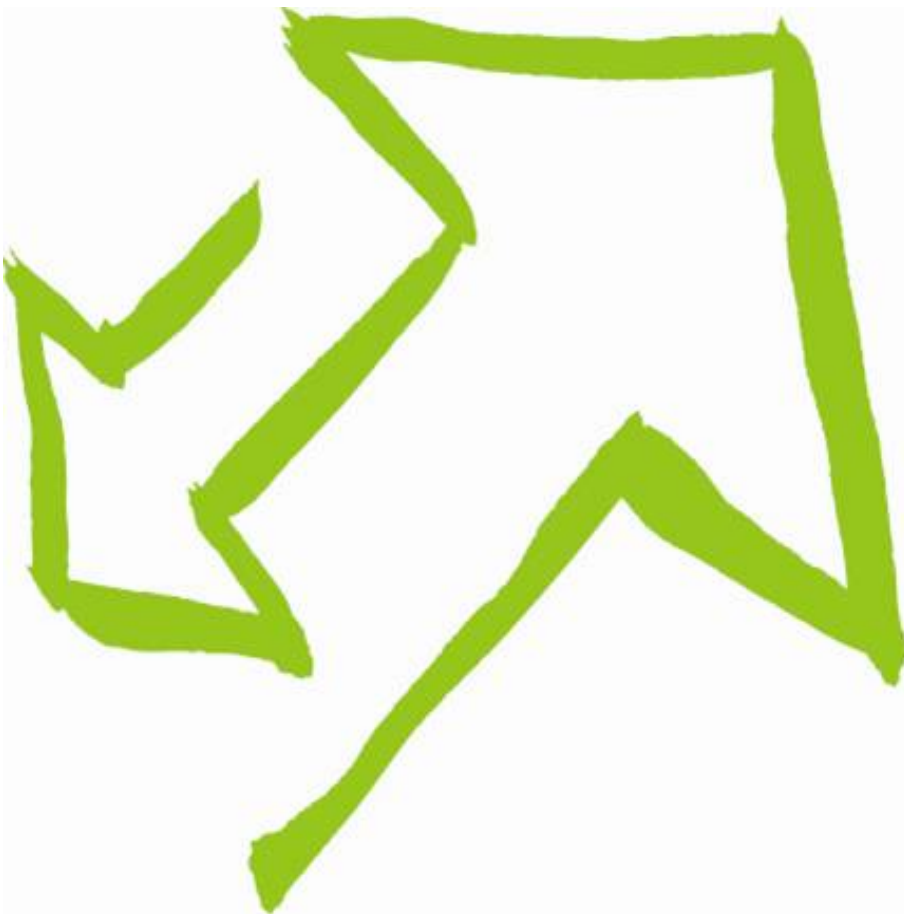


Lee Housing Association Ltd

Lee Housing Association Ltd
November 2008



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Housing Association Inspections

The Audit Commission is an independent body responsible for ensuring that public money is spent economically, efficiently and effectively and delivers high-quality local services for the public.

Within the Audit Commission, the Housing Inspectorate inspects and monitors the performance of a number of bodies and services. These include local authority housing departments, local authorities administering Supporting People programmes, arms length management organisations and housing associations. Our key lines of enquiry (KLOEs) set out the main issues which we consider when forming our judgements on the quality of services. The KLOEs can be found on the Audit Commission's website at www.audit-commission.gov.uk/housing.

For housing associations our inspection role and remit is set out in sections 41(A) and 41(B) of the Audit Commission Act 1998 (as amended by section 109 of the Local Government Act 2003), and is in line with the Audit Commission's strategic regulation principles. In broad terms, these principles look to minimise the burden of regulation while maximising its impact. To meet these principles this inspection:

- is proportionate to risk and the performance of the association;
- judges the quality of the service for service users and the value for money of the service;
- promotes further improvements in the service; and
- has cost no more than is necessary to safeguard the public interest.

We are committed to working in partnership with other regulators, and the Audit Commission and the Housing Corporation are working together to improve the performance and efficiency of housing associations. Our shared objectives are to ensure that associations provide services for the diverse range of customers in their areas of operation, high standards of customer services and access, and value for money for both customers and the taxpayer.

The Housing Corporation is the statutory body which regulates housing associations to ensure that they are well governed, well managed and financially viable, as set out in its Regulatory Code. Its lead regulation staff work with housing inspectors to ensure that there is adequate information provided for the inspection and that the inspected body implements recommendations in the inspection report. The overall findings of the inspection are also used to inform the Housing Corporation Assessment (HCA) which determines eligibility for further public investment and may influence the Housing Association's future business prospects.

