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# Cardiff Community Housing Association

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### Status of this report

This report has been prepared for the internal use of the named body. Our reports are prepared:

- In relation to audit, under the relevant enabling legislation and the responsibilities detailed in the Code of Audit and Inspection Practice, and in the context of the 'Statement of Responsibilities', issued by the Auditor General for Wales.
- In relation to inspection, following inspection work carried out under the Local Government Act 1999, as amended by the Public Audit (Wales) Act 2004, and in accordance with guidance issued by the National Assembly for Wales.

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## Summary

### **The Welsh Assembly Government has appointed the Wales Audit Office to carry out inspections of housing associations in Wales**

1. Inspections of housing associations in Wales are carried out under Section 96c of the Government of Wales Act 1998. They assess how associations are meeting the expectations of the Assembly Government, as set out in its *Regulatory Code for Housing Associations in Wales*, March 2006 (the Regulatory Code). The relevant expectations are summarised at Appendix 1.
2. The inspection of the Cardiff Community Housing Association (the Association) was undertaken in January 2006. The inspectors sought to answer two key questions in relation to the Association:
  - Does the Association deliver good quality services?
  - Does the Association secure continuous improvement in services?
3. The first question is applied to individual service areas, and the second is applied to the Association as a whole in relation to inspected services. The judgements used in answering the two questions are described in Appendix 2.
4. The inspectors concluded that the Association was generally providing good and satisfactory services although it needed to improve its provision of information and advice in community languages and its approach to monitoring equalities data. The Association's approach to continuous improvement was raising standards in service delivery.

### **The Association provided good or satisfactory services in most areas and excellent services in respect of providing housing**

5. The Association provided excellent services in relation to providing housing, good services in relation to its relationship to residents, rents, managing and maintaining housing and satisfactory services in relation to equal opportunities, letting housing and housing for people with support needs.

### **The Association's approach to securing continuous improvement was raising standards in service delivery**

6. The Association could demonstrate evidence of service improvement in a range of service areas and had the capacity to deliver further improvements. The Association recognised that it needed to improve its arrangements for performance management and continuous improvement and was working to achieve that, although it needed to develop more robust improvement plans.

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## **The Association demonstrated good practice in a number of areas**

### **Involving residents in the work of the Association**

- 7.** The Association worked with its residents to produce a Welcome Home Pack which provides attractive, user-friendly information on how to get involved in the work of the Association.

### **Matching clients to adapted properties**

- 8.** The Association was host to the Cardiff Accessible Homes partnership of housing, social care, health and voluntary agencies in the City of Cardiff. The partnership has identified the housing needs and preferences of clients, and has developed a database of existing adapted properties across all social landlords in Cardiff and a 'matching' process to allocate adapted properties.

### **The Young Builders project**

- 9.** The Association's Cardiff Young Builders project has developed a multi-agency approach to deliver sustainable outcomes for young people by breaking the 'no job, no home cycle'. The project provides young people with a training programme with support, self-contained housing with support, and the opportunity to secure permanent employment and permanent accommodation at the end of their participation.

### **The Association's schools project**

- 10.** As part of its neighbourhood renewal work, the Association's schools project has engaged with four local schools in a project offering safety advice on building sites to children, as well as encouraging them to learn about the construction industry and their environment.

### **Dealing with anti-social behaviour**

- 11.** The Association's Community Solutions team has developed a highly effective approach to dealing with anti-social behaviour. The team was effective in involving residents in the development and delivery of the service and provides information on how the Association deals with complaints of anti-social behaviour. Systems and documentation have been developed which ensure a consistent approach and the involvement of relevant local agencies. Management information systems allow review and evaluation of the impact of action taken.

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## **Managing statutory servicing**

12. The Association has developed highly effective procedures for managing statutory servicing. The Association and its contractor work jointly to achieve timely servicing. A database is used to manage servicing and this is supported by robust and creative approaches to gaining access which are informed by local knowledge and the involvement of, and good co-ordination between, all parts of the Association. The system emphasises the importance of personal contact with residents. The IT system ensures that access issues can be raised when residents make contact for other repairs. Senior staff and the Board regularly monitor the up-to-date position on servicing and regular information is provided to residents emphasising the importance of giving access to allow servicing to be carried out.

