some of the challenges faced will take time to address.

The Association is committed to improving it's services and will continue to work hard to that end.

¹ Best Value Review of Rents Allocations and Lettings