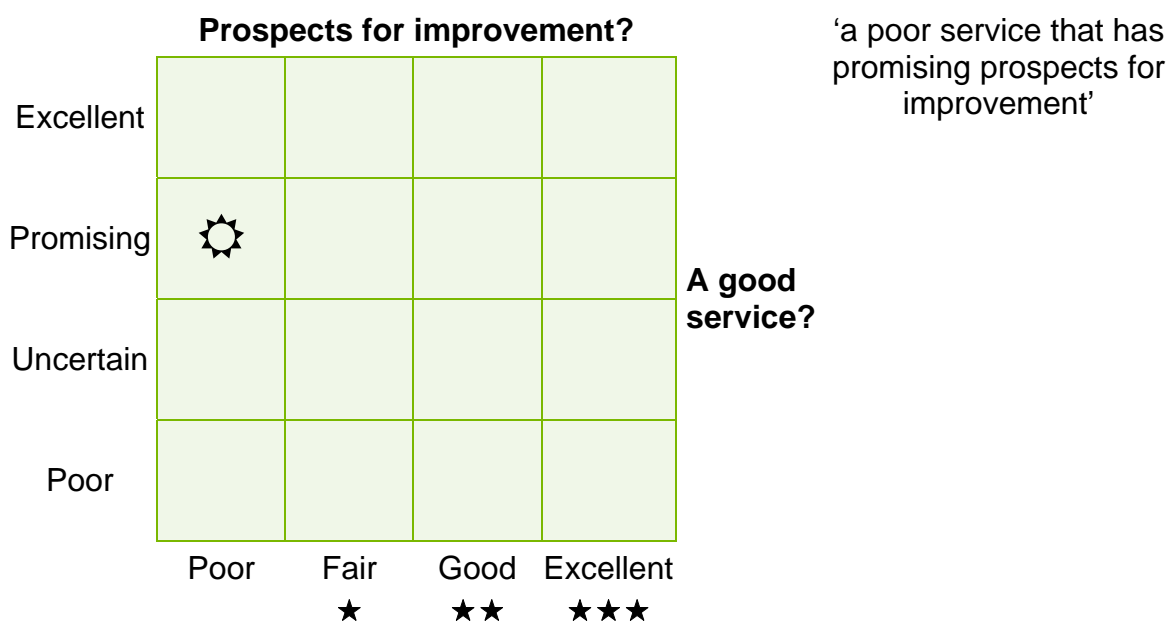
Summary

- 1 Lee Housing Association provides poor services, and has promising prospects for improvement.
- 2 An Audit Commission inspection in 2004 found that the Association was delivering poor services with poor prospects for improvement. The Housing Corporation placed the Association under supervision in the same year due to concerns about management, governance and service delivery. It was removed from supervision in May 2007.
- 3 The Association has poor services. Information for tenants is limited. The Association does not fully involve tenants in decision making, and service improvement is constrained by a lack of information on the needs of tenants, complaints and tenant satisfaction. Translation and interpreting services are not comprehensive, and the office is not fully accessible to tenants with disabilities. The standard of estates is mixed, and the approach to tenants' safety is limited by the lack of quality checks for gas servicing, and by a weak approach to asbestos. Policies and procedures are not comprehensive, and are not consistently followed by officers. The association lacks a strategic approach to value for money, and is not maximising rental income and minimising losses of income from void properties. However, the level of personal customer care is good. There are strengths in stock investment, with 95 per cent of stock meeting the Decent Homes Standard. Void properties are in good condition, and responsive repairs are completed quickly and flexibly. The Association has lower overall costs than most comparable organisations, and the handyman provides a value for money service.
- 4 Lee Housing Association has promising prospects for improvement. The Association has been removed from Housing Corporation supervision, and there are resourced plans to address areas where further improvement can be made. The Association has achieved most of the targets in its annual plans, and most performance measures are moving in a positive direction. The management board is effective, and has a good range of relevant skills. Tenants have a wider range of ways to get involved in the work of the Association, and they are positive about improving services. However, the Association has not implemented all the recommendations of the previous Audit Commission report. Opportunities for service improvement are limited by a lack of robust information on satisfaction, performance and service standards. Staff appraisals and training are not fully developed.

Scoring the service

- 5 We have assessed Lee Housing Association Limited as providing a 'poor', no star service that has promising prospects for improvement. Our judgements are based on the evidence obtained during the inspection and are outlined below.

Figure 1 Scoring chart¹



Source: Audit Commission

- 6 We found the service to be poor because it has a range of weaknesses, including:
- limited information is provided to tenants;
 - the approach to complaints and compensation is weak;
 - satisfaction with services is not adequately measured;
 - the association does not have adequate information on the needs of its tenants, and does not communicate with tenants in a way that meets their needs;
 - translation straplines are not used consistently, and the use of interpreting services is not fully promoted;
 - the office is not fully accessible to tenants with disabilities;

¹ The scoring chart displays performance in two dimensions. The horizontal axis shows how good the service or function is now, on a scale ranging from no stars for a service that is poor (at the left-hand end) to three stars for an excellent service (right-hand end). The vertical axis shows the improvement prospects of the service, also on a four-point scale.

- the standard of communal shared areas and estate environments are variable;
- the approach to asbestos is weak;
- the association does not check the quality of gas servicing;
- targets for the collection of rent are not being met;
- policies and procedures, including those for equality and diversity, anti-social behaviour and complaints, are not comprehensive;
- officers are not consistently following policy requirements;
- the association lacks a strategic approach to value for money, and cannot fully compare costs with other similar organisations;
- the association has not explored potential savings from improved procurement; and
- voids levels do not meet targets, and the approach to decorating properties is unclear.

7 However, there are some areas of strength. These include:

- the level of personal customer care is good;
- the Association has arranged floating support for vulnerable tenants;
- more than 95 per cent of homes meet the decent homes standard;
- repairs are completed quickly and the handyperson provides a helpful and flexible service;
- void repairs are completed quickly and to a good standard;
- all gas appliances have been serviced in the last 12 months;
- regular estate inspections have helped resolve some environmental problems; and
- the Association has overall costs lower than comparable organisations, and can demonstrate savings from the handyperson service.

8 The service has promising prospects for improvement because:

- the Association has been removed from supervision by the Housing Corporation;
- most performance indicators have improved, and the Association is meeting the majority of its performance targets;
- tenants are positive about improvements in customer care;
- the Association has increased the range of ways in which tenants can get involved in its work;
- the Association has met the majority of targets in its annual plan;
- the management board has a good range of skills, and is effective in monitoring the performance of the association; and
- the Association has recognised areas where it needs to improve, and these are included in its current plans.

Scoring the service

9 However, there are a number of barriers to improvement. These include:

- the monitoring of service standards, performance information and satisfaction is limited;
- some recommendations from the previous Audit Commission report have not been implemented;
- the Association does not have a systematic approach to learning from complaints;
- staff training and appraisals are not comprehensive; and
- IT systems do not fully support the work of the Association.

Recommendations

10 To rise to the challenge of continuous improvement, organisations need inspection reports that offer practical pointers for improvement. Our recommendations identify the expected benefits for both local people and the organisation. In addition, we identify the approximate costs² and indicate the priority we place on each recommendation and key dates for delivering these where they are considered appropriate. In this context, the inspection team recommends that the Association shares the findings of this report with tenants and board members, and addresses all weaknesses identified in the report. Associations forming part of a group structure should share the lessons and findings of the report amongst the wider group. The inspection team makes the following recommendations.

Recommendation

R1 Improving services to tenants by:

- producing, in partnership with tenants, a full range of publicity on the services offered by the Association;
- providing and publicising information on local services which may be of benefit to tenants;
- improving, in partnership with tenants, the range of information available on the website;
- involving tenants in the development of policy, including those relating to service charges;
- measuring satisfaction with services and performance against service standards, and using this information to enhance services in line with tenant preferences;
- reviewing the complaints procedure, publicising the revised complaints procedure and taking steps to ensure that it is followed correctly;
- improving the quality of shared communal areas, and of estate environments; and
- fully implementing the recommendations of the previous Audit Commission report.

The expected benefit of this recommendation is:

- improved services which reflect the priorities of tenants.

The implementation of this recommendation will have high impact with medium costs. This should be implemented by January 2009.

² Low cost is defined as less than 1 per cent of the annual service cost, medium cost is between 1 and 5 per cent and high cost is over 5 per cent.

Recommendations

Recommendation

R2 Enhancing services to vulnerable tenants by:

- capturing the profile of tenants, and using this information to tailor services to vulnerable tenants;
- making the office accessible to all tenants, including those with disabilities; and
- using straplines consistently, and making sure that the translations and interpreting service is automatically offered to tenants who do not speak English.

The expected benefit of this recommendation is:

- services will be tailored more effectively to meet the needs of vulnerable tenants.

The implementation of this recommendation will have high impact with medium costs. This should be implemented by January 2009.

Recommendation

R3 Enhancing the repairs and maintenance service by:

- fully addressing safety issues. These include:
 - ensuring the safety of staff and residents by updating the asbestos survey and using this to inform service delivery;
 - Training all relevant staff in asbestos awareness, and making tenants aware of the implications of asbestos in their homes; and
 - checking the quality of gas servicing; and
- clarifying the approach to decorating both void properties and properties which have had major works.

The expected benefit of this recommendation is:

- improved health and safety for tenants, and more equitable services to all tenants.

The implementation of this recommendation will have high impact with medium costs. This should be implemented by January 2009.

Recommendation

R4 Improving the staff performance by:

- reviewing policies and strategies in partnership with tenants so that they provide comprehensive guidance to staff;
- monitoring record keeping to ensure that files are kept in good order, and that staff are following policy requirements;
- creating a training plan to ensure that skills and knowledge gaps are identified and addressed;
- ensuring that appraisals are completed fully, and that they are used to set measurable targets for staff; and
- ensuring that current IT systems are used to full capacity, and review the IT system to address any shortcomings of the system, in the light of resources available to the association.

The expected benefit of this recommendation is:

- improved quality of record keeping and of service delivery

The implementation of this recommendation will have high impact with medium costs. This should be implemented by January 2009.