## **Involving residents in assessing housing standards**

13. The Association has surveyed all residents to get their input into its programmes of work to achieve the Welsh Housing Quality Standard. As well as finding out about residents' views of standards within their homes, the Association is using the survey to take account of cultural and physical aids which may be required, and issues such as affordable warmth.

## **This report makes a number of recommendations for improvement**

14. The Detailed Report includes recommendations for improvement in each of the areas examined. These are brought together in Appendix 3.

## **The Association is required to take action in response to this report**

15. The Detailed Report and the Association's commentary on it will be available on the Wales Audit Office website ([www.wao.gov.uk](http://www.wao.gov.uk)), which also includes reference to good practice found during this and other inspections.
16. The Association is required to circulate our separate summary of this report to tenants and key stakeholders within eight weeks of publication. The Association should also produce a commentary and an Action Plan within eight weeks of publication setting out how it will respond to the inspection findings.
17. The Lead Inspector will review the Action Plan, confirming whether it is acceptable or identifying any necessary changes, and will make recommendations to the Assembly Government regarding the frequency of progress reviews. The Assembly Regulation Co-ordinator assigned to the Association will undertake the progress reviews and, in consultation with the Lead Inspector, will 'sign off' completion of the Action Plan.

### **Cardiff Community Housing Association is a well established, community-based housing association managing 2,296 homes in the Cardiff area**

18. The Association was established in 1976 and is a registered social landlord and an Industrial and Provident Society registered under charitable rules. It was formed as the result of the merger of Adamsdown and Moors Community Housing Associations, and serves communities in Cardiff. At 30 September 2005, the Association managed 2,296 properties, more than half of which were in its traditional base of operations in Splott and Adamsdown. Seventeen per cent of the Association's customers identified themselves as being 'non-white'.
19. The Association's head office is in Ocean Way, Cardiff, and housing services are provided from two community offices in Adamsdown and Splott. The Association also runs two community centres and a Tenant and Community Resource Centre, and hosts Care and Repair in Cardiff, Cardiff Accessible Homes and a range of advice services.
20. The Association is managed by a Board of 15, including five tenant Board members. The Board meets 10 times a year following a set sequence of themed meetings. A Scrutiny Group acts as an audit committee and meets four times a year to scrutinise in detail aspects of the Association's services as specified by the Board. In addition, the Board may delegate to ad hoc groups. At the time of the inspection, only one such group, the Personnel Working Party, was in operation.
21. A Directors' Team, comprising the Chief Executive and three Directors (of Finance and IT, Housing, and Property Development) meets monthly to consider performance and progress against corporate and operational objectives. In addition, a Management Team, comprising the Chief Executive, Directors, Managers and the Head of Policy and Research, meets bi-monthly to focus on operational performance. The Association employs 85 staff, including a small direct labour team, estate caretakers and Care and Repair staff.
22. At the time of the inspection, the Association was in the middle of a period of substantial change as a result of:
  - The development of collaborative approaches to procurement in relation to both development and reactive and planned maintenance, which have the potential to fundamentally change the Association's approach to the development and maintenance of their housing stock. Whilst the Association is positively embracing the opportunities provided by these new approaches, contributing to their development as part of a consortium of housing associations was making significant demands on the Association's resources.

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- New developments in Cardiff Bay. The Association was developing almost 200 new homes for key worker, affordable rent and low cost home ownership which would come into management during 2006. This represented a swift growth in stock in high density developments as part of private developer sites and brought with it substantial challenges in terms of marketing, lettings and approaches to management.

