

REPORT OF LIVING IN HACKNEY SCRUTINY COMMISSION		
Registered Social Landlord Review (Estate Management)	Classification Public	Enclosures
	Ward(s) affected All	

1. FOREWORD BY THE CHAIR OF THE LIVING IN HACKNEY SCRUTINY COMMISSION: COUNCILLOR ERIC OLLERENSHAW – NOVEMBER 2007

One of our considerations in taking on this piece of work was the number of housing related enquiries Members receive as part of their casework and the role that we believe we all often fulfill when it appears that we are coordinating different streams of responsibility whether within the Council or across partner organisations. There are some obvious upsides to these situations; when we are successful in resolving a resident's concern or complaint, whatever this may be, this allows us to play out what many of us believe to be one of our key roles, acting as an effective gateway and interlocker to the authority. However in such situations it is also difficult to avoid the feeling that many examples of Councillor involvement could not and arguably should not require our participation, instead being dealt with through efficient administration, with only the more serious advocacy cases reaching Councillors.

By conducting this review we hope to have reached a position of clarity in respect of the issues that exist around housing and estate management, to have discussed such matters with both housing providers, partners and residents in addition to exploring and putting forward a number of possible solutions or identifying areas where solutions may be developed to those issues we have encountered.

Above all we wish to overcome the apparent hurdles that sometimes exist within this area and foster an environment whereby residents can expect a continuity of service and consistency of standards in relation to their housing needs irrespective of who their landlord is, who they are dealing with or the coordination that may be required on a given issue by the potentially large amount of agencies involved.

2. INTRODUCTION

The potential for Overview and Scrutiny to add value in this area was first discussed by Members of the Commission in the 05/06 municipal year. As in many places throughout the country Members frequently receive casework correspondence and comments at surgeries concerning aspects of Estate Management by Registered Social Landlords (RSLs). This agenda was already and continues to be addressed by a number of consultative and partnership forums within the borough but the suggestion that Councillors might assist in driving forward such an important set of issues received widespread political and officer support and was therefore endorsed at the Overview and Scrutiny Work Programme Conference in June 2006.

- 2.1 The London Borough of Hackney has 69 Registered Social Landlords. The twenty largest RSLs account for 90% of the current stock and the Council is also a social housing provider. When considering the volume of social housing stock within the borough it quickly becomes clear that the consistency and extent to which estate management standards apply across all Registered Social Landlords and more broadly social housing providers operating within Hackney will have and has a significant impact upon the quality of life experienced by a great many of the borough's residents.
- 2.2 The Housing Corporation is the regulatory and funding body for all Registered Social Landlords. RSLs are independent, not-for-profit housing organisations, most are social landlords like housing associations or local housing companies but some are charitable trusts or co-operatives. They all operate as businesses but all surpluses are usually ploughed back into community housing to maintain existing homes and build new ones. The Council does not regulate RSLs, although local authorities are the statutory agencies charged with maintaining a strategic overview of housing needs and supply within their areas. As such, the Council has a role to play in monitoring RSLs, and can use its influence to encourage better performance.
- 2.3 In order to be well placed to consider what might be done to improve standards Members determined we needed to gain a clear understanding of the complex relationships that exist between the various bodies involved in housing provision; primarily the Council; Registered Social Landlords operating in the Borough and the Housing Corporation as regulator.

2.4 The Commission aimed for the review to focus on the areas identified as key issues. These are highlighted below and set out within the review's terms of reference;

- i. General Estate Management arrangements, with a particular focus on multi-landlord estates
- ii. Anti-social behaviour
- iii. Tenant participation and engagement (including service user feedback)
- iv. Complaints management, with a particular focus on large estates
- v. Repairs and Maintenance Services
- vi. Support services
- vii. Homelessness Prevention

3. SUMMARY & RECOMMENDATIONS

We set out below the recommendations coming out of this review and offer a brief introduction to each. They are only included within this section of the report and not within the findings, as is considered standard practice, because we believe all recommendations are interlinked, strategic and impact upon many differing strands of our findings.

3.1 Recommendation One

During the course of this review it has become apparent that scope exists for confusion, particularly amongst residents on estates, in relation to responsibility and ownership for a number of issues such as tackling ASB or bulk waste removal. This means residents can find themselves in situations where they do not know who to approach about an issue, how best to resolve a situation or where to complain. Members believe such concerns may be alleviated through increased information sharing between the Council, relevant partners and residents.

Recommendation

The Commission recommends that if the Council does not hold RSL ownership information (and therefore accessible records of who has a duty to act), it should be sought from the RSLs and a means for holding and updating such information explored.

A suitable means of making such information available to Councillors and residents should also be identified and rolled out – allowing residents to have a known point of contact for each issue as may arise on an estate.

3.2 Recommendation Two

During the course of our investigations we became aware of the existence of the Social Housing Compact which was devised in 2006 as a means to encourage the spread of best practice across all RSLs in LBH and to ensure universal sign up to basic standards of service. We heard how this document was well received by Officers and RSLs alike.

The Commission believes that all housing providers within Hackney should aspire to deliver consistent standards ensuring that no matter who a resident's landlord is all should receive an adequate and broadly uniform service. In order to build upon such initiatives and aspirations we believe all housing providers within the borough would benefit from a review of standards, service levels, protocols and the means by which to monitor performance. Ensuring the principles set out within the Compact become tangible, recordable, managed and regularly reviewed.

Recommendation

The Commission recommends that the Better Homes Partnership give immediate consideration to how appropriate, distinct and agreed standards may be developed by the local providers of social housing and that the capacity and ability to monitor, review and discuss such performance is developed.

We understand that some work has recently been commissioned by the Better Homes Partnership to explore how these matters may be addressed and the form that they would take. The Commission fully endorses this approach and has an interest in reviewing and contributing toward the outcomes of such work which it anticipates will result in the more rigorous monitoring of the principals contained within such a framework when adopted.

3.3 Recommendation three

One aspect of the review dealt with the apparent problems of coordinated responses, action and/or management on Multi-Landlord Estates. Many of the issues raised in Councillors' ward surgeries relate to responsibility for the coordination of repairs and statutory services, such as waste collection, where, for example, it was found that in some RSL areas, the Council already takes responsibility for the removal of bulk waste free of charge.

The Commission recommends that to address any perceived inconsistency in the delivery of services to RSL residents, a lead agency needs to be identified and empowered to take a robust stance with all social housing providers on a given issue or within a given area to ensure the delivery of an agreed and consistent package of care and service.

Recommendation

The Commission would support the identification of a resource and commitment from all local housing providers to research and review opportunities for identification of lead agencies for a given policy area whether across the borough or in a given neighbourhood or area.

One means by which it may be possible to begin to move in this direction would be for the partnership to consider identifying an appropriate officer to lead on the sharing of information (responsibility and activity) within a given policy area both in relation to RSL and Council obligations.

3.4 Recommendation four

During the review it became possible to conclude that a more collective way of tackling ASB must be explored as at present there appears to be currently no formal standardised monitoring of ASB. Each RSL has their own procedures, incorporating varying levels of detail. One RSL will insist on sign up to mediation before proceeding with a more formal complainant procedure.