Recommendations

R5 Improving value for money by:

- developing a strategic approach to VFM, and including VFM targets in the work of officers;
- exploring the opportunities for improved procurement, including joint working with other associations; and
- systematically reviewing the approach to rent arrears and voids management, with a view to reducing losses from rent arrears and void properties.

The expected benefit of this recommendation is:

- improved value for money in service delivery.

The implementation of this recommendation will have high impact with medium costs. This should be implemented by January 2009.

Recommendations

- 11 We would like to thank the staff of Lee Housing Association Limited who made us welcome and who met our requests efficiently and courteously.

Dates of inspection: 16 June to 18 June 2008.

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Report

Context

The locality

- 12** Lee Housing Association has 305 rooms in shared accommodation, and 46 self-contained flats. With the exception of ten flats in Hertfordshire, which it manages on behalf of Riversmead Housing Association, the properties are located in Enfield, with many positioned close to the office in Ponders End. Occupancy of shared accommodation is evenly split between university students and single people nominated by the local authority. The Association operates in a challenging environment, with tenants sharing with up to four other flatmates, with shared bathroom and kitchen facilities. In 2007/08, 140 properties became void, a turnover rate of 40 per cent. Three quarters of tenants are from Black and Minority Ethnic backgrounds; this is more than double the proportion of BME residents within the London Borough of Enfield. The profile of tenants is relatively young.

The Association

- 13** The Association was founded in 1969 by staff and students of Middlesex University, with the aim of providing decent, affordable rented accommodation for students.
- 14** The Association's management board has 12 members and meets six times per year. The board is supported by two subcommittees, which meet quarterly. The Finance and Audit Committee is responsible for reviewing financial performance and controls, and for risk management. The Housing Management and Maintenance Committee monitors tenancy and maintenance issues.
- 15** A previous Audit Commission report in November 2004 found Lee Housing Association to be offering a no-star, poor service with poor prospects for improvement. The Association was placed under supervision by the Housing Corporation in October 2004. The Housing Corporation removed the Association from supervision in May 2007, and the Association was given a full set of green lights for viability, governance and management³ in January 2008.

³ The Housing Corporation grades housing associations as part of its regulatory assessment process. Housing associations are awarded green, amber or red 'traffic lights' in terms of viability, governance, management, and, where relevant, development

Report

The service

- 16** The Association has 11.45 members of staff. Operational management is delegated to the senior management team, which comprises the Chief Executive, the Housing Services Manager and the Finance and Core Service Manager. In addition, the Association employs three housing officers, a maintenance manager, handyperson, receptionist and administrative support officers.
- 17** Lee HA had a financial turnover of £1,312,541 in 2007/08, with an operating surplus of £50,000⁴. At 31 March 2008, the Association had unsecured reserves of £2.5 million, and a cash surplus of £400,000.
- 18** The Association's office is located at 227 High Street, Enfield, Middlesex, EN3 4DX.

⁴ The accounts for 2007/08 were not signed off at date of inspection.

How good is the service?

What has the service aimed to achieve?

- 19** The mission statement of the Association states that it 'seeks to provide a high quality and accessible service to its existing tenants and to provide accommodation for single people in Enfield and the surrounding local authority areas'. Its vision is of 'a vibrant community-based social housing provider offering a secure environment in which people can develop themselves and their opportunities through our range of effective partnerships'.
- 20** The mission and vision statements are underpinned by six objectives. These are to:
- provide short to medium term housing for single people who are homeless or insecurely housed;
 - ensure a viable and sustainable business which is properly accountable to its shareholders, regulators, stakeholders and residents;
 - develop relationships with local stake-holders to identify the aspirations of current and future service users;
 - ensure that it meets or exceeds the Decent Homes Standard (DHS) with environmentally friendly and cost-effective initiatives;
 - continue to consider the development of housing and additional services through partnerships and projects which will assist our service users; and
 - actively participate in the neighbourhood(s) in which it operates for the purpose of contributing to local plans for general well-being and promote actively and improve the perception of social housing.
- 21** These objectives are relevant to wider national and local priorities, including those to reduce the use of temporary accommodation.

Is the service meeting the needs of the local community and users?

Access and customer care

- 22** The previous Audit Commission inspection found that weaknesses outweighed strengths in terms of access and customer care. Although tenants found the Association easy to contact at their local office, the system of measuring satisfaction was inadequate, and information for tenants was limited. The Association was not protecting the privacy of its tenants, the complaints system was not well publicised or administered, and there were no service standards.

How good is the service?

- 23** Although access and customer care has improved, this remains an area of weakness. Information to tenants remains limited. There are few relevant leaflets and the website is basic. Satisfaction data collected since the tenant survey of 2005 is insufficient to help improve services. The complaints and compensation policy is not well publicised or implemented. However, clear service standards are now available. Tenants continue to find the Association easy to contact, and find front line staff responsive and helpful. The Association has increased the number of ways in which tenants can get involved in the work of the Association.
- 24** The Association provides limited information to tenants. There is a range of posters in the office, and tenants we spoke to were positive about the information they receive. However, there are no leaflets for key areas of operation, such as how the Association deals with anti-social behaviour and rent arrears. Although paper copies of policies are available at the office on request, some of this material is of limited use to tenants in practical terms; for example policy information does not have contact numbers. In addition, the information provided to new tenants is limited. The tenancy pack does not contain all the information new tenants need, and the tenancy agreement contains out-of-date information. There is no check list for signing up new tenants, with the result that important issues, such as the location of stopcocks and electricity fuses, are not explained. As a result, new and existing tenants are not aware of key policies and the practical information they need.
- 25** The telephone service is adequate. Although not systematically monitored against service standards, tenants attending the focus group stated that this area has improved, and that telephone calls are generally answered quickly and effectively.
- 26** The provision of information from other sources is also limited. The website is basic, with little practical information for customers. There are no interactive features - for example to allow the customer to make a complaint. There is no facility to download information. Notice boards are provided in shared accommodation, but there is no standard set of information provided, such as emergency telephone numbers and dates for rubbish collection. A newsletter is published quarterly, but does not routinely include all the information tenants require. This means that tenants who do not call at the office are not kept fully informed of important issues.
- 27** The approach to complaints and compensation are not well publicised or implemented. In practice, many tenants come into the office to comment about services. However, complaints forms are not readily available at the office, on the website or in tenant packs. Letters sent to complainants are not comprehensive. For example, they do not always set out the next stage of the process, timescales for response or whether the complaint has been upheld. Staff are not all trained in using the complaints procedure. In practice, stage 1 complaints are not logged, and complaints are not always acknowledged. The organisation has only recently started to survey complainants to measure satisfaction. It is therefore not clear that the complaints process meets the needs of tenants or the organisation.
- 28** The Association has a policy to provide compensation or missed repairs appointments, but this is not publicised to tenants, and some staff are not aware of the policy. As a result, the Association does not benefit from feedback from tenants, which would help improve services.