## **The Association provided good or satisfactory services in most areas and excellent services in respect of providing housing**

### **The Association had 'good' arrangements in place for its relationship with residents**

#### **The Association was encouraging resident involvement**

23. The Association had a clear framework for resident involvement in place through its Tenant Participation Strategy and Tenant Participation Compact. Residents had been involved in the development of this framework and were supportive of its aims and objectives. The Tenant Participation Compact had been reviewed recently in partnership with residents and offered a range of involvement opportunities. The Association was working with residents to develop these opportunities with the aim of further widening the scope of its resident involvement activity.
24. Residents were involved in shaping the policy and future direction of the Association through Board membership, the Tenants' Representative Council and a number of review groups covering particular areas of interest, comprising Anti-Social Behaviour, Best Value, Policy Review and Compact Review. There was provision for up to five places on the Board for tenants, and tenant board members were provided with training and support to ensure that they were able to participate effectively. All five tenant board member places were filled at the point of inspection.
25. The Association was working to increase the involvement of Black and Minority Ethnic (BME) residents through its Recognising All Cultures Equally (RACE) group, and of disabled residents through the Disabled Action Group. With the support of the Association, both groups had recently received Tenant Empowerment Grants, which are aimed at increasing the involvement of BME and disabled residents in the work of the Association.

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26. The Association's work on resident involvement was supported by a full-time Customer Involvement Officer and complemented by a range of community development activity. Community development was promoted by the Association's full-time Community Development Co-ordinator and included provision of a variety of activities through the Association's two community centres, the Tenants' Resource Centre and a wide range of local partnerships, such as with Scarman Trust in Adamsdown. Community activities were funded by the Association's Community Support Fund. At the time of the inspection, the Association's resident involvement and community development activities took place separately and it was not able to take full advantage of the many opportunities for resident and community engagement which arose from their wide range of activities. The Association recognised the need to improve links and maximise engagement opportunities and was considering options to achieve this.

### **The Association produced clear and accurate information and advice for residents**

27. The Association has two community-based offices from which it provides housing services. These offices were compliant with the Disability Discrimination Act 1995 (as amended) and display a useful and comprehensive range of information and advice leaflets and posters, including a Tenant Participation notice board with information related to resident involvement. The offices did not have loop or minicom provision for customers with hearing difficulties and, due to a lack of space, had no play facilities for children.
28. The Association had a comprehensive range of high quality, well designed and user-friendly, published information and advice for residents. This included information leaflets covering the Association's housing and maintenance services, an easy to use Tenants' Handbook, Annual Report, Best Value Annual Review, Tenant Participation Compact and Welcome Home, a publication outlining the range of options for resident involvement. Residents had had a high level of involvement in the development of the Association's published information and advice for tenants.
29. In addition, the Association has a quarterly newsletter for residents, CHAT, which provided relevant and useful information in a user-friendly format. The Tenants' Representative Council was also consulted about the contents of CHAT.
30. Information and advice could also be accessed via the Association's website, which provided a wide range of information of interest to existing and potential customers. The website included the opportunity to report repairs and obtain further information on re-housing.

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#### **Good practice – Welcome Home Pack**

The Association has worked with its residents to produce a Welcome Home Pack which provides attractive, user-friendly information on how to get involved in the work of the Association. The pack has been made available to all of the Association's residents and will be used in the future as the basis of a settling in visit to every new resident by the Association's Customer Involvement Officer. The Association intends its approach to make clear to all residents, from the beginning of their tenancy, that it wants to encourage involvement and offers a range of ways to get involved to suit the needs of each resident. The Association hopes the approach will achieve more involvement from under-represented groups, such as young people.

#### **The Association asked for, listened to, and took account of the views of residents**

31. The Association's Tenant Participation Compact outlines a range of ways to find out the views of residents, from input to Association policy and future direction to having a say in day-to-day, local issues. The Association was working with residents to develop methods to promote increased levels of resident involvement.
32. Residents' views on policy and future direction were sought through the Tenants' Representative Council and a range of special interest working groups, as well as through the CHAT newsletter and a variety of survey processes, such as the recent survey in relation to the Welsh Housing Quality Standard.
33. The Association carries out a comprehensive survey of all residents every two years. The results of the most recent survey were being analysed and an action plan developed to address or further investigate issues highlighted by the survey.
34. The results of repairs satisfaction surveys were circulated to all residents reporting a non-urgent repair, with entry in a prize draw offered to encourage participation. Survey results were analysed and acted upon.
35. The Association also carried out regular ad hoc surveys to encourage resident input to issues as they arise, for example in relation to parking issues and anti-social behaviour. Ensuring that residents got an opportunity to have their say on the issues that affected them was part of the culture of the organisation and applied to all areas of its work – housing, maintenance and development.
36. The Association and its residents were able to provide a range of examples where residents' views had been listened to and acted upon, eg in relation to tackling anti-social behaviour issues. Residents we spoke to during the inspection expressed satisfaction with the range of opportunities available for them to have their views taken into account and with the Association's response to the views expressed.

