

# Twynham Housing Association

## Residents' Inspection Report, 22<sup>nd</sup> August, 2008

**This report has been prepared by volunteer resident inspectors. The aim of the report is to give an overall customer impression of the service being inspected over a short period of time. There may be errors or omissions of detail.**

### 1. Introduction

The Sovereign Group acquired Twynham Housing Association in April, 2006, following a supervision order by the Housing Corporation; at that time, it had a zero rating.

The Audit Commission conducted an inspection in February, 2008, and reported on 5<sup>th</sup> June, 2008, which resulted in a one-star rating.

THA manages over 3,600 properties, the majority of which are situated in the Christchurch and Bournemouth areas; the management of over 1,000 of these properties was taken over from Sovereign Housing Association, another part of the Group. Staff employed number 77, including some part-time. The Responsive Repairs Department employs four Maintenance Surveyors, a Performance Monitoring Co-ordinator, and a part-time Repairs Administrator.

Since this inspection was conducted shortly after receipt of the Audit Commission Report, it was anticipated that there would be few notable improvements, in view of the short timescale.

Other factors, which this team noted, were:

- the change in property data software from IBS to Academy in September, 2007 and the running of systems in parallel
- work on the interface between Academy and MCM (the contractor's software) between October, 2007 and December, 2007

The Residents' Inspection Team comprised:

Mr Chris Chris-Moore  
Mr Brian Edmonds  
Mr John Howden-Richards

### 2. Summary of Report

This team was impressed by the speed and vigour with which the THA management had approached the challenges exposed by the Audit

Commission Report, where the responsive repairs service was regarded as “an area with a balance of strengths and weaknesses”.

Much of the requisite improvements in the information and control systems were evidently in place, prior to the Audit Commission inspection, but needed further development and implementation.

THA’s responsive repairs service is considered to be mostly a two-star rating, whilst the prospects for achieving a three star rating are very promising.

## 2.1. Key Points

- There is a very high level of Tenant satisfaction
- The information and control systems are sophisticated and capable of providing the necessary data for an efficient service
- The contractor is the weak link both in the performance monitoring and the delivery chains

## 2.2. Main Recommendations

- Consider making a charge to Tenants, who are not in attendance at the agreed time for a contractor’s visit
- Do not make the reporting system over-complicated; there is a danger of this resulting in information overload, at the expense of efficient operational requirements
- Greater discipline needs to be exerted on Mears, the contractor, in order to improve performance
- Consider moving the call centre in-house

## 3. Methodology

The approach adopted by this Inspection Team was to utilise the Audit Commission Report in its reference to Responsive Repairs, in particular; this highlighted the areas for concern, providing a credible foundation for assessment and progress review.

Information was gathered at the outset, whilst two team meetings were held, prior to the visit to Twynham on 20/21 August, 2008.

At Twynham, this team met, first, with Mrs Ann Brown, Residents Involvement Manager, and Mr Steve Shepherd, Responsive Repairs Manager; the supply and collation of additional relevant information, following discussions with the THA management team, was speedy and efficient.

On the second day, telephone calls were made to four tenants listed in the last 20 completed jobs. Meetings were also held with two Surveyors, a Mr Mike Odden and Ms Maria Norris, and the Performance Monitoring Co-ordinator, Ms Clara Burton.

A final team meeting was held at the Vale's offices with Ms Claire Phillipson, Communications and Research Assistant, on 22<sup>nd</sup> August, 2008, to discuss the draft of this report, and to make final conclusions and recommendations.

## **4. Findings**

### **4.1. Action Plans**

THA have drawn up an Action Plan, in response to the Audit Commission recommendations, which covers problems concerning areas other than responsive repairs; this appears to reflect the fact that the Audit Commission were not overly concerned about the performance of the Responsive Repairs Department.

A Service Improvement Plan has been established, following a Key Line of Enquiry seminar at Sovereign Group, which provides an Action Plan covering all aspects necessary to be accomplished in the aim to secure a three-star rating for the Group; this will incorporate all the essential improvements necessary with regard to responsive repairs.

