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# March 2006 Inspection of North Wales Housing Association: a Summary Report

## **North Wales Housing Association**



*The Welsh Assembly Government (the Assembly Government) has appointed the Auditor General for Wales to carry out the inspection of housing associations in Wales under Section 96c of the Government of Wales Act 1998.*

Inspections assess how an association is meeting the expectations of the Assembly Government as set out in the current Welsh Assembly Government's *Regulatory Code for Housing Associations in Wales* (the Regulatory Code). Inspectors assess the quality of service provided in a range of service areas. They also assess how North Wales Housing Association (the Association) secures continuous improvement in the Association as a whole and in relation to inspected services.

The inspection of the Association was undertaken in **March 2006**. The full report is available from:

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Within eight weeks of the publication date, the Association should circulate this summary of the report to tenants and key stakeholders and produce a brief commentary and Action Plan setting out how it will respond to the inspection findings. The commentary will then be published on the Wales Audit Office website.

The Lead Inspector will review the Action Plan and confirm whether it is acceptable or identify any necessary changes. The Lead Inspector will make recommendations to the Assembly Government regarding the frequency of progress reviews. The Assembly Government's Regulation Co-ordinator assigned to the Association will undertake progress reviews, and in consultation with the Lead Inspector will 'sign off' completion of the Action Plan.

**The inspectors found that North Wales Housing Association was providing satisfactory services in all areas. The Association's approach to securing continuous improvement was raising standards in service delivery.**

- 1. North Wales Housing Association had satisfactory arrangements in place for its relationship with residents.** The Association was culturally committed to encouraging resident involvement but needed to work with its residents to develop a comprehensive and systematic framework for its resident involvement and community development activity. It also needed to ensure that opportunities to get involved were tailored to meet the specific needs of supported housing tenants.
- 2. North Wales Housing Association had satisfactory equal opportunities arrangements in place for service users and employees.** The Association was involved in a range of activities aimed at promoting respect for diversity and equality of opportunity, but needed to put in place appropriate equalities targets and monitoring systems to allow it to evaluate the impact of that activity. The Association had a Welsh Language Scheme in place but needed to ensure that it was meeting the action deadlines in the related action plan.
- 3. North Wales Housing Association had a satisfactory approach to providing housing and meeting local needs.** It worked in partnership with relevant local authorities and other agencies, although there was scope to strengthen its arrangements for partnership working. The Association participated in community development initiatives but it needed to do more to secure increased involvement in neighbourhood renewal and regeneration initiatives.
- 4. North Wales Housing Association was providing a satisfactory rent service.** It needed to develop an effective debt prevention service. The Association's arrangements for control and recovery of rent arrears were having limited effect and it needed to develop a clear plan to improve its service.
- 5. North Wales Housing Association was providing a satisfactory letting service.** The Association was not letting properties quickly and it needed to develop a clear service improvement plan. The Association ensured that people in housing need were aware of, and had good access to, its housing. It was working effectively with local authorities on the allocation of housing. The Association made sure that those housed were fairly selected but it needed to develop systems to ensure that it maintained a balance in housing allocation.
- 6. North Wales Housing Association was providing a satisfactory housing management service.** The Association ensured that residents were offered the most secure form of occupancy. It was helping to safeguard the quality of life of residents and neighbours through its approach to anti-social behaviour, but it needed to take action to ensure that its policies were effectively applied and managed.

7. **North Wales Housing Association was providing a satisfactory maintenance service.** The Association's responsive repairs were not always carried out effectively and it needed to improve its responsive repairs service to secure value for money, effective budget control, accurate performance information, and a quality service to residents. The Association was managing its statutory gas servicing very effectively and made sure that its cyclical and planned maintenance was carried out effectively. It had a clear plan to fully identify the maintenance and improvements necessary to meet the Welsh Housing Quality Standard by 2012.
8. **North Wales Housing Association had satisfactory arrangements in place for housing people with support needs.** The Association made housing available for people with a wide range of support needs and ensured that they had access to the services they need. Whilst it applied most key expectations equitably to customers who require support and tailored its services to meet their specific needs, the Association was not tailoring its resident involvement arrangements to meet those needs. The Association needed to make sure that its monitoring and review arrangements were operating effectively and to evaluate how intended services were actually being provided to residents.
9. **North Wales Housing Association was raising standards in service delivery.** Whilst the Association could demonstrate evidence of service improvement in a range of service areas, it needed to improve its arrangements for performance management and to make sure that robust and consistent arrangements applied across all of its continuous improvement activities. The Association needed to ensure that it had the capacity and arrangements to deliver prioritised improvements.

**Examples of good practice demonstrated by North Wales Housing Association included the following:**

**Equal opportunities: access to information.** The Association had put in place clear and effective arrangements to ensure its information and advice was readily accessible in a wide range of different formats.

**Housing management: evaluation of probationary tenancies.** The Association piloted the use of assured short hold tenancies as introductory tenancies, evaluated their impact and sought the views of residents prior to their introduction to general use.

**Raising standards: approach to Best Value.** The Association had developed a robust and effective approach to Best Value with responsibility allocated to a senior staff member, a clear methodology and processes which resulted in comprehensive reports and recommendations for action.

North Wales Housing Association (the Association) was established in 1974 and is a Registered Social Landlord and Industrial and Provident Society registered under charitable rules. At 31 December 2005, the Association managed 2,127 properties, serving communities in Conwy, Gwynedd and Ynys Môn. Its head office is in Llandudno Junction. Housing services are provided from that office and from a second office in Bangor.

The Association is managed by a Board of 12 including three tenant board members. The Chief Executive leads a Corporate Management Team, comprising himself and the three Directors, which meets fortnightly. The Association employed 137 staff at 31 December 2005.





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