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**The Association was answerable to residents for the quality of services provided but needed to do more to ensure that tenants could access and make use of service standards**

- 37. The Association provided residents with information on its performance through its Annual Report, Best Value Annual Review and website. The Association also provided information on its own comparative performance over time and with the average for Welsh Housing Associations.
- 38. The Association's literature and policy documents included a large number of service standards, but there was no single document that included all of the Association's service standards. This meant that it would have been difficult for residents to hold the Association answerable for the quality of services provided as they would have had to search for the service standards in a large number of places. Some service standards, such as repairs completion targets, were monitored as part of the Association's Management Information Reports, but adherence to most service standards was not formally monitored and reported to residents.
- 39. The Association had a Customer Pledge which was widely advertised to residents. However, most pledge commitments, such as 'deal with enquiries effectively with the least possible inconvenience' were not quantified, and none of the commitments were formally monitored and reported to residents.
- 40. The Association had a complaints policy and procedure which met Assembly Government requirements, and produced comprehensive reports on complaints received and subsequent action taken.

<b>Recommendations</b>	
<b><i>Relationship with residents</i></b>	
R1	Improve links between resident involvement and community development activities to ensure joint working to achieve maximum opportunities to engage with community members.
R2	Make it easier for residents to access and make use of the Association's service standards and Customer Pledge.

**The Association had 'satisfactory' equal opportunities arrangements in place**

**The Association was involved in a range of activities which aimed to promote respect for diversity and equality of opportunity. It was working to improve information and advice in an appropriate range of formats and languages and to develop its approach to monitoring equalities data**

- 41. Seventeen per cent of the Association's residents had identified themselves as being 'non-white'.

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42. The Association had promoted and was involved in a number of initiatives designed to promote respect for diversity and equality of opportunity. Examples included:
- setting up and supporting an independent group (RACE) specifically for residents from a BME background and providing support to the Disability Action Group, both of which have been funded, via an Assembly Tenant Empowerment Grant, to examine options for further development;
  - development of a range of accommodation to meet the needs of BME community members;
  - forming links with local equalities organisations to secure access to advice for its customers, for example through referrals to the local Somali Advice Centre and hosting a regular surgery by Race Equality First;
  - involvement with other local associations in a project to assess the barriers to BME contractors and consultants and mapping the availability of BME contractors and consultants;
  - employment of a PATH (Positive Action Training Highway) trainee as part of the maintenance team;
  - in partnership with Acen, supporting the Biskit project which is at the early stages of improving access to English language learning for the Somali community, in particular women, via the internet;
  - from late 2005, being a partner in a project to provide witness and victim support, including support for victims of racial harassment; and
  - publication of a code of conduct for contractors in relation to equalities issues (though this is not monitored or enforced except in the case of a specific complaint).
43. The Association had a Race Equality Plan which was regularly monitored. The Association also had an equal opportunities policy, but this was not linked to an equal opportunities action plan. Diversity training had been provided for all staff and Board members.
44. The Association had a racial harassment policy, which was the operational responsibility of its Community Solutions team. The policy provided for rigorous monitoring and reporting and the provision of a client-centred, timely and appropriate response. Racial harassment cases scrutinised during the inspection indicated that procedures were being followed, and that racial harassment cases were given high priority for action by the Association. The Association was a member of Cardiff Multi-Agency Race Forum, which meets bi-monthly to review all live cases of racial harassment, exchange information, advice and good practice, and ensure that cases are pursued vigorously and all appropriate options facilitated through effective co-ordination of relevant agencies.
45. The Association had full equalities information on 70 per cent of its existing customers, and was working to gather further information. Equalities information was being gathered in relation to applicants for housing.