- 29** The Association does not fully involve tenants. Where tenants are involved, the results are not consistently fed back to tenants; for example, the outcomes of estate inspections are not confirmed to the wider body of tenants. This means the benefits of involvement are not clear to those that do get involved.
- 30** The Association does not effectively measure satisfaction with services. In most areas, such as dealing with rent arrears and complaints, there is no system of feedback. The Association has only recently started to measure satisfaction with the way it deals with anti-social behaviour and repairs, and the rate of return for repairs satisfaction surveys is very low. Tenants have not been consulted on the opening hours of the office, which remain limited, albeit with late opening one day each week. As result, the Association does not have the information it needs to improve services.
- 31** The satisfaction information the Association has is limited. A full STATUS⁵ survey was carried out in 2005. This indicated that the Associations tenants were less satisfied than average with overall services, with opportunities to participate and with the outcomes of their enquiries. However, this data is now out of date, aa many tenants would have moved in the intervening period. Other organisations to whom the Association has been compared may not be similar in terms of tenant profile and the provision of shared accommodation. As a result, the Association cannot be confident in broad terms that the services it offers are of good quality.
- 32** There are, however, positive aspects to the service delivered in terms of access and customer care. The level of customer care offered to tenants is high. There is a range of ways to contact the Association, and the office is easily accessible to most tenants. It is easy to contact the right member of staff. Front line staff are committed to the aims of the Association, and this is reflected in the care and individual support offered to tenants at the office, and by housing officers and repairs and maintenance staff. Tenants attending a focus group expressed satisfaction with this aspect of the service.
- 33** The Association has introduced a number of different ways for tenants to get involved in its work. Tenants are able to feed back on policies and performance through a quarterly tenant panel. The management board hosts an annual reception on a local estate, which allows tenants to meet the board and make comments and suggestions. As a result of tenant feedback at this event, additional security measures have been introduced on the estate.

Diversity

- 34** The previous Audit Commission inspection found that weaknesses outweighed strengths in this area. Although a high proportion of tenants were from BME backgrounds, the Association did not have a diversity strategy led from the top of the organisation. It had not measured the satisfaction of BME tenants, there was little information on the communication needs of customers and there was no translation service for people who were unable to communicate well in English.

⁵ STATUS surveys are standardised surveys based on guidance from the National Housing Federation

How good is the service?

- 35** There are still significant weaknesses in this area. The Association demonstrates a commitment to equality and diversity, and a raft of relevant policies and strategies have been introduced. However, these are not fully comprehensive, and have had limited input from tenants and community groups. The Association has inadequate information on the needs of tenants, particularly those who may be vulnerable. The office does not comply with the requirements of the Disability Discrimination Act, and the provision of translated materials and interpreting services is variable. The training of staff is limited. However, staff and board membership is diverse, and the Association makes good use of floating support, and this helps potentially vulnerable tenants sustain their tenancies.
- 36** There are limitations to the Association's approach to equality and diversity. Tenants have not been adequately involved in developing strategies and related action plans. Although the disability action plan was informed by input from the resident panel and two disabled residents, there has been no consultation with local community groups. Other strategies required by the Housing Corporation, such as the gender equality strategy, have not benefited from consultation, and the Association has as yet not completed any equality impact assessments⁶. Current strategies do not address all strands of equalities. For example, they do not reflect issues of faith sexuality and age. In the context of providing shared accommodation, this is a significant omission. As a result, these equality and diversity strategies may not reflect the priorities and needs of tenants.
- 37** The Association does not fully understand its tenant profile. There is a database of the needs of tenants, but this is not comprehensive, and information to update this is not collected systematically. Officers state that, working for a small, locally-based association, they understand the needs of individual tenants. However, in practice, they have only a limited awareness of the presence and needs of vulnerable tenants. For example, the Association can identify some tenants who do not speak English, but the information held does not state who to contact, or whether the tenant needs help in terms of spoken or written language. As a result, services cannot be tailored to the needs of all tenants.
- 38** The office is not fully accessible to tenants with mobility and sight impairments. It is not compliant with the requirements of the Disability Discrimination Act⁷, and the Association only carried out an access audit to address this in January 2008. It has made some reasonable adjustments to facilitate access- for example, there is a door bell outside the building, and a mobile ramp can be fitted by staff if the caller has limited mobility. However, there is no sign to explain what the doorbell is for. The Association has fully resourced plans to improve physical access in 2008/09. However, the current physical environment means that some tenants may not be able to access the office easily.

⁶ Equality Impact Assessments assess the impact of policies and practice on different community groups

⁷ The Disability Discrimination Act 1995 required that public buildings should be made accessible for people with disabilities

- 39** There is a limited focus on the needs of vulnerable tenants. The vulnerable person policy is basic, and does not set out what services the Association offers to tenants and applicants. There is no specific racial harassment or domestic violence policy, and policies in general do not take into account the needs of vulnerable residents. As a result, officers lack guidance in providing services to tenants in need.
- 40** The Association does not communicate with tenants in a manner that meets their needs. Straplines are not always provided on publicity. Although an interpreting service has been used on occasion, it is not always offered to tenants. Officers usually rely on friends and relatives for interpreting, which may compromise the confidentiality and understanding of issues discussed. Letters are not easy to read, and many have a small font size. This means that potentially vulnerable tenants may not be aware of some important information that they need.
- 41** Staff training in equality and diversity is not adequate. Diversity and equalities training is compulsory; however, staff who have previously received training in this area are not required to attend. There is no additional training tailored to the specialist work and tenant profile of the Association such as working with people with mental health issues. As a result, staff are unable to provide compelling examples of how the training had informed their work, and outcomes from the training are limited.
- 42** Contractors' compliance with the organisation's diversity policy is not monitored. Policy commitments to monitor contractors by policy and the make up of staff have not been achieved. As a result, diversity issues may not be considered in the day to day work of the Association.
- 43** The Association does, however, have some strengths in the areas of equality and diversity. The management board has a good understanding of the equality and diversity agenda, and has been involved in developing a raft of policies. Although, as noted previously, these are not fully developed and implemented, the Association is making progress towards a more strategic approach to issues of equality and diversity.
- 44** The composition of board members and staff is influenced by the community that the Association serves. The Association is engaged in the Two-Ticks initiative to increase the employment of people with disabilities. There are targets to increase the diversity of the board in terms of ethnicity, disability and gender, and the Association has recently made good progress in increasing the number of board members from BME communities.
- 45** The Association has facilitated floating support for vulnerable residents. Although it is at an early stage of engaging with local community groups, it does refer tenants to a local support service for help with, for example, rent arrears and budgeting. Officers regularly check the progress of tenants who are using this scheme. This means that vulnerable tenants are being helped to develop life skills which will help them sustain their tenancies.

How good is the service?

Stock investment

- 46** The previous Audit Commission inspection found that weaknesses outweighed strengths in this area. Responsive repairs were carried out quickly by the handyperson, and void properties were re-let in a timely manner. However, the Association did not have an effective asset management strategy, and it did not know how many of its properties met the Decent Home Standard.
- 47** This is now an area where strengths balance weaknesses. The proportion of homes meeting DHS is now greater than 95 per cent, and a system of cyclical works has been introduced to keep properties in good condition. Repairs are carried out quickly, and the handyperson service is well regarded. However, the asset management strategy remains basic. Tenants are not offered a choice of decorations and decorations policies are confusing. The Association has completed all gas servicing in prescribed timescales, but the quality of work is not checked. The approach to asbestos is under developed. The out of hours service is variable, and satisfaction with responsive and major repairs is not measured adequately. As a result, the quality of shared communal repairs is mixed.