The following will be added to this plan, and are now in the process of being implemented as part of the programme for continuous improvement:

- enhanced software interface between THA and the contractor, in order to improve response times
- closer monitoring of time extensions, call-backs and appointments through more detailed reports
- more detailed pre-set procedures at the time of audit for recharges, insurance jobs and invoices
- established pro-forma for recharges for contractor
- set up responsive resident forums and workshops, e.g. painting and decorating for residents
- set up independent audit by surveyors reviewing 10% of jobs completed in the month
- set up fortnightly meetings between THA and contractor to investigate reasons for target extensions, cancelled jobs, and call-backs
- set up fortnightly meetings between surveyors and contractors to review quotations and resident matters
- establish clear appointments and monitoring procedures through a revised process map
- set up a job cancellation procedure, which has been notified to tenants
- conduct contractor appraisal with tenants
- set up MORE scheme for responsible residents

#### 4.2. Completion of Responsive Repairs

Completion of repairs overall within target times is satisfactory, but, the monthly reports show a decline from 92.3% in March, 2008 to 83.7% in July, 2008; this could be due to recent changes in administration at Mears, the contractor, but, more likely is the fact that the contractor has been very slow to agree appointments with the tenants at the beginning of the 20 days period rather than at the end. Many dates reflecting contact by the contractor with the Tenant were within a few days of the proposed visit; thus, it was not surprising that the appointments required rescheduling.

The number of jobs completed within the extended target date by the contractor for Routine Maintenance (52.78%) and Urgent Repairs (35.19%), is considered to be poor.

#### 4.3. Tenant Satisfaction

Tenants contacted by telephone were very satisfied with the quality of work carried out by the contractor, Mears, whilst others praised the THA administration.

During a brief session with the surveyors, a member of this team witnessed an emergency call from a tenant with a gas problem; the staff contacted the contractor, Preheat, who were able to despatch an engineer immediately, whilst the Tenant was still on the telephone.

#### 4.4. Responsive Repairs Monthly Report

This report is very comprehensive (11 pages), but is difficult to follow for the uninitiated and would be more useful, if it were to show trends, rather than simply the number of jobs in each category. Also, as presented, it is not clear that the second page includes a summary of Mears performance. A new page, "Jobs failing the original target yet meeting the extension", which highlights "appointments made" and "no access", is very useful as a general indicator of performance, but disguises the real reasons for these extensions, which are the primary cause for delays in job execution (see 4.2).

#### 4.5 Tenancy Review Visit

The Surveyors are conducting a comprehensive survey of all properties, which is recorded on the computer system; this will enable them to assess the need for repairs, prepare a refurbishment plan and determine if any support is required.

#### 4.6 Call Centre

The call centre, which is based at Newbury, notifies Mears the contractor directly – Mears then notifies THA; as a result THA is dependent upon Mears providing this information.

## **5. Conclusions**

5.1 THA has set its sights beyond the two-star rating (yet to be achieved), with higher aspirations for the future.

5.2 There is strong evidence of improved quality assurance procedures, rechargeable repairs performance, and contract management systems development, which were the main criticisms by the Audit Commission. However, much of these improvements have yet to show through in the statistics, since implementation is very recent.

5.3 Notwithstanding the quality of work by Mears, the contractor, they evidently have problems with their administration and communications.

## **6. IRIS overall grading of responsive repairs service against the Audit Commission KLOE standards**

THA's responsive repairs service is considered to be mostly a two-star rating, whilst the prospects for achieving a three star rating are very promising. For a detailed breakdown of findings against the relevant KLOE standards, please see Appendix 1 attached to this report. This shows individual star and prospect ratings against the individual KLOE standards.

## **7. Recommendations**

- 7.1. Report causal factors of target extensions in more detail: differentiate between reasons prompted by late contact with the Tenant by the contractor, Mears, and those where the Tenant is clearly at fault.
- 7.2. Consider charging Tenants for not allowing access, when they are clearly at fault.
- 7.3. Consider introducing a penalty system to the contractor, Mears, for target extensions over a certain number; consider, too, what action should be taken when extensions granted are required to be extended.
- 7.4. Endeavour to determine the problems with the administration at Mears, the contractor, and how to exert greater discipline on them, without jeopardising the relationship.
- 7.5. Consider redesigning the Responsive Repairs Report, to make it clearer and more readily understood; and to show trends.
- 7.6. Consider ways of improving communications with the call centre, or moving it in-house; this would provide THA with greater control over notification of repairs by tenants and over appointment making by Mears, the contractor.