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46. The Association is a member of Language Line and offers translation facilities as required by clients. However, it did not ensure that those who needed information in different formats or languages had access to the same wide range of information and advice, and the variety of opportunities to express their views, available to the rest of the Association's customers. Contact information in community languages was included with the Association's 2005 Tenants' Survey and the Association was analysing survey results to reflect feedback from the BME community. The Association's Tenants' Handbook contained signposting in community languages and it is available in Braille or on tape. The Association had a standard compliments slip with contact information in community languages on the reverse although it was not consistently used in all correspondence or provision of requests for information. Very little other information was available in alternative formats or languages.
  47. The Association was working to ensure information requirements were improved. In partnership with other local housing associations, it had initiated a project which aimed to employ a full-time BME Information Officer to develop improved links with the BME community, and to develop appropriate information and advice for the communities served by the Association. This project had been submitted for Social Housing Management Grant funding from the Welsh Assembly Government.
  48. The Association did not have a full range of equalities targets and there were no targets in relation to disabilities. Equalities targets had been set and were regularly monitored in respect of waiting lists, lettings, Board membership and staff recruitment. The Association had recently met its BME target for Board membership and was working with Tai Pawb to identify how it could improve its approach to staff recruitment and composition. In Housing Services, allocations and waiting lists were monitored. No monitoring was carried out in relation to access to services other than through the biennial tenants' survey.
  49. All the Association's adapted or purpose built accommodation was made available to Cardiff Accessible Homes for letting. This is an attempt to ensure equality of opportunity across Cardiff. Cardiff Accessible Homes provided a broad range of monitoring data on disabled applicants including ethnic origin, disabilities, family composition and wheelchair use. This was compiled by the project in partnership with Cardiff County Council and covered all housing association partners.
  50. The Association's community offices did not have access to hearing loop or minicom facilities.

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**The Association was developing a Welsh Language Scheme but did not have appropriate arrangements in place for dealing with requests for a service in Welsh**

- 51. The Association was developing a Welsh Language Scheme as part of a Best Value Review, and was consulting with staff and tenants during the early stages of the scheme's development. Progress on this may have been affected by the work being carried out by the Welsh Federation of Housing Associations and the Welsh Language Board to develop a template Welsh Language Scheme for the use of housing associations across Wales.
- 52. None of the Association's publications was available bilingually and the Association had no formal arrangements in place to ensure that all staff are aware of how to deal with a request for a service in Welsh.

<b>Recommendations</b>	
<b><i>Equal opportunities</i></b>	
R3	Provide information and advice in an appropriate range of formats and languages and ensure that all residents have the same opportunities to express their views through Association surveys.
R4	Set, monitor and report on an appropriate range of equalities targets for housing services.
R5	Progress the Association's Welsh Language Scheme in the context of the work being undertaken by the Welsh Federation of Housing Associations and the Welsh Language Board.

**The Association had an 'excellent' approach in providing housing**

**The Association was working as an effective, valued and creative partner with Cardiff Council and other agencies to identify and provide for the housing related needs of the area**

- 53. The Association was working closely with Cardiff Council and other Cardiff based housing associations in delivering the Local Housing Strategy. The Association also represented Cardiff housing associations on the Community Planning Implementation Group, which is the strategy group that has overarching responsibility for the Local Housing Strategy. Our discussions with partners indicated that the Association was an effective, valued and creative partner.
- 54. The Association was involved in the Cardiff Housing Managers' Group, which helped to develop the Homeless Strategy protocol with the Local Authority. As a result of this work, homeless families had been housed with support provided by Foundation Housing, and supported housing for vulnerable homeless people had been provided in partnership with Wallich Clifford.

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55. We found specific examples where the Association had taken a lead in the development of services and highlight the Cardiff Accessible Homes project as an example of good practice.

**Good practice – Cardiff Accessible Homes**

The project, piloted by the Association, has developed a Housing Register specifically for people with physical impairment who are seeking to move to alternative accommodation. Initial grant funding from the Welsh Assembly Government enabled a partnership of housing, social care, health and voluntary agencies in the city of Cardiff to be established. The partnership has identified the housing needs and preferences of clients, and developed a database of existing adapted properties across all social landlords in Cardiff and a 'matching' process to allocate adapted properties.