Capital improvement, planned and cyclical maintenance, major repairs work

- 48** The Association has improved the condition of its stock through major and planned works. A comprehensive stock condition survey was completed in March 2005, and this has been used to inform both capital and planned works. The proportion of stock meeting the Decent Home Standard⁸ is 95.5 per cent. The bulk of non-decent stock comprises two properties which require major remodelling; a decision regarding the future of these properties will be taken this year. As a result, tenants are experiencing adequate levels of thermal comfort and modern facilities in their homes.
- 49** A cyclical decorations programme has been introduced, and these are carried out every five years to communal areas. The communal areas within flats may be decorated more frequently, as there is heavy usage of the shared facilities there. Major works and cyclical decorations seen during the inspection were carried out to a professional standard, and the tenants interviewed were positive about the process and outcomes of these works.
- 50** However, the Association lacks an informed strategic approach to capital and planned works. The asset management strategy is basic, and does not incorporate all elements of the repairs and maintenance service into a longer term strategy, and does not link it to wider social objectives, such as dealing with anti-social behaviour. In addition, the Association does not collect satisfaction data for major and planned works. This means that it does not have an adequate approach to maintaining its stock in the longer term.
- 51** Decoration policies are not clear and offer limited choice. Tenants are not offered any choice of colour when the communal areas of flats are decorated, or whether they would like such a choice. In addition, both tenants and officers are unclear about the circumstances under which decorations grants are offered, and how much this grant should be. This means that tenants may not be treated equitably.

⁸ The Government requires that all social housing properties are decent by 2010; that is, they are weatherproof and have reasonably modern facilities.

- 52** The Association's approach to dealing with asbestos is underdeveloped. There is an asbestos register, but the 2005 survey has not been updated, and the Association has not progressed further action based on the survey. Relevant staff have not received asbestos awareness training, and tenants are not provided with any information about the risks of asbestos in their homes. As a result, Association staff, contractors and tenants are not fully protected against the health risks associated with asbestos.
- 53** The Association has a reasonable approach to providing aids and adaptations to tenants. The service is advertised in the Association's newsletter. However, there are only two properties with adaptations, and the relatively young profile of tenants means that demand for the service is comparatively low.

Responsive repairs

- 54** The repairs service is generally flexible and responsive. The work of the handyperson is well regarded by tenants, who feel that a swift and customer-friendly service is provided. The appointment of a full time maintenance officer has improved the checking of the quality of repairs, and tenants are confident that repairs, once reported, will be completed effectively.
- 55** Repairs are carried out in a timely manner although the targets set are not very challenging compared to other social landlords. In 2007/08, 100 per cent of emergency repairs were carried out in time (target 95 per cent), 95 per cent of urgent repairs were in time (target 90 per cent) and 95 per cent of routine repairs were in time (target 95 per cent). Tenants we spoke to reported that repairs are effected very quickly, with the result that the Association is meeting the aspirations of tenants.
- 56** However, the Association cannot be confident that tenants are satisfied with the quality of repairs. All repairs valued at more than £500, and a random selection of other repairs, are visited and checked by the maintenance officer following completion. The proportion of repairs satisfaction surveys returned by tenants is low, with the result that the Association's view that tenants are satisfied with repairs remains largely anecdotal.
- 57** In addition, tenants have not been consulted about priorities for the repairs service. For example, the target time for unblocking a toilet in a shared flat is five days. The lack of satisfaction data and engagement with tenants means that the priorities of the repairs service may not reflect those of the service users.
- 58** The Association does not identify and address all the repairs required in it the communal areas of its properties, and the standard of communal areas in shared accommodation varies. The Association has relatively high wear and tear on its properties. We found some to be in good condition, but in one we found examples of broken locks to doors, including fire doors. As a result, the Association cannot demonstrate that all its properties are in a good state of repair, or that it is ensuring the safety of all residents.
- 59** The out-of-hours service is variable. The number for this service is not provided in newsletters or outside the office and the telephone number provided does not always work. This is a significant weakness, given the profile of tenants served by the Association.

How good is the service?

Voids repairs

60 The Association completes void repairs quickly and to a good standard. Despite a high turnover of void properties, they are re-let relatively quickly; the average void period is 28 days, against 30 days for the comparator group. A voids standard has been developed, though it is not clear that tenants have influenced its content. The voids standard is basic, but properties are let in good condition. This has resulted in high satisfaction rates, with more than 80 per cent satisfied with the condition of the property, and 97 per cent with the sign up process and information.

Gas and safety testing.

61 The Association has an adequate approach to gas servicing. At the time of inspection, all gas appliances had been serviced within the previous 12 months. The Association has a limited number of gas appliances, and the majority of these are accessible as they are in the communal areas of flats. However, the Association does not presently check the quality of work. Therefore, while tenants can be confident that their appliances have been serviced, the quality of the work cannot be demonstrated.

62 The Association has hard-wired fire equipment in all shared property, and carries out regular electrical testing in properties. Equipment such as fridges is tested by the handyperson, ensuring that tenants have an adequate safety protection system.

Income management

63 Weaknesses outweigh strengths in this area. The Association is not meeting targets for the collection of rent. Information provided to tenants is limited, and tenants have not been consulted on important aspects of the rent policy. The policies themselves are not comprehensive, and officers do not consistently follow them. However, the target for the level of former tenant arrears is being met. Officers provide welfare benefits advice, and the relationship with the housing benefits service is positive.

64 The Association is not achieving all its targets for rent collection. In 2007/08, former tenant arrears as a proportion of total rent roll were 3.2 per cent, against a target of 4.2 per cent. However, the level of current tenant arrears is above target. In 2007/08, current rent arrears as a proportion of total were 7 per cent, against a target of 6 per cent. It is not clear that the level of arrears reported adequately reflects performance throughout the year, and does not measure the rate of rent collection against rent roll. At 31st March 2008, the arrears total stood at £92,636. This means that the Association is not maximising resources which could be targeted on priority areas.

65 Information about the rent arrears process is limited. Tenants receive a rent statement twice a year; they have not been consulted on the frequency of rent statements. This shows payments and rent due, but does not differentiate Council Tax, which is included in the rent. As a result, tenants may not have full information to inform their budgeting plans.

66 The Association faces challenges in maximising its rental income. Council Tax is included in gross rent payments by tenants, and then paid to the Council on behalf of the tenants. This means that the Association bears the risk of non-payment of the Council Tax element of rent.

- 67** Policies relating to income management are limited. There is no debt recovery, former tenant arrears or write-off policy, despite debt being regularly written off. The rent arrears policy and procedure does not adequately set out the timescales for action, or other requirements for officers, and does not outline alternative remedies for recovering debt. As a result, officers do not have the guidance they require and income collection cannot be effectively monitored, and the Association cannot be sure that tenants in arrears are treated equitably.
- 68** It is not clear that the existing rent arrears policy and procedure is being followed. Tenant rent account records are variable in quality. Files do not consistently record referrals for debt advice, and in one case, Notice of Seeking Possession was served despite regular reduction in rent arrears. Tenants should be visited six weeks after they start their tenancy, but these visits are not regularly completed. It is therefore not clear that officers are taking all the steps they need to minimise rent arrears.
- 69** There are however strengths in the approach to income management. The Association provides support for tenants to pay rent. Housing benefits claims forms are completed at sign up, and new tenants fully advised of their rights and responsibilities relating to rent payment. Housing officers provide tenants with welfare benefits advice, and have referred a number of cases to specialist providers, who provide tenants with budgeting and life skills training. There is a good relationship with the housing benefits service, and the Association regularly attends liaison meetings with benefits staff. These processes help tenant maximise their incomes and meet their obligations.