The Commission is aware of the work proposed by a recent review of the Regeneration and Social Inclusion Scrutiny Commission (Safer Neighbourhoods) specifically recommendation 7 as set out below.

Recommendation 7 from the Social Inclusion Scrutiny Commission is as follows: *Poor attendance on the part of some agencies at Anti-Social Behaviour (ASB) Case Conferences is related to the proliferation of ASB-related groups. Although these groups and agencies work to a similar agenda, Members would encourage the SCPB to develop a better co-ordinated approach to tackling ASB in Hackney.*

Recommendation

The Commission recommends that the SCPB considers a means to rationalise the proliferation of multi-agency ASB-related groups and its partners adopt and adhere to a common protocol for dealing with ASB.

Recommendation

The Living in Hackney Scrutiny Commission commends the implementation of this recommendation to the BHPB.

4. FINANCIAL COMMENTS

- 4.1 There are no finance implications for the Council arising directly out of this report. However, recommendation 3 refers to the partnership considering identifying an appropriate officer to lead on the sharing of information (responsibility and activity) within a given policy area both in relation to RSL and Council obligations.
- 4.2 From the Council's perspective, any additional resource requests must be considered within the Resourcing our Priorities planning framework. Given the pressure on budgets generally, the Council is looking to meet the costs of service improvements by finding compensating savings from within existing budgets.

5. LEGAL COMMENTS

5.1 Registered Social Landlords (RSL's) are regulated by the Housing Corporation pursuant to its powers under the Housing Act 1996. Further to this the Housing Corporation has issued a Regulatory Code and Guidance (August 2005) which sets out how RSL's are to conduct themselves in the discharge of their functions. With particular reference to management by RSL's of their housing stock the Regulatory Code requires Housing Associations, amongst other things to:-

- i) Have management arrangements, resources, skills and systems which are appropriate to their circumstances, scale and scope of operation.
- ii) Deliver continuous improvements and value for money in their services.
- iii) Deliver and manage good quality homes that seek to meet people's needs, now and in the future.
- iv) Provide good quality housing services for residents and prospective residents.
- v) Work with Local Authorities to enable them to fulfil their duties to the homeless, vulnerable and people in priority housing need.

The Housing Corporation has power to both regulate, and where necessary, intervene into the affairs of RSLs where concerns arise in relation to the discharge of its management functions.

The Housing Associations themselves are non profit organisations whose activity will be regulated by, or under a, constitution which will further delineate how they operate. A key thing emerging from the review of housing provision within the Borough is the need for consistency of service across RSLs. Given that RSLs are independent organisations, albeit regulated by the Housing Corporation, the desired consistency will be most easily obtained through informed and ongoing dialogue through the Local Strategic Partnership which was specifically pioneered by central government to facilitate this kind of dialogue.

Aside from RSL's Hackney Homes is an Arms Length Management Organisation (ALMO) which manages the Council's housing stock. The ALMO is a company owned by the Council and between the two parties there exists a comprehensive agreement concerning amongst other things, the discharge of housing functions. Officers employed within Hackney Homes are answerable to the Hackney Homes

Board which is in turn answerable to the Council pursuant to the agreement between the parties.

It should also be noted that there has been in recent years legislation passed in the housing field to specifically deal with issues of anti-social behaviour and in particular:

1. Part 2 of the Anti Social Behaviour Act 2003 introduced a raft of new powers for social landlords to tackle anti-social behaviour. These measures included demoted tenancies, anti-social behaviour injunctions and possession on the grounds of anti-social behaviour.
2. The Housing Act 2004 allows social landlords to extend introductory tenancies, refuse mutual exchanges or suspend the right to buy for anti-social behaviour.
3. The Housing Act 2006 introduced powers for local housing authorities to introduce licensing of private rented accommodation in order to address a raft of issues including anti-social behaviour.

In relation to the recommendations as stated in the report the following comments are to be noted:

Recommendation 1

No legal issue arises from this recommendation saving to note that the Council has power under s.2 of the Local Government Act 2000 to do anything to secure the social, economic or environmental well being of persons living within its area and the collation and publication of information concerning RSL's within the Borough would clearly fall within the power.

Recommendation 2

It will be for each RSL within the Regulatory framework as administered by the Housing Corporation (under Housing Act 1996) to agree a consistent approach. That may entail various RSL's arriving at a common position as to the standards to be expected of them under the Housing Corporations Regulatory Code and Guidance document of August 2005. It is also likely that such matters are covered in the constitutional arrangements of each RSL but a dialogue would facilitate a common approach to similar issues as called for in the report.

Recommendation 3

A discussion would need to be had between the relevant partners to determine where such a person with lead responsibility would be seated. It is likely that a partnership agreement setting out obligations and expectations would be required.

Recommendation 4

No legal issues arise in relation to recommendation 4 saving that it represents good practice.

6. FINDINGS

Prior to commencing any review it is important to consider both the policy context and the regulatory environment within which the sector you are discussing has to operate and in some cases may be confined by. We believe this remains the case even if such context and background may strictly speaking fall outside of the remit of a scrutiny review.

6.1 Policy context

Even with the briefest of reviews of the recent past of social housing within the UK it is possible to conclude that housing policy, development, quality and stock standards has received a great deal of Government focus over the last 20 years, even if the trends and principal aims and focus may have changed, over this period of time. Arguably the process started with the promotion of home ownership, this was followed by resident participation and more latterly in driving up standards and quality of stock under the Decent Homes initiative.

‘Over the last quarter century the role of social housing has changed. The sector has become much smaller as a proportion of the total, although nearly 4 million households still live within it. While post-War provision was aimed at households on a range of incomes, since the 1980s provision has become more tightly constrained and new lettings focussed on those in greatest need. As a result, the composition of tenants has changed, with tenants much more likely to have low incomes and not to be in employment than in the past or than those in the other tenures. Seventy per cent of social tenants have incomes within the poorest two-fifths of the overall income distribution, and the proportion of social tenant householders in paid employment fell from 47 to 32 per cent between 1981 and 2006. Tenants have high rates of disability, are more likely than others to be lone parents or single people, and to be aged over 60. More than a quarter (27 per cent) of all black or minority ethnic householders are social tenants (including around half of Bangladeshi and 43 per cent of black Caribbean and black African householders), compared to 17 per cent of white householders. Looking at today’s social housing stock, 93 per cent of it was already within the sector nine years ago (although 750,000 dwellings were transferred between local authority and housing association ownership ...). For tenants, there is much less movement between dwellings than within the private rented sector, and more than 80 per cent of those living in social housing today were also within the sector ten years ago (if born by then)¹.

‘However, there are exceptions to this picture of general improvement: overcrowding against the bedroom standard has deteriorated in London, particularly in the private rented sector; social tenants enjoy less space per person than other tenures, less than they did a decade ago, and are more likely to be dissatisfied than others if they are living with little space; the use of temporary accommodation is more than double what it was a decade ago – albeit mostly self-contained, rather than shared such as in bed and breakfast accommodation’¹

¹ Ends And Means: The Future Roles of Social Housing In England, John Hills, Summary, February 2007

We have also reviewed reports which suggest up to £16 billion public funding is directed towards housing provision and funding. When considering the amount of public funds involved, the issues outlined in the preceding paragraphs and the very real potential for housing to influence the social make-up and composition of our society, neighborhoods and areas, not to mention the extent to which its affordable provision can influence both an individuals and families ability to live full and independent lives it becomes easy to visualise and accept why issues associated with housing are of such critical importance.

