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There are more strengths than weaknesses for Incommunities

Incommunities Housing Association 'has more strengths than weaknesses' according to a report released today by the independent Audit Commission.

Audit Commission inspectors reached this conclusion following a short-notice inspection of how the Bradford-based housing association delivers day-to-day repairs, repairs to empty properties and gas servicing. The inspectors found that requests for repairs are dealt with promptly and that gas checks are done efficiently. Empty homes are repaired and let to a standard agreed with tenants, although the time taken to re-let them is too long.

Riza Yassin, Audit Commission Lead Housing Inspector, said:

'This is a positive result for Incommunities. They are making steady improvements in the areas we inspected, but there is work to do to ensure they are able to repair and relet empty homes more quickly and more could be done to address the needs of all in the community.'

Strengths include:

- Repairs and gas checks are completed quickly with high levels of satisfaction
- Empty homes are repaired to a standard agreed with customers
- Savings have been made and services improved when contracts have been re-tendered

Weaknesses include:

- Some complaints are not responded to within the timescales promised by Incommunities
- It takes too long to re-let empty properties and satisfaction with new homes is not high
- Incommunities does not yet have a full understanding of its customer profile to ensure services meet their needs
- Service standards are not comprehensive and performance is not reported to customers

To help the service improve, inspectors made a number of recommendations. These include:

- Developing a better understanding of tenants needs and using this to tailor services
- Developing and checking performance against standards of service that are agreed with customers

Incommunities is now required to work with its customers to produce an action plan to address these recommendations.

The Tenant Services Authority (TSA) is the affordable housing regulator in England and works with the Audit Commission on the inspection of housing associations. The TSA commissions the Audit Commission to carry out inspections and the results are used by the TSA in its overall assessment of housing association performance

Copies of the report are available from Incommunities Housing Association or from the Audit Commission website at www.audit-commission.gov.uk

ENDS

Notes to editors

Incommunities was formed in 2003 following a stock transfer from Bradford Metropolitan Borough Council. Previously a group structure and known as Bradford Community Housing Trust (BCHT), the association changed its name to Incommunities in 2007.

The association operates in the Bradford area and manages over 21,000 homes employing around 1000 staff. According to the 2001 census 21.7 per cent of Bradford people are from a Black or Minority Ethnic (BME) background. Some 51.9 per cent are female and 18.5 per cent of people are disabled or have a limiting long-term illness.

The association operates from its head office in the centre of Bradford and six area offices. More than 92 per cent of homes meet the Decent Homes standard. The responsive and voids repairs service is provided by the in-house building services team.

The Audit Commission introduced short-notice inspections for housing associations to give inspectors a clearer and more realistic view of the services that tenants receive.

Associations are given just five days notice of the inspection before their services are rated on a four point scale - from 'strengths significantly outweigh weaknesses' down to 'weaknesses outweigh strengths'.

Within two months of the publication of this report, Incommunities will provide the Audit Commission with a plan showing how it will implement the report's recommendations.

The Commission will then assess and publish Incommunities' prospects for improvement.

The Audit Commission is an independent watchdog, driving economy, efficiency and effectiveness in local public services to deliver better outcomes for everyone. Our work across local government, health, housing, community safety and fire and rescue services means that we have a unique perspective. We promote value for money for taxpayers, auditing the £200 billion spent by 11,000 local public bodies. As a force for improvement, we work in partnership to assess local public services and make practical recommendations for promoting a better quality of life for local people.

Further details about the role of the Audit Commission can be obtained from www.audit-commission.gov.uk

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