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Date: 1st October 2009

Dear Resident,

Re - The results of the short notice inspection at One Housing Group

A team from the Audit Commission has recently inspected resident involvement services provided by your landlord. This letter tells you what we found.

We looked at how One Housing Group supports residents to become involved and help shape and influence the services across all three of the registered housing associations that are part of the group, focusing on:

- resident participation.

We also asked the following questions relating to resident participation:

- how easy it is for residents to access these services;
- what residents think of One Housing Group's customer care;
- how One Housing Group caters for different peoples' needs; and
- whether it provides value for your money.

Overall we found that the Group delivered a reasonable tenant participation service with strengths and weaknesses in balance. (See note on page 2 for an explanation of our judgements). In particular we found the following:

1. Resident Participation

We found that there is a balance of strengths and weaknesses in resident participation services. There are a range of ways for residents to be involved in the services they receive. Residents are influencing how services are delivered and have driven some service improvements. The service is resourced well and there is a range of training available that supports residents. However, Residents are not always clear about how and why some decisions are taken or what the expected outcomes are. The way that resident involvement services are delivered across the group is relatively new and opportunities for residents to influence strategies have not yet been fully delivered. Opportunities for leaseholders are limited and further work is required to ensure that leaseholders play a more active role in the resident involvement service.

2. How easy is it for residents to access resident participation services

We found that there is a balance of strengths and weaknesses in this area. Residents can easily access the service over the telephone or through the website. There is a customer focus with residents with mystery shopping and feedback from residents helping to inform how resident involvement services are delivered. However we also found that service standards for resident involvement are not being monitored or reported to residents and members of the board.

3. How responsive resident participation services are to different residents' needs

We found that there are more weaknesses than strengths in this area. One Housing Group does not have up to date information about the needs of all its residents to help ensure that services are delivered in a way that meets all residents' needs. We also found that there are some physical barriers that may make it difficult for some residents to visit some offices and facilities. However One Housing Group is working with residents who have specific needs as part of its resident involvement framework and local community and training projects are working well to support residents.

4. Do resident involvement services provide value for your money

We found that there are more weaknesses than strengths in this area. One Housing Group works well with its partners and has been successful obtaining funding to support the service from external organisations. However residents are not involved in helping to improve value for money. There are no strategies or targets in place that show how better value for money is going to be delivered in the future and the service is not comparing how well it delivers value for money compared to other housing organisations.

To help your landlord improve its service to all residents, we have made the following recommendations:

- it should review and update resident participation service standards with residents and these should be monitored and regularly reported to residents and board members;
- Improve the information held about the needs of all residents to help improve services;
- ensure that all buildings used by residents are easy to access for all residents;
- strengthen the way that the service delivers and measures value for money;
- improve resident participation by improving ways that the Group communicates with residents and helping to bring residents together to learn from each other and discuss ways to improve services.
- Support residents to increase the opportunities available to help inform how services are delivered in the future across the Group.

The report will shortly be available on our website at www.audit-commission.gov.uk/housing. You can also find further information about housing inspections there. Alternatively the association will be able to let you have a copy of the report.

3. Next steps

We have asked One Housing Group to work with its residents over the next few weeks to develop an action plan showing how it intends to implement our recommendations and to send this to us by 7th December 2009. We will consider the likelihood of One Housing Group improving the inspected service. We will then publish our final report. We hope to publish this by 14th January 2010

The Association's regulator, the Tenant Services Authority will work with them to make sure that the recommendations in the inspection report are acted upon and improvements to your service are delivered.

A copy of this letter is also being sent for information to each member of the board of One Housing Group.

I hope this letter has been of interest to you. Thank you very much for your co-operation.

Yours faithfully

Julie Watts
Principal Inspector
Housing Inspectorate
Audit Commission

Note

The Audit Commission uses a four point scale for judging the quality of services, as follows:

- Strengths considerably outweigh weaknesses;
- Strengths outweigh weaknesses;
- A balance of strengths and weaknesses; and
- Weaknesses outweigh strengths.