Tenancy and estate management, focusing on dealing with anti-social behaviour (ASB)

- 70** The previous Audit Commission inspection found a number of weaknesses in the approach to dealing with ASB. There was no ASB policy, and the draft ASB policy did not include racial harassment, standards or timescales. Satisfaction was not measured, and staff had limited guidance on how to address this issue.
- 71** Weaknesses continue to outweigh strengths in this area. Although estates are free of graffiti, the general upkeep of communal areas is mixed. The policies relating to ASB are not yet comprehensive. Information provided to tenants is limited. Although officers are committed to swift action, this could not be evidenced in practice, and they do not use the full range of tools in addressing ASB. However, regular estate inspections provide a platform for improved estates. The Association benefits from working strategically with partners, and, where a multi-agency approach has been used, it has had positive outcomes for tenants. House meetings provide a useful forum for resolving low level disputes and ASB.
- 72** The standard of upkeep of communal areas is mixed. While some blocks are clean and well maintained, the main block close to the office has overgrown weeds and borders, large potholes in the car park, a number of untaxed and abandoned cars, and a storage room for unwanted furniture with no doors. The Association has not been able to resolve dumping of rubbish by tenants. This encourages vandalism and results in low tenant satisfaction.

How good is the service?

- 73** The organisation's ASB policy and procedure is not comprehensive and is out of date. With a focus on shared accommodation, the Association deals with a substantial amount of low level ASB, but this is not reflected in policies and procedures. More serious issues, such as racial harassment and domestic violence are not covered. Arrangements for referring victims and perpetrators of ASB to support agencies are not addressed. In practice, officers are working to a new draft ASB policy. Although this is more detailed than the current policy, it has not been agreed by the management board. Officers are not working to best practice guidelines or to an agreed policy in this area.
- 74** Information for tenants is limited. Some information is provided at sign up, and there are posters in the reception area of the office. There are no leaflets, and no relevant information on the website. It is not clear what tenants should do to report ASB that occurs outside office hours and there is no facility to report ASB through the website. Tenants are confused as to whether they need to report ASB in writing, and concerned that their confidentiality may be compromised. This means that tenants cannot be confident that all aspects of ASB are treated seriously, and unsure what the Association will do once it is reported.
- 75** There are some effective arrangements in place to address low level ASB. Tenants are encouraged to hold house meetings, and these are attended by officers when tenants feel that they require outside help to resolve house matters. This has resulted in positive outcomes when dealing with problems in shared flats. However, there is no arrangement with a mediation service, and alternative tools such as anti-social behaviour contracts (ABCs) and injunctions have not been used. Therefore, while there is reasonable tenant satisfaction in this area, the Association is not achieving best practice in addressing ASB
- 76** Although officers are committed to dealing with ASB swiftly and effectively, this could not be evidenced from written records. Files are hard to follow, and provided little evidence of, for example, police involvement or of inter-agency working. As a result, the outcomes of actions are unclear, and the Association may not be learning what works best in terms of dealing with ASB.
- 77** There are some positive aspects to the approach to ASB. The Association has systems in place to identify problems in communal areas. There are quarterly inspections by officers of communal areas, including those in flats. These are supplemented by inspections by senior officers and board members. More serious issues are noted in the 'special measures' register, and monitored by the board and the senior management team. The estates seen during the inspection were clear of graffiti. Although the officer-led inspections are less frequent than those of other social landlords, they provide a useful basis for monitoring potential ASB issues.
- 78** The Association is benefiting from partnership working at a strategic level. It is an active member of the Council's Safer Community Board. This allows staff to keep up to date with developments in the ASB field, and has resulted in the sharing of information and measurable outcomes in terms of illegal and anti-social activity.

- 79** Support is provided to tenants who are vulnerable. The Association has good links with Enfield Connect, which provides floating support to local people who need personal support. The Association is also engaged with a multi-agency group in Hertford. As a result, the Association is able to more effectively balance the need to take action in ASB cases with the need to sustain the tenancies of those involved.
- 80** There are some effective arrangements in place to address low level ASB. Tenants are encouraged to hold house meetings, and these are attended by officers when tenants feel that they require outside help to resolve house matters. This has resulted in positive outcomes in dealing with problems in shared flats, and in higher satisfaction for tenants.

Is the service delivering value for money?

- 81** The previous Audit Commission inspection found that there was an insufficient focus on efficiency and value for money issues. Internal controls were weak, and there were gaps in record keeping and systems to ensure probity. The Association did not collect information on service costs.
- 82** The approach to value for money remains an area where weaknesses outweigh strengths. The Association still lacks a strategic approach to value for money. Although it can now demonstrate that its overall costs are lower than many comparable organisations, it cannot identify high costs areas, or that its practices demonstrate value for money. There are some examples of the Association achieving value for money, but the opportunities for joint procurement have not been explored.

How do costs compare?

- 83** The Association is able to demonstrate that overall service costs are below those of their comparators. It has recently started to benchmark its costs against those of seven other small London-based housing associations. Although data for some areas is not robust, the data provided does indicate that the Association has average management costs of £11.18 per unit per week, and average operating costs of £53.31 per unit per week. Both figures are second lowest among the comparator group. As a result, the Association can be confident that, in broad terms, its costs are competitive, despite investing substantial resources to housing management.
- 84** However, this process is at an early stage. The Association cannot identify areas of relatively high cost. For example, accurate information is not available on the ratio of planned to responsive repairs. Combined with the limited asset management strategy, this means that the Association does not have the information it requires to plan future stock investment.

How is value for money managed?

- 85** Lee Housing Association is at an early stage in developing a strategic approach to value for money. Addressing value for money is not explicitly addressed in the Association's objectives, and there is no value for money strategy to inform its operations. As a result, value for money is not embedded in the work of the Association, and there is little evidence that it has a high priority in the work of senior managers and the board.

How good is the service?

- 86** The Association is not maximising its resources. The Association has a relatively high turnover of properties. The level of voids and of current tenant arrears however does not meet targets. In addition, it has not fully assessed its repairs and maintenance processes. Two contractors currently carry out most of the work not covered by the handyperson, and a high proportion of rooms are decorated before tenants move in. Neither of these issues has been assessed in terms of value for money. In 2007/08, there was a £13,000 overspend on the responsive repairs budget. There is a policy for recharging relevant costs to tenants, but this is not enforced in a systematic manner. The Association therefore cannot demonstrate that it is taking all necessary steps to reduce costs to rebalance the repairs budget.
- 87** The approach to procurement is underdeveloped. The procurement policy is basic. The Association has recently been under supervision, and the policy focuses on issues of probity rather than value for money. The Association is aware of this issue, but as yet has not taken steps to assess joint procurement of services. Therefore, so the potential for cost savings and improvements in quality has not been realised.
- 88** However, the Association can demonstrate some strengths in delivering value for money services. The Association has achieved significant gains through the handyperson scheme, as it saves resources by avoiding contractor call-out charges. The operative completes around 80 per cent of day-to-day repairs jobs, and pre-inspects the majority of repairs to assess whether a contractor is required. This reduces the use of contractors, and ensures that orders sent to contractors are accurate; only two or three variations are requested by contractors each year. The hourly rate for the handyperson service is £27.30, including on-costs, but excluding the cost of tools and van usage. As a result, the Association is able to offer a popular service at competitive costs.
- 89** The Association can evidence some initiatives which maximise the use of resources:
- legal proceedings are made on-line, saving £50 per application;
 - the Association has tested the cost of different methods of rent payment, and does not use the most expensive ones; and
 - external funding of £1600 was levered in for roof insulation works.
- 90** Although small scale in nature, these initiatives have helped the Association reduce costs and increase income.