It is important to acknowledge such a context even though ultimately such issues are for national policy makers to consider. The focus of our review is to consider the very mechanics of how the day to day running of local estates, developments and buildings are shaped and influenced by such policy dimensions and the very real way in which issues such as effective and efficient refuse collection or combined multi-agency action on issues of shared concern such as ASB have the potential to assist and significantly improve the lives of our residents.

6.2 Regulation

‘There are over 1,500 housing associations in England, currently managing around 2 million homes and housing at least twice that many people. Some were founded centuries ago but many trace their origins to the 1960s. Many new associations have been formed to manage and develop homes transferred to them by local authorities ²’.

The Housing Corporation is a public body responsible for regulating Registered Social Landlords in England and for allotting government grant funding for new and renovated affordable rented homes. It sets registration criteria for would be RSLs and performance standards for them to meet in their operations and housing services. A review of published literature also shows that they provide advice and support to housing associations, to help them provide the best and most cost-efficient services, and assesses their performance against agreed standards.

‘Social housing organisations provide affordable housing to those whose needs are not met by the market. This includes low cost ownership schemes Four million homes ... housing 8.4 million people. There are four categories of provider;

- Local authorities as owners and managers of social housing (32% of the total)
- Arms length management organisations (ALMOs) of local authorities (20%)
- Housing associations (48%); which has grown significantly as a proportion of the social
- Housing stock since 1988 with the advent of large scale voluntary transfers
- Unregistered bodies including for-profit providers, which since 2004 have been allowed
- To apply for grant to provide social housing (0% of ownership to date, but for-profit organisations undertake some management)³.

² <http://www.housingcorp.gov.uk>

³ Every Tenant Matters: A Review Of Social Housing Regulation Executive Summary Professor Martin Cave, June 2007

'The current regulatory system has delivered a number of benefits but also has acknowledged shortcomings. The key ones can be listed as follows;

- Inadequate concern for tenant interests
- Over-regulation of some providers and excessive administrative burdens
- Inadequate separation of policy and regulation (leading to the unacknowledged implementation of policy by regulation)
- Poor incentives for efficiency
- Failure fully to utilise available³

It is some of the front line consequences of the issues detailed above and replicated from the recent Cave Report (a review of Social Housing Regulation) that this scrutiny review hopes to establish how to move beyond locally through improved and enhanced jointed working, partnership and the adoption of shared standards.

6.3 Strategic Housing Management in Hackney

Hackney as with many local authorities has a local strategic partnership, called Team Hackney, a partnership dedicated to improving the quality of life for everyone in the borough, which it seeks to achieve through bringing together the different parts of the public, private, community and voluntary sectors.

In brief the local strategic partnership is led by a board with the wider partnerships' work organised along thematic sub partnerships. The partnership with direct responsibility for housing is the Better Homes Partnership and one of the borough's five LAA targets aims to establish a local environment that increases access to low cost home ownership.

6.3.1 The role and remit of this partnership has been reviewed relatively recently as part of a broader review and refresh of Hackney's LSP arrangements. The Better Homes Partnership aims to;

- Reduce overcrowding and homelessness by securing additional affordable homes
- Increase the availability of homes in Hackney that are attractive to those unable to afford market prices (LAA target)
- Improve the condition and management of houses and housing estates in the borough. (LAA target)

6.3.2 As referred to elsewhere upwards of 69 RSLs operate within LBH all of varying sizes. The composition, capacity, resources and representation of such a diffuse grouping were considered when determining the structure of the Better Homes Partnership which we understand is now based upon the following structure;

- Main Board
- Investment Sub Group
- Housing Management Sub Group

³Every Tenant Matters: A Review Of Social Housing Regulation Executive Summary Professor Martin Cave, June 2007

6.3.3. Prior to the 1980s, we understand that RSLs were commonly accustomed to providing smaller scale developments, and managing homes and buildings. However a number of changes to the law have been implemented since 1989 meaning this situation has begun to change, such a transitional period has undoubtedly created some challenges as such organisations, which have not always had appropriate local familiarity, have sought to develop the ability to provide community centred and neighbourhood consistent services. Something that is clearly not always easy for independent organisations, with their own policies, procedures and strategies and can result in different service standards being provided to residents of different landlords on the same estate. Differences which can affect residents include:

- a) Approaches to tenant representation and consultation
- b) Approaches to ASB
- c) Response times to repairs
- d) Programmed repair priorities
- e) Incompatible practices applied to grounds maintenance, caretaking, car parking and other estate-wide management issues.

6.3.4 Similarly, issues can arise between RSLs over boundaries of both ownership and management. For example, where more than one RSL has flats in one block it may not be clear who is responsible for unblocking gutters or maintaining the communal areas such as stair wells and the door entry system. Similarly lengths of railings or fencing require maintenance but it may not be clear where the responsibility of one RSL ends and other begins.

6.3.5 A Key Action from *The (LBH) Housing Strategy Consultation Document 2004 – 2007: Working with partners*. From our review we understand and conclude that examples of good practice do exist in the borough and have been identified in relatively recent best value inspections. Which for example, identified successful arrangements taking place in the areas of Stamford Hill and Shoreditch. Where such examples of good proactive and effective arrangements have been found to exist the Council has sought to actively encourage and support the continuance of the relationship. The key issue therefore appears to be how, as the strategic housing lead for the area, the Council can promote such arrangements across the whole borough.

6.3.6 At the time of commencing its review the relationship between the Council, the RSLs and other affordable housing providers was set out in the Social Housing Compact, established in September 2005 and at that time overseen by the Better Homes Partnership Board. The partners to the Compact are in theory committed to providing quality, customer focused services and to continuous improvement of services.

The compact suggested that performance information will be used to inform development decisions and to engage with the sub-region concerning preferred partners for development. But upon reviewing progress it appears few standards were included and the ability and mechanisms to compile, monitor and deliver against such standards were either not included or sufficiently enforceable within this the compact. This led us to ponder if the missing link is now the fact that we do

not yet have the means by which to support a more rigorous monitoring of the principals contained within such a compact?

6.3.7 As part of our review we heard from both senior officers and one of the co-Chairs of this Partnership and we also spoke to a number of RSLs. All felt the partnership produced and built upon positive relationships although anecdotal evidence could allow some to conclude that progress on achieving real and sustained improvements had been mixed. However in keeping with much of the actors within Team Hackney (following its refresh) contributors advised us that they are now beginning to both see and believe that they are contributing to the delivery of beneficial action on the ground as a direct consequence of partnership centred activity. I'm not clear whether this means that many of the actors see this too or that many of the actors are delivering beneficial action.

6.3.8 In collating our evidence we heard that the partnership is moving to a position of adopting a number of priorities, a fact which is supported by the matters brought to our attention independently as the review progressed. Perhaps the most important area, where such a consolidation of opinion appears to be forming, relates to the desire to improve the overall consistency and quality of management of Hackney's housing stock which from the evidence we collated during our review needs to tackle;

- Variety of landowners and managers
- Different standards and rationalisation
- Local Authority Role – as an enabler and facilitator

We have learnt that the Better Homes Partnership has commissioned some work to explore how and what such standards might look like. It is with some interest that we await the conclusion of this work without which it is difficult to assess the extent to which they will prove successful in delivering the desired performance.

