

Russet Homes Limited

Housing Management Services

Introduction

This response has been prepared by Russet Homes following an inspection carried out by the Audit Commission's Housing Inspectorate. Inspected bodies are asked to prepare responses to the Inspectorate's reports which set out how the report's recommendations will be met and how services to users will be improved following the inspection. The Commission has editorial control over the content of the responses of inspected bodies.

Response

Russet Homes welcomes the Audit Commission's inspection report. We view the inspection process as a positive opportunity to further improve services to our customers and learn from the collective experiences of other organisations.

In particular we are pleased the inspectors have recognised that there are high levels of customer satisfaction with the service provided by Russet Homes and that information and access to those services is customer-focused and with a high level of support for older, vulnerable tenants. Similarly we welcome the recognition of good progress on meeting the decent homes standard, the delivery of maintenance services, management of anti-social behaviour and performance on income collection.

Overall the judgement of 'good' shows we are on track in meeting our aspiration to deliver excellence in the extent and quality of our services and have welcomed the inspectors' recommendations for improvements which have been prioritised and incorporated into our business planning.

In terms of our prospects for improvement, the Audit Commission has been helpful in pointing out how these can be made more certain than they are at present. Actions to deliver the Commission's recommendations, both already implemented and proposed, are summarised in the table below:

Continuous improvement
• Capacity building for Board Members
<i>Board Member appraisal and skills audit improved, leading to the implementation of a corporate programme based on individual training needs by July 2007</i>
• Strengthened and better integrated service improvement planning
<i>A review of the Service Improvement Plan is underway with extended KPI monitoring and reporting in place by November 2007</i>
• Development of a more robust action plan in support of the Value for Money strategy
<i>The work of the VFM cabinet will continue in applying our Value for Money strategy with greater focus on staff and resident engagement</i>

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Capacity building for staff by the use of one-to-one meetings to show progress against individual work programmes
<p><i>A new behaviours framework for staff appraisal will address this on introduction in June 2007</i></p>
<p>Customer service</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Review monitoring arrangements for complaints handling
<p><i>Detailed complaints analysis is now reported monthly to Senior Management Team. A review of the complaints procedure is underway and due to conclude in July 2007</i></p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ensure consistency in cleaning arrangements for communal areas in blocks of flats
<p><i>An options report is being prepared for consideration by Members</i></p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Allow for fast tracking for high priority cases needing aids and adaptations
<p><i>Interim arrangements are in place and a wider review underway for subsequent consideration by Members</i></p>
<p>Tenant involvement</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Capacity building for residents and increase their involvement in strategic decision making
<p><i>A Tenant Repairs User Group has been established to involve residents at foundation level with changes to how maintenance services are structured and delivered. We intend to further develop our Tenant Portfolio holder posts and, in consultation with FORUM, our resident consultative body, to establish a training programme by July 2007 to build up the necessary confidence and skills base</i></p>
<p>Repairs and maintenance</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Offer repair appointments when tenants first make a request for work, reduce the level of emergency and urgent repairs and review arrangements for pre and post inspections
<p><i>An improved appointments system, better balance in work priorities and routines are key components of work underway redesigning a new maintenance service that will replace existing contractual arrangements when they expire in April 2008</i></p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Consider options to improve the SAP rating of non-traditionally constructed dwellings
<p><i>A further energy efficiency survey has been completed and an action plan being developed based on the results</i></p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Adopt a clear plan to consider procurement options for the long-term delivery of repairs and maintenance
<p><i>In conjunction with the South East Procurement Consortium, a framework agreement is in place which will form the basis of procurement for maintenance improvement works from the summer of 2007. A Maintenance Steering Group is tasked with the implementation of partnering for response maintenance from April 2008</i></p>
<p>Equality & Diversity</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Develop ways to maximise feedback from and the involvement of the Gypsy and Traveller Community
<p><i>Several members of this community are now actively involved in our Consumer Panel and we intend to develop this relationship to gain a wider understanding of how to involve this and other minority groups more effectively. A STATUS survey will be commissioned in the summer with the Gypsy and Traveller community identified as a specific sub-group and a cultural diversity open day in July 2007 will celebrate the contribution of minority groups, in particular Gypsies and Travellers, to wider community life</i></p>

We'd like to take the opportunity again to thank the Audit Commission staff both directly and indirectly involved with the inspection and the many individuals and organisations that assisted the Association in the process.