What are the prospects for improvement to the service?

What is the service track record in delivering improvement?

- 91** The previous Audit Commission inspection found that the Association could not demonstrate a consistent track record of improvement to services, and that performance had declined in some areas.
- 92** Strengths now outweigh weaknesses in terms of implementing changes which will lead to improved service delivery. The Association has been removed from Housing Corporation supervision, and there is a generally positive record in improving performance and meeting targets in terms of performance indicators. Tenants confirm that the customer focus of the Association has improved. However, a number of recommendations from the previous Audit Commission report have not been implemented, or have been only partially implemented.
- 93** Lee Housing Association was placed under Housing Corporation supervision in October 2004. The Association has addressed the key concerns of the Housing Corporation, with the result that it was removed from supervision in May 2007, and obtained three green lights in January 2008. This means that that Housing Corporation has expressed confidence in the Association's approach to viability, governance and management.
- 94** The Association has a generally positive direction of travel in terms of key performance indicators. Over the last two years:
- three performance indicators have fully met targets;
 - eight performance indicators have improved, including the collection of current and former tenant arrears and repairs completed in time. The proportion of decent homes improved from 61 per cent in 2006/07 to 95.5 per cent in 2007/08;
 - three performance indicators have remained the same.; and
 - four performance indicators have declined, including the level of void properties.
- 95** In terms of achieving target performance, the Association has met 20 of its 27 targets in 2007/08.
- 96** Tenants are positive about the way that customer services have improved. They state that it is easy to contact staff, and that staff respond quickly to queries. They commend the improved customer focus from front line staff and at the office, and the personal commitment that officers have to resolving their problems. Complaints are responded to within target times.

What are the prospects for improvement to the service?

- 97** Some recommendations of the 2004 Audit Commission report have been fully addressed. For example, a cyclical maintenance and decorations programme has been introduced based on a robust stock condition survey, repairs are inspected by the maintenance officer and estate inspections have been introduced. The roles of staff and the management board have been clarified, and an improved performance management framework introduced. The Association commenced a series of focused internal audit reports, and these have helped the Association address areas of weakness. Progress against recommendations is set out in Appendix 3.
- 98** However, other recommendations have not been implemented, or only partially implemented. For example, a STATUS survey was completed in 2005, but there is a lack of more specific and up-to-date information. Policies and strategies have been introduced in key areas, but these have not consistently involved tenants, and some are not comprehensive or have not been reviewed. Other recommendations, such as improving information for tenants and analysing the diverse needs of tenants, have not been addressed. The approach to value for money issues is still at an early stage of development. As a result, tenants have not fully benefited from improving services which offer value for money.

How well does the service manage performance?

- 99** The previous Audit Commission inspection found that the Association lacked strategic planning systems and did not have a performance culture.
- 100** Strengths now balance weaknesses in terms of performance management. The audit system and annual plans provide a good platform for service improvement, and the Association demonstrates in its plans awareness of areas where it needs to improve. However, there is lack of information on satisfaction, limited information to compare performance with other organisations and there are some weaknesses in strategic planning.
- 101** The performance management process is adequate. The annual plan provides a method to link overall corporate aims with short term objectives. The plan is informed by Audit Commission recommendations, the Business Plan and the results of internal audits. The management board sets out the annual plan at an annual strategic away day, and there is evidence that the board monitors progress and holds senior officers accountable for their actions. In 2007/08, the Association achieved 95 per cent of the outcomes in the annual plan. As a result, the Association can demonstrate progress in key areas of operation.
- 102** The Association is aware of the challenges it faces. It acknowledges many of the issues raised in this report, and has resourced plans in place to address them. For example, the annual plan for 2008/09 includes improvements to the communal areas of local blocks, completion of a full satisfaction survey, disability awareness training for staff, quality checking of gas servicing and building works to make the office more accessible. Some improvements were underway at the time of inspection. This means that tenants can be more confident that improvements in key areas of service delivery will be completed.

What are the prospects for improvement to the service?

- 103** However, there are also some weaknesses in long term strategic planning. The Business Plan 2005-2010 is linked to corporate aims, but it is not SMART⁹, lacking resources and milestones, and it is not detailed enough to guide senior officers and board members. As such, the plan does not provide a firm basis for addressing corporate and tenant priorities.
- 104** In addition, there is a lack of information on key areas of operation. There is limited satisfaction data for ASB, repairs and complaints, and performance data does not include trends over time, or information on the performance of comparable organisations. The Association does not fully measure its performance against service standards. This means that Lee HA cannot be fully confident that it is making good progress against its plans.
- 105** There are limitations to the complaints policy. Complaints are reviewed at an annual senior management team meeting; this does not allow the Association to identify trends in a timely manner. In practice, this review does not contain comments or recommendations for further action. Two of the four stages of the complaints process do not have target response times. This means that the Association does not fully use the complaints procedure to improve services.
- 106** The quality of record keeping is variable. Paper-based files are generally in poor order, and it cannot be demonstrated that officers are following the Association's policies. There is no system of monitoring the quality of file keeping or correspondence, which means that outcomes from officers' actions are not clear, and that court action against tenants may be compromised.

Does the service have the capacity to improve?

- 107** The previous Audit Commission report found that the Association did not have capacity to improve. It had serious issues of governance and leadership, and officers lacked skills and expertise to improve services.
- 108** This is now an area where strengths outweigh weaknesses. There are adequate resources available to improve the work of the association. The management board has a good range of skills, and is effective in monitoring the work of the Association. The Chief Executive is committed to improving services and has succeeded in leading the Association out of supervision. A performance appraisal system has been introduced, but in practice, appraisals are not being effectively used to improve service delivery. Staff training is limited. The Association's IT systems do not adequately support the work of the Association.
- 109** The Association has adequate resources to meet its aims, with unrestricted reserves of £2.5 million and a cash surplus of £400,000.

⁹ SMART: specific, measurable, achievable, resource based, time-bound

What are the prospects for improvement to the service?

- 110** The management board is effective in setting the direction of the Association and managing its operations. The board has a wide range of skills. Members have experience in finance, housing management, legal issues and in the voluntary sector. New members have been recruited to address skills gaps, and the Association is actively promoting board membership to tenants. There are currently two tenant board members. Board members are committed to the aims of the Association, and have a good understanding of their strategic role. The roles of officers and board members are better defined, and board members provide a good challenge to officers in decision making. As a result, the management board is in a good position to effectively manage the affairs of the Association.
- 111** The ability of staff to deliver service improvements has improved since the last Audit Commission inspection. The Chief Executive has succeeded in having the Association removed from Housing Corporation supervision, and the management board and officers are confident in the ability of the Chief Executive to deliver service improvements. The Association has made progress in achieving IIP¹⁰ status. However, capacity at middle management level needs to be developed further. A performance development system has been introduced, and all staff have received appraisals and one-to-ones. Staff sickness is lower than the sector norm, and the Association has recruited permanent, full-time staff to key areas such as the repairs service. Improved staff capacity will help the Association achieve its aims.
- 112** The system of appraisals is mixed. All staff have received appraisals. At board level, there is a robust system of identifying skills gaps, and the Chair of the board carries out appraisals of other members and of the Chief Executive. However, the appraisal documents for officers are not linked to corporate aims; for example, there is no requirement that officers address issues of value for money in their work. Officers do not generally complete the forms adequately, particularly in relation to equality and diversity issues. As a result, it is not clear that the work of officers is consistently driving service improvements.
- 113** Staff training is limited. Not all staff have received training in core service areas such as customer care, equality and diversity and handling complaints. Although officers state they have received relevant training in previous employment, there is a need for up-to-date training which relates to the specialised work of the Association. A lack of such training limits the capacity of the organisation to provide a good service.
- 114** The IT system does not adequately support the work of the Association. For example, it does not have the facility to track performance, and to provide reports by exception. Also, it is not clear that the system is being used to its full capacity. This is reducing the ability of the Association to monitor and improve performance.