6.4 Benchmarking

6.4.1 We requested that some benchmarking be undertaken by officers in order to establish what other comparable boroughs were doing in this important area – we are grateful to those that helped us by compiling this information. The results of this exercise were presented to a meeting of the Commission where Members were advised that the boroughs reviewed were all London Boroughs and selected because of their reputation for pro-active working relationships with RSLs.

The boroughs approached were;

- Croydon;
- Islington;
- Tower Hamlets;
- Hammersmith and Fulham;
- Greenwich;
- Camden; and
- Newham.

- 6.4.2 All boroughs are known to routinely monitor the affordable housing programmes being delivered by RSLs within their boroughs. This is clearly an important function as RSL developments are the sole, or major source of new affordable homes.

All boroughs meet with RSLs to discuss housing management issues including housing benefit and anti-social behaviour on a regular basis. The exercise found that two boroughs collected Housing Management Information (Islington and Tower Hamlets).

Hammersmith and Fulham, Croydon and Newham have preferred partners but the terms of the partnership agreements may not always be well enforced.

We heard how LB Hammersmith and Fulham have recently agreed a complaints protocol, and monitor the way that RSLs respond to cases of domestic violence and fly-tipping. They also offer a free fly-tipping and rubbish-clearing service to RSLs as well as comparing the housing management performance of their preferred partners with their ALMO – at the time of collating such evidence arrangements were thought to be at a developmental stage.

Islington Council advised that it sent all RSLs managing properties within its area an annual return on performance for their completion. The Commission was advised that the questions shadow those which the Housing Corporation requires RSLs to answer annually about their activities – the Regulatory and Statistical Return (RSR) – though such information clearly differs in so much as it is specific to the borough and covers the full range of RSL activity, including Development and Performance, as well as Housing Management activities. Islington publishes the information it gathers on its website, where it is available for public scrutiny.

The London Borough of Tower Hamlets approach differs from that of Islington, in that their questionnaire avoids duplicating information that the Housing Corporation requires on the RSR. The information provided is sufficient to identify any issues arising. When issues are identified, there is informal, *ad-hoc* liaison with the RSL concerned.

- 6.4.3 In comparison: Hackney currently has regular liaison arrangements, and is producing arrangements for collecting data from, and monitoring RSLs, an initiative presently being led by the Better Homes Partnership (BHP) of Team Hackney. RSLs are well represented on the BHP and a number of sub-groups. These sub-groups include Affordable Homes, which deals with investment/development matters, and a Housing Benefit liaison group. Of most relevance to this report, however, are:

- a) The Housing Management Project Group (HMPG). This meets bi-monthly, and covers operational housing matters
- b) The Best Practice Group. This is a sub-group of the HMPG, and provides a forum for RSLs and other housing providers to identify and share best practice in housing management. It also supervises the:
- c) Task Groups. These have been formed to assist with the production of a Hackney Plus Housing Standard. Five Task Groups will produce the Standard, covering Respect/ASB; Leaseholder Issues; Communal Environment/Liveability; Customer Care and Complaints Handling and Repairs. The Standard is

intended to be adopted by all housing providers in the borough. It will be monitored as part of the Local Area Agreement, and will include data collection and monitoring arrangements with which the Council will measure the performance of the participating RSLs (and other housing providers).

Whilst both Islington and Tower Hamlets collect information on RSL Housing Management, it appeared from the evidence presented to Members that only Tower Hamlets addresses under-performance where the data illustrates that this is happening. Action taken by LB Tower Hamlets is limited to *ad-hoc* liaison. Hackney, in contrast, appears to have well evolved liaison arrangements, but is still putting arrangements in place to collect data.

Whilst these examples show that it is perfectly feasible to collect this information, gathering data is less than half the story. If the data indicates that local residents are receiving unsatisfactory services as tenants of an under-performing RSL, procedures to enable the Council and its partners to address this need to be agreed and implemented.

6.4.4 SLAs, Local Agreements and Protocols; good practice in housing management that we have encountered during our review appears centred on providing consistent standards of service to residents. Examples, both from within the borough and elsewhere, include:

- a) Management Agreements, whereby the different landlords agree to work to common goals on the estate, and might divide up different functions between them. For example, one landlord deals with grounds maintenance, another provides caretaking, etc. We heard how the RSLs at Lee Conservancy Road made such an agreement in 2005, in response to a number of problems there. The agreement has succeeded in resolving most of the more pressing problems.
- b) 'Management Agency' Agreements. A more far reaching agreement - one RSL manages the whole estate on behalf of all the landlords.
- c) Management Contract: RSLs agree to let an external agency manage the property for all of them. This could be a commercial contractor, a Tenant Management Organisation or a Housing Co-operative.
- d) Management Partnership. RSLs provide a dedicated organisation in partnership. This might simply manage the estate, or it could own and manage the estate.

When we had opportunity to discuss the current situation in Hackney with those RSLs able and available to meet with us we heard how many view any perceived breakdown of partnership working as arising because of an absence of formal and signed agreements between RSLs and the Council, outlining basic standards of service including the incorporation of monitoring arrangements.

6.5 Partnership working & Multi-Landlord Estates

Hackney has a number of estates of socially rented homes where there are 3 or more landlords, including Registered Social Landlords and Hackney Homes. During our review we were advised that there were three main reasons for this:

- **Council stock transfers:** In the 1990s and early 2000s, LBH lacked the resources to maintain some of its more run down estates. One way it addressed this issue was by inviting RSLs to submit bids to acquire part or all of those estates. Some RSLs formed consortia in order to spread the risks and resources required to take over large numbers of Council properties.
- **New Developments:** Some RSLs formed consortia to develop or acquire new schemes on privately-owned sites. This, again, was done in order to spread the risks and resources involved, but there was also an element of LBH wanting to ensure that different RSLs got 'fair shares' of the available new developments.
- **Hackney's BME Housing Policy:** This currently requires that all developments of 20 or more RSL homes need to have a BME partner, who would own or manage at least 20% of those homes.

6.5.1 Multi landlord estates can be separated into two distinct groups; a) those that are formerly council owned and b) new developments.

a) These were transferred under the Estate Regeneration Scheme, which included Northwold and Kingsmead, and the Comprehensive Estates Initiative, which included Holly Street and Trowbridge.

b) New Developments: There are relatively few of these. Lee Conservancy Road is a prominent example, where seven RSLs own and manage 119 rented and intermediate homes.

As part of our review we visited one of these estates and spoke to residents ourselves about the issues they faced on a day to day basis and enhanced our understanding of some of the unique challenges faced in estates such as those already identified.