### Appendix 1 – Findings against the KLOE standards

KEY LINE OF ENQUIRY (KLOE 3)	AN ORGANISATION DELIVERING AN EXCELLENT SERVICE	FINDINGS at THA	SERVICE RATING: POOR FAIR * GOOD ** EXCELLENT ***	PROSPECTS FOR IMPROVEMENT: POOR UNCERTAIN PROMISING EXCELLENT
<p><b>Access, customer care and user focus</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>How effectively does the organisation communicate and consult with its residents and stakeholders about stock investment and asset management?</li> <li>How easily do residents access the service?</li> </ul>	<p>1 Has staff who treat people with respect at all times</p> <p>2 Has frontline staff that demonstrate a wide range of knowledge about the full range of enquiries they receive or know who or how to access the necessary information to help residents</p> <p>3 Makes it easy for residents to report or query repairs or improvements by telephone, in person or electronically, including</p>	<p>Reception and surveying staff were observed treating residents with respect and giving them time and patience. The contractor Mears gives very good customer service.</p> <p>Reception staff have good knowledge of relevant people to contact – the relatively small number of in-house staff facilitates this. All residents phoned praised THA and contractor’s work, not differentiating between THA and contractor.</p> <p>24 hour call centre. Contractor on call 24 hours a day to deal with emergencies. Not aware of residents email to report repairs,</p>	<p>Good</p> <p>Good</p> <p>Fair</p>	<p>Promising</p> <p>Promising</p> <p>Promising</p>

	<p>outside normal office hours – all of which are dealt with efficiently and effectively</p> <p>4 Will generally use appropriate technology to help staff and residents identify the repair</p> <p>5 Tells residents when their repair should be completed at the time they report it, including outside normal office hours</p> <p>6 Arranges a repair, maintenance and improvement work, and inspections related to it, at a time to suit residents, mainly by appointment.</p>	<p>however no need for this identified.</p> <p>Handbook facilitates diagnosing repair, specific details help clarity of diagnosis. The handbook is also available on line.</p> <p>Date of visit not advised at first point of contact (call centre). Mears will advise tenant when they call when to expect the repair to be completed. Emergency repairs are completed out of hours.</p> <p>Mears make appointments including 'before school run' and 'after school run' appointments (7am – 9am and 4.30 – 7pm) They have extended More Scheme, which gave this choice, to all tenants.</p>	<p>Good</p> <p>Poor</p> <p>Good</p>	<p>Uncertain – subject to improved communications with Mears</p> <p>Promising – due to THA disciplining Mears</p> <p>Promising</p>
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	7 Has clear arrangements for dealing with residents when they refuse access for repairs and uses appropriate legal methods to ensure the completion of all necessary works	System in place to access properties, sometimes requiring court orders to obtain access. Court action not always successful for THA.	Fair	Promising
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>How clear and comprehensive are service standards from a residents' perspective</li> </ul>	8 Has published clear service standards for the repairs service, which are tailored to meet local need and which often exceed minimum statutory requirements	THA have good standards in place. Tenants are not as aware of these standards as they could be at this point in time, however actions are underway to address this. Updated procedures are communicated to tenants, for example the job cancellation procedure. A Responsive Repairs Resident Forum has just been set up to consult residents. The annual report contained repairs standard information.	Fair	Promising – due to Resident Forum now in place
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>How does the organisation respond to residents?</li> </ul>	9 Actively canvasses the views of residents and uses them to review or improve services. Residents are consulted and involved in major	Responsive Repairs Resident Forum has been set up. Two meetings have been held so far and a third one is planned. The forum is involved with	Good	Promising – subject to Sovereign Group not just paying lip service to residents' views

	decisions that affect the service, for example in relation to stock investment priorities, programmes and procurement and repair target timescales	service and procurement decisions. Residents are consulted over improvements to their estates eg Cheviot Court as well during the development of new estates.		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>What residents' satisfaction has been achieved through stock investment and asset management?</li> </ul>	<p>10 Has residents who feel confident that their input will be valued and acted upon.</p> <p>11 Has residents who are satisfied with the repairs and improvements they receive and this is evidenced by a wide range of feedback methods.</p>	<p>Responsive Repairs Resident Forum.</p> <p>The 4 residents that inspectors spoke to were satisfied with the THA service throughout. Overall satisfaction with repairs was 99% for the year to date. 89% satisfied with ease of reporting repair, 92% satisfaction with appointments made, 93% satisfaction that completed within target time, 92% satisfied that completed on first attempt. 10% of responsive repairs jobs are surveyed over the phone to gauge satisfaction and an audit</p>	<p>Good</p> <p>Good</p>	<p>Promising – but THA should consider fully residents' views</p> <p>Promising</p>

