



WALES AUDIT OFFICE  
SWYDDFA ARCHWILIO CYMRU

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# Inspection of Mid-Wales Housing Association: a Summary Report

## **Mid-Wales Housing Association**

*The Welsh Assembly Government (the Assembly Government) has appointed the Auditor General for Wales to carry out the inspection of housing associations in Wales under Section 96c of the Government of Wales Act 1998.*

Inspections assess how an association is meeting the expectations of the Assembly Government as set out in the current Welsh Assembly Government's *Regulatory Code for Housing Associations in Wales* (the Regulatory Code). Inspectors assess the quality of service provided in a range of service areas. They also assess how the Association secures continuous improvement in the Association as a whole and in relation to inspected services.

The inspection of the Mid-Wales Housing Association (the Association) was undertaken in **March-April 2006**. The full report is available from:

Wales Audit Office,  
2-4 Park Grove,  
Cardiff CF10 3PA  
Tel: 029 2026 0260  
Textphone: 029 2026 2646  
E-mail: [info@wao.gov.uk](mailto:info@wao.gov.uk)  
Website: [www.wao.gov.uk](http://www.wao.gov.uk)

Within eight weeks of the publication date, the Association should circulate this summary of the report to tenants and key stakeholders and produce a brief commentary and action plan setting out how it will respond to the inspection findings. The commentary will then be published on the Wales Audit Office website.

The Lead Inspector will review the action plan and confirm whether it is acceptable or identify any necessary changes. The Lead Inspector will make recommendations to the Assembly Government regarding the frequency of progress reviews. The Assembly Government's Regulation Co-ordinator assigned to the Association will undertake progress reviews, and in consultation with the Lead Inspector will 'sign off' completion of the action plan.

**The inspectors found that Mid-Wales Housing Association was providing a good service in one area, satisfactory services in three areas and had scope for considerable improvement in four other service areas. The Association also showed weaknesses in process and performance.**

- 1. The Association had scope for considerable improvement in its relationship with residents.** The Association had established a framework for engaging with tenants but did not consistently support them to participate in developing landlord services. The Association provided a limited range of readily accessible, clear and accurate information and advice for residents. The Association sought tenant's views but it did not consistently take account of them in developing landlord services. The Association was not answerable to residents for the quality of services provided.
- 2. The Association had scope for considerable improvement in its equal opportunities arrangements for service users.** Training initiatives had been undertaken and an Equality and Diversity Strategy was in place. However, the Association did not consistently promote respect for diversity and equality of opportunity, work towards the elimination of unfair discrimination in all their activities, and promote good relations between people of different racial groups. The Association lacked a Welsh Language Scheme.
- 3. The Association had a good approach to providing housing.** The Association was working effectively in partnership with Powys and Ceredigion County Councils and contributing to identifying and meeting housing related needs in these areas. The Association's Community Housing Agreements with Powys and Ceredigion County Councils were delivering effective outcomes for service users. The Association had developed an effective Community Initiatives Strategy and was working with a number of communities to develop new services.
- 4. The Association had scope for considerable improvement in its rents service to tenants.** The Association's approach to debt prevention was not providing an effective service for all its tenants. The Association had a rents policy and procedure in place, but there was scope to improve how arrears were monitored, evaluated and managed.
- 5. The Association had scope for considerable improvement in its letting service.** While the Association was meeting its targets for letting properties, there was scope for improving consistency in the quality of vacant homes prior to re-letting. The Association did not go as far as it could to ensure that people in housing need were aware of, and had good access to, the Association's accommodation. The Association was working effectively in partnership with Powys and Ceredigion County Councils over the allocation of its housing. The Association was seeking to achieve a balance in housing allocations, but was unable to demonstrate that those housed had been fairly selected.
- 6. The Association provided a satisfactory housing management service.** The Association ensured that tenants were offered the most secure form of occupancy compatible with the purpose of the housing and the sustainability of the community. The Association had established a framework for dealing with nuisance and more serious anti-social behaviour, but there were opportunities to further improve services.

- 7. The Association was providing a satisfactory maintenance service.** The quality of work undertaken to Association homes was considered by tenants to be good, but there were opportunities to improve the efficiency and effectiveness of the responsive repairs service. The Association had cyclical improvement and servicing programmes in place and was addressing weaknesses in current arrangements for ensuring access for gas servicing and informing contractors about the presence of asbestos. The Association was not yet in a position to fully determine the extent or cost of works required to achieve the Welsh Housing Quality Standard (WHQS).
- 8. The Association was providing satisfactory services for people with support needs.** The Association made housing available for people who had support needs, but was not able to consistently ensure its existing tenants or applicants who needed support could access services. The Association ensured that all key expectations were fairly applied to customers who required support and tailored services to meet their specific needs.
- 9. The Association showed weaknesses in process and performance.** The Association was likely to have difficulty ensuring that all strategic objectives are met because of the absence of an effective human resource function, weaknesses in its appraisal system and limitations in plans to support the delivery of objectives. Although the Association had established, and was further developing, a performance monitoring system and support framework, the absence of comprehensive service standards and performance evaluation in all areas of operation did not support the Association to consistently drive improvement in all areas. The Association had developed a Best Value Review programme and applied an agreed methodology for each review, but it was unable to gauge whether intended outcomes were being achieved, and consultation with, and involvement of, tenants in the review process was weak. The Association had developed a range of improvement plans, but due to limited resources and a large programme of change it could not guarantee that these would result in service improvements.

**Examples of good practice demonstrated by Mid-Wales Housing Association included the following:**

**Providing housing: the Association's Community Initiatives Strategy.** The strategy provided a comprehensive framework for the Association to develop and deliver innovative community based services. The strategy included clear criteria for acceptable projects.

**Performance management: the Metrics performance management report.** The system provides monthly reports analysing the performance of the Association against core indicators. The Metrics report covered three broad areas – Stakeholder, Business Processes and Learning & Growing – and operated on a traffic light system showing green, amber and red performance. Where performance was below the target (red indicators), operational managers met monthly to identify the reasons for poor performance and to agree how to manage an improvement in the service.

Mid-Wales Housing Association was formed in 1975 and is a non-charitable Industrial and Provident Society. The Association manages 1,240 properties, including 103 supported housing units, throughout Powys and Ceredigion, and has its head office located in Newtown. The Association operates as a group structure. It has one subsidiary – Care and Repair in Powys – and 47 staff.

At the time of the inspection, the Association was governed by a Board of Management of 13, of which two were Tenant Board members. The operation of the Board had been the subject of a Best Value Review of governance and the Association was in the process of introducing new working arrangements for the Board.



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2-4 Park Grove  
Cardiff CF10 3PA  
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Website: [www.wao.gov.uk](http://www.wao.gov.uk)