6.5.2 Much anecdotal evidence exists to suggest Hackney's regeneration is now apparent right across the borough. It is important that information sharing between statutory agencies continues to develop in order to support this process and to assist with the delivery of the Council's commitment to continue to improve housing and the environment for its residents. However, we found that scope exists for confusion on a number of estates, particularly, in relation to MLE (Multi – Landlord Estates) maintenance and repairs. For example, during a site visit to the New Kingshold Estate residents indicated that they felt that there are some discrepancies in the way Housing Associations carry out repairs on the estates. One resident may have his/her tired windows replaced whilst her neighbour's property, of a similar condition is left unattended. Residents and Members of this Commission believe such concerns may be alleviated through increased information sharing and improved levels of communication between the Council and RSLs to enhance the level of coordination between relevant bodies.

- 6.5.3 Our review also established that there currently appears to be no systematic database kept of RSL stock in the borough. We believe that the Council, in its strategic housing role, would benefit from such a resource as it would, for example, clearly identify the locations of all MLEs, and help identify opportunities for introducing more effective and efficient housing management arrangements.

We know that the Council has a track record of working successfully with RSLs on the estates to promote positive development of services and housing management. For example, Housing Associations and the Better Homes Partnerships Team worked with the landlords at Lee Conservancy Road to promote the adoption of a successful management agreement. This experience could be applied to other such estates where problems arising from the existence of multiple landlords are identified.

And yet during our discussions throughout this investigation RSLs have acknowledged there are obstacles to working in partnership including:

- a) RSL standards versus Council expectations: Some RSLs have their own standards and consult upon and manage those and generally apply these across all of their stock. Occasionally the Council may have higher or lower standards than theirs however RSLs may believe it would be difficult to apply them to their stock in Hackney without applying them elsewhere.
- b) Consortium estates: Consortium estates are harder and more expensive to manage and the Commission encountered some anecdotal evidence that a number of RSLs would avoid their involvement in them if at all possible. The difficulty appears to be that each RSL has its own standards (in some cases none). A scenario may then arise where responsible RSLs are held accountable for the actions of less responsible RSLs on the same site and end up providing services instead of or as well as them, without extra payment.
- c) Some larger RSLs have found pressure from themselves on other less responsible RSLs does not always persuade them to work collaboratively. However a perception was encountered that if the Council wanted to initiate improvement in this area it could use its influence to encourage this. We heard how difficulties tend to be centered on small RSLs who may not have the resources to deliver and some pan London RSLs who may be less interested in apparently isolated stock. We encountered examples as follows:
 - A small local RSL did not undertake cyclical decorations for 10 years.
 - A West London based RSL made it clear that they were not prepared to attend a meeting regarding seven of their properties in a specified location.
 - A Wembley based RSL who passed on ownership of stock to another RSL without telling other consortium members or telling the other RSL it was on a consortium estate.

We encountered the view from some RSLs that they feel involving residents especially on smaller estates with scattered stock can be difficult. They commented that they often find other ways to involve and consult people. Larger estates with significant problems tend to naturally generate formal associations. Similarly one complication arising as a consequence of consortium estates has been that some

RSLs end up servicing and running resident consultation largely comprised of tenants and leaseholders who live in properties owned by other organisations.

- 6.5.4 Whilst the Commission understands many of the challenges listed above to improving the situation amongst RSLs, the current responses do nothing to consistently or significantly drive forward improvements across the whole borough. They fail to challenge norms and to respond to the needs of residents. This Commission also believes that such a position risks ignoring the role of the local authority as a strategic lead for housing within its area and the place shaping expectations being directed toward local authorities by central government obligation.

If the local authority possesses the desire, capacity and local networks, required to drive forward housing management improvement within its area, as it appears the government intends, this Commission considered that an appropriate model could be based upon the promotion of areas of responsibility or portfolio leads for RSLs or other organisations for a given issue e.g. refuse collection or ASB.

- 6.5.5 Stock rationalisation has also been discussed as a concept in light of the fact that Hackney has a high number of RSLs providing landlord and support services within the borough. Such a large number of social landlords inevitably means potential exists for wide variations in service standards. An RSL with few properties in Hackney cannot dedicate the same resources to its residents in the borough that another RSL, with a much larger presence, can. Consequently, tenants of the RSL with few Hackney properties will not benefit from easy access to local offices, frequent staff visits (or resident staff), or their landlord's engagement in the wider partnership working and sustainability agendas.

Stock rationalisation locally might encourage RSLs to exchange stock in order to reduce the number of different social landlords on multi-landlord estates, and within the borough as a whole. However there are inevitable barriers to such an initiative as the management of assets is a key part of business for any organisation involved in property management. As a group we have therefore pondered the question of whether stock rationalisation is in fact the panacea some feel it might be or whether a mutually beneficial solution (and one potentially more easily implemented) could be the exploration of the potential for rationalisation of management control whether on specific estates, in areas or neighbourhoods in order to drive up standards and consistency.

6.6 Repairs, Complaints and Participation

In much of our evidence gathering we encountered the feeling from residents that they experience difficulty in establishing who is responsible for doing what in a variety of housing associated situations as has been referred to elsewhere within this report. Such perceptions are likely to be exacerbated when residents have a variety of landlords (whether on a specific estate or merely in a borough) working to different standards and response times – something all the more pronounced if dwellings in the same building or estate are operated and managed by no single landlord.

As unresolved difficulty of this sort may lead to a complaint, and complaints are also more likely to arise where services are not felt to be responsive to the needs of residents, we have decided to consider these issues together.

The Commission concurs with the Housing Corporation that 'Complaints are a positive source of feedback and the Corporation accepts that a healthy level of complaints can be an indicator of an effective service provider. We would not seek to judge an association's performance purely on numbers of complaints. Housing associations which record a high level of complaints tend to have the highest customer satisfaction, according to research from the Housing Corporation and the Independent Housing Ombudsman (Independent Housing Ombudsmen)⁴.

We believe that Hackney residents deserve the best no matter who their landlord is - we also recognise that on occasions service provision will not always go as planned. In such situations it is important that residents know how to raise any concerns that they may have, that appropriate action will be taken and that lessons will be learnt and, if appropriate shared, across the sector. We have also concluded as referred to elsewhere that it is important for standards to be developed which can be shared and jointly monitored across all social housing stock within the borough, the existence of such information should make it easier to residents to track performance and to be clearer about when expectations are not being met.

Whilst again we recognise that RSL and Estate Management is not and cannot be dealt with or summarised merely by reviewing the operation of our ALMO – Hackney Homes – it is important to consider that the high number of housing stock in a borough managed by such an arrangement and their very real potential to both shape and influence the housing arena within a locality. As such in this section, perhaps more than in other areas of the report, we have reflected upon information contained within the Audit Commission's assessment of Hackney Homes in order to give us an improved understanding of the local situation. We have also considered an appropriate selection from the Audit Commission's key lines of enquiry (KLOEs) when looking at landlord services - tenancy and estate management services.

6.6.1 Repairs

'It is a good time to be looking at ways to improve the quality of responsive repair services. The pressure to improve is not new, but there is now greater emphasis on delivering a better service at lower cost'⁵

⁴ 'Complaints management by housing associations - Summary 2002' Housing Corporation'

⁵ 'Right first time' how housing associations are improving their repairs – executive summary. Chartered Institute of housing for Housing Corporation August 2005.