		has been set up for surveyors to review 10% of jobs raised in the month. 20% of these are double checked.		
<b>Diversity</b> 1 How does the organisation respond to the diversity of its community to ensure that all users, or potential users, have fair and equal access to stock investment	12 Has a clear understanding of its local community using all relevant information, including the input of local partners, and knows its own residents' profile, making necessary adjustments where this is out of step in meeting the needs of those that require services	Diverse staff to represent the community that they serve.  The Tenancy Review Visits enable staff to visit tenants in their homes and flag up diversity information. This information is then put on the system and is flagged up for all staff. Surveyors have a programme of visits to collect this information from all residents.	Good	Promising
	13 Knows, records, analyses and monitors information about the ethnicity, vulnerability and disability of residents and uses it to ensure services are delivered appropriately and to prioritise resources.		Good	Promising

	<p>14 Provides information about services and service standards in a comprehensive range of languages and formats appropriate to residents' needs eg large print, Braille, other languages etc</p>	<p>Information is available in a range of languages, and different formats including audio.</p>	<p>Excellent</p>	<p>Excellent</p>
	<p>15 Works with its residents to ensure fair representation and service take-up</p>	<p>Information on resident profile enables all residents to access service.</p>	<p>Good</p>	<p>Promising</p>
	<p>16 Does not discriminate against any person or other organisation on the grounds of race, ethnic origin, disability, nationality, gender, sexuality, age, class, appearance, religion, responsibility for dependents, unrelated criminal activities, being HIV positive or with AIDS, or any other matter which causes a person to be treated with injustice.</p>	<p>No discrimination witnessed.</p>	<p>Excellent</p>	<p>Excellent</p>

<p><b>Responsive Repairs</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>How effective and responsive is the organisation in keeping its homes and communal facilities in a good state of repair?</li> </ul>	<p>17 Can get the necessary work done quickly and efficiently without long-winded approval systems.</p> <p>18 Completes repairs to a high standard within its target timescales, generally at the first visit.</p>	<p>Standard of repairs high but target timescales need working on. The call centre notifies Mears directly – Mears then notifies THA and THA then have an opportunity to ask about any problems. This could be a factor in slowing the process down.</p> <p>Mears is slow to agree appointments with the tenants at the beginning of the 20 day period and often leaves this towards the end of the period, meaning that tenants are notified of their proposed visit only a few days beforehand; thus many appointments require rescheduling and the timescale extending.</p> <p>The number of jobs completed within the extended target date by the contractor for Routine Maintenance (52.78%) and Urgent Repairs (35.19%), is considered to be poor.</p>	<p>Poor</p> <p>Poor</p>	<p>Promising</p> <p>Promising</p>
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	<p>19 Uses an innovative mix of caretaker, handyman and multi-trade working to complete repair works in a responsive and customer-focussed way.</p> <p>20 Regularly inspect communal areas, jointly first with residents' representatives, and ensures the necessary repairs are carried out within target timescales.</p>	<p>Multi-skilled workforce who do not cover electrical or gas repairs.</p> <p>Housing Officers and other staff regularly inspect communal areas of estates and sheltered accommodation. Surveyors phone to check up on works requested at estate inspections and whether this work is carried out.</p>	<p>Good</p> <p>Good</p>	<p>Promising</p> <p>Promising</p>
<p><b>Value for money</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>How effectively has the organisation established partnerships geared to achieving value for money and improving its performance to residents</li> </ul>	<p>21 Collects accurate information on costs and services and uses it to decide priorities and to strategically manage resources</p> <p>22 Provides residents with clear and well understood information on costs and benefits and how these relate to the quality of services delivered</p>	<p>The organisation holds fortnightly meetings with contractor to go through costings and requests a break down of costs in order to pick up errors; minor errors have been identified.</p> <p>Calendar annual report with breakdown of costs sent to all residents. This includes information on average rents.</p>	<p>Good</p> <p>Good</p>	<p>Uncertain – owing to recent implementation and performance of Mears</p> <p>Promising</p>