¹⁰ Investors in People (IIP) is an externally validated recognition of the way in which organisations manage and develop their staffing resources

Appendix 1 – Performance indicators

Table 1 Lee Housing Association Performance data

Performance indicator	2006/07	2007/08	Target 2007/08
Voids (%)	2.31	2.58	1.81
Current rent arrears (%)	7.97	7	6
Former rent arrears (%)	2.19	3.2	4.2
Bad debt write off (%)	4.13	3.57	3.64
Board attendance	71	80	75
Annual plan delivery (%)	100	95	98
Emergency repairs completed in target time (%)	93.37	100	95
Urgent repairs completed in target time (%)	86.43	95	95
Routine repairs completed in target time (%)	89.08	92	90
Complaints dealt with in target time (%)	100	100	95
Resident panel meetings	4	4	4
Tenant satisfaction (%)	70	70	70
Gas safety certification (%)		100	Annual 100%
Decent Homes Standard (%)	61	95.5	94
Post inspection (planned) (%)		100	100
Post inspection (routine) (%)		10	10

Source: Lee Housing Association

Appendix 2 – Reality checks undertaken

- 1 While on-site we carried out a number of different checks, building on the work described above, in order to get a full picture of how good the service is. These on-site reality checks were designed to gather evidence about what it is like to use the service and to see how well it works. Our reality checks included:
 - observation of the public office;
 - testing how easily the portable access ramp can be utilised;
 - visits to estates and individual properties;
 - a focus groups with tenants;
 - interviews and focus groups with officers, contractors and board members;
 - reality checking of phone services, and of services offered at the office; and
 - file checks in the following areas: rent arrears, complaints and anti-social behaviour.

Appendix 3 - Achievement against previous Audit Commission Recommendations

	Recommendation	Response
1	Improve the governance and organisational structures to ensure good leadership and clear roles and responsibilities for board and staff members. Use the findings of the Housing Corporation's governance review and this report as a framework for this	The Association was removed from Housing Corporation supervision in 2007, following improvements in governance arrangements. The roles of officers and board members have been clarified
2	Ensure that the association has a clear definition of its client group and the priority for letting properties, analysing current demands and lettings.	Not covered in 2008 inspection
3	Provide a good service to residents by: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Delivering a component replacement programme and decoration programme, which will ensure good long term maintenance of the Association's assets; Improving the standard of properties when let, by reviewing the void standard in consultation with tenants; and Improving written information for tenants and prospective tenants. Ensure what is provided gives adequate information that is easy to understand and is available in formats required by the Association's client group. 	<p>The Association has introduced a cyclical maintenance and decoration programme. However, this is not supported by a comprehensive asset management strategy.</p> <p>The void standard has been revised, but is unclear to what extent tenants were involved in this process. Void properties seen were in good lettable condition.</p> <p>Not achieved</p>

Appendix 3 - Achievement against previous Audit Commission Recommendations

	Recommendation	Response
4	<p>Improve service delivery by:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • developing service standards, in consultation with service users, monitoring these standards and ensuring that they are met; • carrying out a resident survey, using a method consistent with STATUS surveys; • gathering customer feedback at key service points; • using customer feedback to develop improvement plans; • looking at the approach taken by other similar sized associations; • analysing the diverse needs of service users and using this information to shape the service; • formally assessing the value for money of services provided; • developing a programme of comprehensive service reviews; and • ensuring staff are adequately trained. 	<p>Clear service standards are now available, but they are not adequately monitored.</p> <p>A full STATUS survey was carried out in 2005, and is due to be repeated in 2009.</p> <p>There is a lack of feedback from customers in key service areas such as repairs.</p> <p>There is a lack of customer feedback to inform service improvement</p> <p>The Association has yet to engage with best practice of other associations.</p> <p>There is a lack of information about vulnerable service users</p> <p>Although the Association can evidence VFM at a broad level, this has not been completed at service level</p> <p>There has been a process of audit, but no thorough service reviews.</p> <p>Staff training is limited.</p>

Appendix 3 - Achievement against previous Audit Commission Recommendations

	Recommendation	Response
5	<p>Improve the performance of the Association by developing an effective performance management framework which includes:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • developing clear priorities for improving the service; • setting clear challenging and realistic targets; • putting in place systems for monitoring targets; • making managers responsible for monitoring performance; and • reporting performance to the board, analysing data and explaining trends. 	<p>Service improvement plans are not adequately prioritised;</p> <p>Target setting is not fully developed.</p> <p>Targets are monitored, but there is a lack of comparative data.</p> <p>This is set out in annual planning.</p> <p>Performance is reported by the board, but there is a lack of trend and comparative analysis</p>
6	<p>Improve performance by establishing effective monitoring systems:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • developing an IT strategy which is appropriate to the size of the business; • ensuring adequate records are kept for all areas of tenancy management; • regular estate inspections; • random inspection of a proportion of all repairs; • tracking the progress of all void properties; and • logging systems for complaints and anti-social behaviour. 	<p>There is currently no IT strategy.</p> <p>Tenancy files are not kept well.</p> <p>Estate inspections have been introduced</p> <p>Repairs are now randomly post inspected.</p> <p>The progress of voids is monitored</p> <p>Complaints and ASB cases are logged.</p>

Appendix 3 - Achievement against previous Audit Commission Recommendations

	Recommendation	Response
7	<p>Develop the following strategies in line with government and Housing Association guidelines.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Resident involvement strategy. Asset management strategy. diversity strategy. Anti-social behaviour strategy. 	<p>Developed</p> <p>Developed, but limited in scope.</p> <p>Developed</p> <p>Developed, but not comprehensive</p>
8	<p>Develop and improve policies and procedures to guided staff:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> repairs and maintenance; allocations and lettings; anti-social behaviour; access to rooms and communal areas; and payment of energy bills in shared housing. 	<p>Developed</p> <p>Not covered in this inspection.</p> <p>Developed, but not comprehensive.</p> <p>Developed</p> <p>Developed, but may have adverse consequences for rent arrears.</p>
9	<p>Provide proper systems of assurance and internal control:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a programme of internal audit of housing management and maintenance services; develop clear criteria for assessing eligibility and priority of applicants; adopting good practice in allocations; and introducing a clear policy for adopting assured shorthold tenancies. 	<p>Introduced</p> <p>Not covered in this inspection</p> <p>Not covered in this inspection</p> <p>Developed, but tenancy agreements are not up to date.</p>

The Audit Commission

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