The Audit Commission have recently determined in respect of Hackney Homes' (HH) performance that 'The standard of responsive maintenance service offered is low ... In this inspection we found this to be an area of where there are more weaknesses than strengths. HH provides a minimal responsive service, customer service standards are inconsistent, value for money is not demonstrable, and the service is expensive. HH has failed to introduce a recharge policy, there are high levels of customer complaints, high levels of disrepair claims settled, high levels of variations on works orders with inadequate performance management of reported completions and the variation process (there are some positive trends); customer satisfaction is improving; emergency and urgent repairs are well within best practice ratios, the number of pre and post-inspections have improved, appointments made and kept have improved significantly and the time to get jobs done within government prescribed times is good'⁶.

It therefore appears possible to surmise that more needs to be done to progress activity in this area within Hackney. Equally a very real opportunity exists to build upon some solid foundations in addition to the potential to use Hackney Homes as a vehicle to drive forward improvement across the sector capitalising on best practice, sharing learning and playing to each RSL's strengths and expertise. Above all, priorities we have identified include providing tenants with clear and accessible information supported by efficient and effective recording and tracking in addition to the maximisation of the quality of any work undertaken.

In one publication we reviewed 'Tenants' views were collected particularly to help define what a 'good' repairs service is, and also to find out what issues they have about the running of repairs services. The factors which tenants in the study considered vital for a service to be acceptable are:

- being given an appointment date quickly;
- keeping appointments and informing tenants if they have to be changed;
- good quality work; and,
- an efficient system, so that faults do not have to be reported more than once and that a report can be identified easily if a tenant calls to discuss it.

Other aspects of the service are *important*, but slightly less so than those above:

- repairs being completed within promised timescales;
- repairs being completed at the first visit;
- staff who are pleasant and polite;
- coordination of repairs and planned maintenance (for example, not repairing a component shortly before it is replaced)⁶.

We believe such a framework sets out a useful set of milestones by which the performance of a repairs service might be judged. Above all we would like all of Hackney's residents, irrespective of landlord, to have confidence in the repairs service they are provided

⁶ Audit Commission – Hackney Homes (ALMO) London Borough of Hackney July

6.5.6 Participation

We are aware that the Audit Commission considers a number of issues when assessing an organisations performance in relation to tenant participation as follows;

- Access
- Customer care & user focus
- How effectively does the organisation communicate with its service users and stakeholders about tenancy and estate management issues?
- How easily do service users access the service?
- How clear and comprehensive are service standards from a service user's perspective?
- How does the organisation consult with and respond to service users?
- What service user satisfaction has been achieved within this service area?

Tenants' and residents' participation is important in all of the services that the Council and its partners provide, perhaps no service more so than housing, affecting arguably more people and therefore of greater influence to the well-being and satisfaction of a substantial number of our residents.

In respect of the Audit Commission's Assessment of Hackney Homes performance in this area they judged 'the service to be fair because it has a range of strengths including; customer focused access arrangements ... (however it was also judged as being an area where improvements are required in respect of) developing ASB procedures and customer service standards, lack of satisfaction monitoring and weak case management. Consultation and feedback mechanisms are inconsistent ... (nevertheless) there was a consensus from residents we spoke to that access arrangements to HH have improved'⁶.

We would therefore again see merit in the development of a pan borough approach to communicating with residents and encouraging their participation in housing management. We would support any initiative which sought to maximise consistent service provision in this area as with other areas mentioned elsewhere within this report.

6.7 ASB

Anti-Social Behaviour (ASB) is a relatively new term in relation to policy making but one that has received much attention over the last decade encapsulating a multitude of concerns associated with quality of life and a neighbourhood or area's liveability. As such as part of this review we felt it was important to enquire about the practices and processes put in place locally by all actors (RSLs, Hackney Homes, and the Council etc) to respond to concerns that residents may have.

⁶ Audit Commission – Hackney Homes (ALMO) London Borough of Hackney July

The Hackney Safer and Cleaner Partnership defines ASB as: 'Behaviour, whether or not it is in itself criminal, which causes or is likely to cause harassment, alarm or distress to other people; including behaviour which puts people in fear of crime'.

This includes vandalism, graffiti, noise nuisance, abandoned vehicles, prostitution, disorder, drunkenness, disputes and disturbances.

- 6.7.1 During the course of the review the RSLs were asked if they had any initiatives in place to address Anti Social Behaviour and what their relationship was with the Council in this respect. The RSLs reported that they feel that they work reasonably well with the Council on Anti Social Behaviour as well as dealing effectively with it when cases arise and they all reported that they had an ASB Strategy.

The Housing Corporation expects that all RSLs produce an ASB policy and a statement of their procedures (we reviewed a number of these). They must work with local residents to achieve adequate and appropriate arrangements. However, we established during the review that LBH and those operating within it currently have no formal standardised monitoring processes for ASB, rather each RSL has their own procedures, incorporating varying levels of detail.

We determined that amongst our key concerns toward tackling ASB include the relevant local actors having published statements which allow local residents to be clear about what they can expect to be done, how and who they are required to inform or work with. Such arrangements will need to be supported through appropriate and effective partnership arrangements, will provide support to victims and witnesses dealing quickly and sensitively with all incidents of anti-social behaviour, prevention and early intervention in addition to delivering appropriate levels of accountability.

- 6.7.2 We heard how, often, low level disorder continues to be a problem for RSLs because nuisance individuals can often come from other areas and therefore may not fall within the 'jurisdiction' of the relevant RSL.

Nevertheless we also heard how a number of current initiatives are appearing to have had some success with the engagement of problem youths, who have, for example, been encouraged to take seats on Neighbourhood Boards and to participate in other community activities all with measured success. Schemes that have run in tandem with other introduced and including, after school clubs, training and sports programmes.

- 6.7.3 In respect of specific services provided which direct impact on the ASB agenda we heard from both the Estate Safety Team and reviewed a number of noise statistics. The Estate Safety Team aims to, where possible, enable tenants and residents to peaceful enjoyment of their home. As landlords the Council has a legal and ethical duty to ensure the safety of tenants, treating criminal activity with zero tolerance and promoting early interventions as a way to dealing with issues before they become a major problem.

The Estate Safety Team is a central unit within Hackney Homes that deals with serious crime issues such as drug dealing, organised prostitution and gangs. Housing fraud, unlawful subletting and bogus benefit claims are also investigated by this team. The tools used to combat the above include; surveillance on council property, pirate radio incursions, checking occupation by auditing along with other activities.

The Intervention and Support Team are based in three neighbourhoods and we heard how there have been 144 cases reported during the first two quarters of 2006/7. 9 areas have been identified as hot spots and a number of targeted initiatives were being delivered there; including

- Actions have been taken against premises where evidence of Class A drugs use has been found
- Closure orders have been obtained since March 2006
- A Vulnerable People Support Officer has been appointed
- 10 Vulnerable residents were supported
- 19 Communal areas were targeted
- 2 Community flats opened

During our review the Commission also heard how Hackney Homes was considering reviewing with the Council the setting up of CCTV in areas that currently do not have it and there is a Surveillance Vehicle that can be deployed to trouble spots where necessary. Much of this work is commendable.

- 6.7.4 We reviewed a number of examples of good practice of partnership working in relation to tackling ASB. One such example relates to ASB case panels, forums where partners discuss all aspects of individual cases and seek resolution through joint action. The group should include, the Police, Social Services, Education and Youth Teams. However we also heard how some difficulties can be encountered in relation to whether all relevant actors attend such meetings or issues are fed back to the centre for onward action. On occasion Members were presented with the argument that some partners may not attend groups or appreciate the need to attend because a large number of partnership groups set up to deal with ASB exist. We also heard how ensuring that the people who attend are at an appropriate level with their organisation is almost as important as the attendance itself.

When collecting evidence we increasingly encountered the view that RSLs were not working as well as they might with the Council in progressing the ASB agenda and at the time of concluding our evidence gathering there has only been one recorded case of an ASBO as a direct result of RSL action. As such there is believed to be substantial under reporting, especially of low level ASB on estates and more needs to be done to address this issue in order to ensure that our residents quality of life remains the highest possible.

We believe significant scope exists for more co-operation and two way feedback between RSLs and statutory partners. For example we encountered the view that there is a lack of feedback from RSLs in relation to the mapping of problems on the estates and poor coordination with other areas especially with regard to dispersal and limitation of knock on effects. Any renewed emphasis on RSL contribution in this area should form part of a broader initiative to review the apparent multitude of ASB forums ensuring that resources can be and are used in the most efficient manner.

We also considered the need for Hackney Homes to develop an ASB strategy which should compliment the Council's Strategy in addressing the large spectrum of low and high level crime. Good work continues in relation to the repossession of dwellings as a part of the Safer Neighbourhoods remit.

In collating evidence during our review we concluded that more work needs to be done to ensure:

- a) RSLs develop shared intelligence because perpetrators of ASB may not necessarily belong to the estate on which the nuisance is being committed.
- b) Any scope to establish sharing funding arrangements to fund wardens for the estates be explored.
- c) RSLs do more to raise their profile at ASB panels becoming more involved with other stakeholders benefiting from shared knowledge, fresh ways of working and examples of good practice.

6.6.5 There currently appears to be no standardised Noise Nuisance Complaints procedure, however we were advised that Hackney Homes are currently in the process of devising one.

Noise complaints statistics as were reviewed and available at the time evidence was presented to us were as follows:

Ward	Apr 2004 - Mar 05	Apr 2005 - Mar 06	% change
Brownswood	197	264	34%
Clissold	235	192	-18%
Chatham	246	282	15%
Cazenove	176	253	44%
De Beauvoir	237	258	9%
Dalston	348	328	-6%
Hackney Central	124	223	80%
Hackney Downs	168	216	29%
Haggerston	422	521	23%
Hoxton	291	297	2%
Kings Park	131	130	-1%
Leabridge	239	256	7%
Lordship	99	131	32%
New River	273	190	-30%
Queensbridge	198	158	-20%
Springfield	214	133	-38%
Stoke Newington Central	248	304	23%
Victoria	239	207	-13%
Wick	213	176	-17%

For residents experiencing problems covering the remit of Environmental Health, Hackney Homes uses the Environmental Health Service call out provision. There is an answer phone facility on which callers must leave a message if their complaint is to be dealt with. We felt some concerns may exist about whether this information

could be made more accessible to the wider population of the borough, especially when trying to reach more diverse communities.

7 CONCLUSIONS

- 7.1 This has been the second substantive investigation conducted by the Living in Hackney Scrutiny Commission. The review has aimed not only to identify and understand the service delivered but also the effects the present service has on its all social housing residents within the borough. The Commission's perception of the challenges currently being faced has increased and the recommendations have been made bearing these in mind.
- 7.2 From the start of this review we sought to ensure that we obtained opinions from as wide a group of people as possible so as to ensure that the Commission heard from a varied and representative group of people which included residents, RSLs, Council officers, current and past Councillors, we also wrote to tenants and resident's associations and also conducted site visits, distributed questionnaires and accepted written submissions.

We will not replicate the findings of these exercises here as such information was supplied to us in order to help shape the direction of our review and not necessarily for publication. Such findings do however explain why we have chosen to shape our review and its conclusions in the way that we have and to focus on specific areas identified at the outset of the review and included within our terms of reference – something which we have not covered in its entirety. Nevertheless we feel our work has taken account of those areas where maximum potential for enhanced benefit exists, where it was apparent to us that the greatest demand for improvements existed, or where such conclusions coincided with other work streams being undertaken within Hackney.

When we heard from our current and/or former colleagues we heard of both good and less than ideal experiences, most points related to impressions gained from specific case work related issues and no systematic failings were identified or referred to.

- 7.3 Overall during our discussions with RSLs we heard that they find working with Hackney a very positive experience, and they feel that they have a reasonable and constructive dialogue that in the main occurs through Team Hackney and their organisations membership of the Better Homes Partnership. However, we did encounter views that there are areas of the Council's Services where performance may be less satisfactory and it is not always clear how to resolve these problems or who is responsible. As such we believe that the more joined up approach alluded to elsewhere within this report would be welcomed. For instance: Responsibility for the removal of abandoned vehicles to be taken up by the relevant Council department or appropriate and timely support for vulnerable residents from the Social Services Department.

Where RSLs have housing stock in other boroughs the Housing Associations report that the partnership working arrangements in Hackney are comparatively well structured and regularly maintained. In addition there is good evidence of a genuine partnership approach in Hackney which is not always evident elsewhere. We heard how Hackney's proactive approach to taking an interest in this subject might be considered as more detailed than our peers. For example, many RSLs

rarely have Councillors in any other Borough raising estate management issues with them outside of constituency enquiries – this was seen as a positive for Hackney. In reviewing this area and reading this report, Members, the Council and our partners should not ignore the many positives that exist within this arena but rather strive to build upon them to ensure that residents in Hackney get the service they both expect and deserve.

7.4 At the time the Commission's Terms of Reference were written the details of the programme had not yet been full determined.

Lead Councillor: Cllr Eric Ollerenshaw

Scrutiny Officer: Ben Vinter, ☎ 020-8356 3441

Agreed by the Living in Hackney Scrutiny Commission

November 2007

8 CONTRIBUTORS

The following gave evidence at meetings of the Commission. Others present, both officers and members of the public, made informal contributions.

The Commission is grateful to all those who took part. Errors and omissions are the responsibility of the Commission.

14 September 2006 &
4 October 2006

LBH officers; Peter O' Kane
James Simpson
Chris Church

8 November 2006

Richard Hawkins, Housing Management Project Group
Gloria Willis, Circle 33 Housing Trust

LBH and HH officers; Tom Hogan
Wayne Hylton
Murat Ozcelik
Peter O' Kane
James Simpson
Chris Church
Fiona Fletcher-Smith

December

New Kingshold Estate Site Visit

29 January

Informal RSL meeting attendance as follows;

- Sanctuary
- NLMHA
- KUSH
- Hanover
- Southern Housing
- Industrial Dwellings
- Newlon
- Family Mosaic
- Peabody
- Guinness
- Community Housing
- Canalside

8 February 2007

LBH officers; Peter O' Kane
James Simpson
Chris Church

12 July 2007

Gavin Cansfield (Hanover in Hackney and BH Partnership)
Fiona Fletcher-Smith

9. Contributing Members of the Scrutiny Commission

9.1. Elected Members up to May 2007 AGM

Councillor Eric Ollerenshaw, Chair
Councillor Sem Moema, Vice Chair
Councillor Sophie Linden
Councillor Clayeon McKenzie
Councillor Phillip Glanville
Councillor Linda Kelly
Councillor Christopher McShane

Scrutiny Officers; Angela Budd, Sally Masson & Ben Vinter

9.2. Elected Members from May 2007 AGM

Councillor Eric Ollerenshaw, Chair
Councillor Clayeon McKenzie, Vice Chair
Councillor Daniel Kemp
Councillor Phillip Glanville
Councillor Darren Parker
Councillor Gulay Icoz
Councillor Christopher McShane

Scrutiny Officer - Ben Vinter

Background papers

The following documents have been relied on in the preparation of this report and were either presented to the Scrutiny Commission or referred to during the meetings.

- Audit Commission – Hackney Homes (ALMO) London Borough of Hackney July
- Ends And Means: The Future Roles of Social Housing In England, John Hills, Summary, February 2007
- Every Tenant Matters: A Review Of Social Housing Regulation Executive Summary Professor Martin Cave, June 2007
- Complaints management by housing associations - Summary 2002' Housing Corporation'
- Right first time' how housing associations are improving their repairs – executive summary. Chartered Institute of housing for Housing Corporation August 2005.
- The Housing Corporation – Anti Social Behaviour: A Good Practice Guide.
- London Borough of Hackney Social Housing Compact – September 2005
- Registered Social Landlords: Anti Social Behaviour Strategies;
 - Sanctuary Housing Association
 - Southern Housing Group
 - Hanover Housing Association
 - Family Mosaic Housing Association
 - Kush Housing Association (Places for People)
 - Ujima Housing Group
 - London and Quadrant Housing Association

Living in Hackney Scrutiny Commission
Review of Registered Social Landlords and Estate Management

1. Brief description of the proposed review/Proposed Terms of Reference

The purpose of this review is to examine estate management standards applied by the Registered Social Landlords¹ operating within Hackney. The London Borough of Hackney has 69 Registered Social Landlords. The twenty largest RSLs account for 90% of the current stock. The Council is also a social housing provider.

The Housing Corporation is the regulatory and funding body for all Registered Social Landlords. The Council does not regulate RSL's in the Borough, although local authorities are the statutory agencies charged with maintaining a strategic overview of housing needs and supply within their areas. As such, the Council has a role to play in monitoring RSLs, and can use its influence to encourage better performance.

The relationship between the Council, the RSLs and other affordable housing providers is set out in the Social Housing Compact, established in September 2005. This identifies the principles of Working together in Partnership. It is managed through the Better Homes Partnership Board - branch of Team Hackney. The aim of the Commission is for the review to build upon the partnership working through the terms of reference as outlined below:

1.1 Terms of Reference: What will be reviewed

The review will focus on the following areas:

- viii. General Estate Management arrangements, with a particular focus on multi-landlord estates
- ix. Anti-social behaviour
- x. Tenant participation and engagement (including service user feedback)
- xi. Complaints management, with a particular focus on large estates
- xii. Repairs and Maintenance Services
- xiii. Support services
- xiv. Homelessness Prevention

1.2 How this will be achieved:

► By gaining a clear understanding of the complex relationships that exist between the various bodies involved; primarily the Council; Registered Social Landlords operating in the Borough and the Housing Corporation as regulator.

► Following the above; identify through methods proposed in part 6, areas in need of review and improvement, to include:

- How local outcomes compare to best practice housing service standards
- Benchmarking against top performing RSLs
- What are the key issues / problems for RSLs and tenants; for example equalities issues etc.
- How to promote partnership working with the RSLs through improved communication and supporting the work of the Better Homes Partnership.
- How to ensure the views of residents and tenants of Registered Social Landlords are sought throughout the review and fully incorporated in the final report, ensuring their needs are reflected in outcomes produced by the review.

1.3 Potential Outcomes:

- i. Devising a system of performance monitoring in the areas identified
- ii. Agreed service standards for all housing providers, which are capable of continuous improvement, including a common standard on tackling anti social behaviour on Estates.
- iii. Establish systematic procedures for monitoring and reviewing the agreed standards
- iv. Improved tenant satisfaction
- v. The desired outputs correlate with the aims of the Better Homes Partnership Board as set out in the Social Housing Compact. Recommendations from the Commission will feed into the work of BHPB.

¹ Registered Social Landlord (RSL) is the technical name for social landlords that are registered with the Housing Corporation.

2. Origin of request (e.g. Surgery, Neighbourhood Committee, Outside body, performance indicator).

The review was proposed by Members of the Commission in the last municipal year. Many of the Members had received casework correspondence and comments at surgeries concerning aspects of Estate Management by Registered Social Landlords. The idea for a review along the terms as outlined above received full support from the Corporate Director for Neighbourhoods and Regeneration and the relevant Cabinet Members following discussions at the Overview and Scrutiny Work programme conference in June 2006.

3. What is the scope of the review?

The scope of the review will be as outlined in the terms of reference.

4. What is the likely scale of any recommendations, and who is likely to be affected by them?

Recommendations may impact upon:

- The Council
- Registered Social Landlords
- Team Hackney, and in particular The Better Homes Partnership Board
- Tenants Associations
- Hackney Homes
- Local tenants / leaseholders

5. What are likely sources of evidence/ stakeholders?

The Commission wish to hear evidence from a wide variety of bodies and organisations and wish to encourage tenant and resident participation. This will be achieved through the following:

- Tenants' and residents' views will be sought in a structured way
- Site visits to Estates will be undertaken
- A series of evidence gathering sessions will be held and evidence may be requested from organisations including:
 - i. The Council
 - ii. The Housing Corporation
 - iii. Cabinet Members
 - iv. Team Hackney
 - v. The Better Homes Partnership
 - vi. Registered Social Landlords
 - vii. Tenants Associations
 - viii. Local residents
 - ix. Hackney Homes
 - x. The Metropolitan Police

6. What level of support is likely to be required by the review?

Input and support will be required from the following

- Relevant Officers of the Council
- Relevant Cabinet Members
- The Financial Controller
- The Monitoring Officer
- The Scrutiny Officer
- Overview and Scrutiny Board
- External bodies as identified in part 5.

7. What are the timescales for the review? (ie does it need to be completed in order to meet a deadline elsewhere?)

The review will commence in September 2006, with preliminary work and discussions being undertaken during July and August. It is proposed that duration of the review will be 6 months, provisionally as follows:

- September - Results of the TA / Residents Questionnaire / Additional Information as requested
- October – Multi Landlord Estate information
- November - Anti Social Behaviour
- December – Case Study / Estate Management
- January – Bench Marking against other LA's / Best practice
- February – Agreement of Recommendations and Final report

Ad hoc meetings and site visits may also be undertaken as requested by the Members of the Commission. The areas

8. Who will be the Lead Member?

Councillor Eric Ollerenshaw

9. Who will be the Lead Officer / Hackney Management Team Sponsor?

Peter O Kane, Assistant Director, Housing Needs.

10. How will progress be monitored?

Progress monitoring will be agreed and detailed in the final report.