The outcome for clients is an improvement in the options available to those in unsuitable accommodation. 265 clients have been re-housed since the project began in September 2002 and approximately 2,000 adapted properties have been identified across the city. For landlords, there has been an improvement in letting times and existing adapted properties are being used more effectively.

By identifying existing, suitably adapted dwellings and matching them with a client in need, the project is maximising the use of existing resources.

This project has also provided a database of the needs of people with physical disabilities, which is informing provision at a strategic level. There is evidence that this project has helped focus and shape the local Housing Strategy and assisted the Local Authority to more effectively manage its stock and resources and target the Social Housing Grant programme more effectively.

The Association produced an evaluation report in 2004, which it used to promote the project to all the housing associations working in Cardiff.

56. The Association had an effective working relationship with the Local Authority's Supporting People team, and the Association's involvement in the Dispersed Foyer Scheme (accommodation in various locations where support linked to work and training opportunities is provided for young people) was detailed in the Supporting People Plan.
57. The Association was assisting Cardiff Council to deliver its Local Housing Strategy priorities through a number of other projects, such as family housing at Butetown, a community housing scheme developed in partnership with Cardiff's Yemeni community, affordable apartment living in the city centre for key workers and those on low incomes, and low cost home ownership and affordable rented accommodation in Cardiff Bay developed in partnership with the Local Authority and private sector developers.

**A Community Housing Protocol with Cardiff Council was in place**

58. A Community Housing Protocol with the Local Authority and other housing associations working in Cardiff was in place. This was introduced in September 2005 and set out Cardiff Council's strategic framework for working with Cardiff Community and other housing associations.

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59. The Local Authority had not formally evaluated the Association's contribution to delivering the Local Housing Strategy. However, contact with the Council indicated that the Association's contribution was valued and that it had a proven track record of delivery. The Local Authority was planning to introduce a 'matrix' assessment to enable more effective evaluation of the Cardiff housing associations' contribution to delivering the Local Housing Strategy.

**The Association was leading and participating in a range of community development, neighbourhood renewal and regeneration initiatives**

60. The Association was leading and participating in improving the communities in which it operated. It provided community facilities such as Trowbridge Mawr Community Hall, Tremorfa Community Hall and Adamsdown Community and Tenants' Resource Centre. A range of services, such as computer classes, a day nursery and dance through Rubicon (a local community dance development organisation) was being provided to the community from these venues.
61. The Cardiff Young Builders project, which provides opportunities for young people to learn a trade while living in secure accommodation, had been promoted by the Association since 1999. The project involves partnership working with the Young Builders Trust and contractors engaged to build housing schemes for the Association.

**Good practice – Cardiff Young Builders**

The Association has been involved in three phases of the Cardiff Young Builders project over the last five years. The project's objective is to develop a multi-agency approach to deliver sustainable outcomes for young people by breaking the 'no job, no home cycle'. The project has four key components: provision of a training programme with support; provision of self-contained housing with support for the duration of the project, to prepare the participants for successful independent living in the future; a real opportunity for employment in a recognised building trade at the end of the programme; and, for those in housing need, the opportunity to secure permanent accommodation upon successful completion of the programme. Funding has been secured from the European Social Fund, New Deal, the partners involved and the private contractors who provide training placements for the participants. The most recent phase assisted six young people to learn a trade, of which three were given permanent employment with the contractor. The Association evaluates the scheme on an annual basis.

62. Renewal and regeneration activity assists the Local Authority to deliver its strategic objectives. The Adamsdown/Plasnewydd Neighbourhood Renewal Scheme had improved the physical environment in Adamsdown and Splott, and the Association had significantly re-invested in its stock in these areas. As a result, there had been a significant reduction in long-term voids, a comprehensive decant policy had been developed in partnership with residents, good collaborative working had been promoted between staff, and a successful schools project, run in conjunction with local contractors, had promoted to children health and safety on building sites in the community.

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#### **Good practice – School project**

As part of its neighbourhood renewal work, the Association has engaged with four local schools in a project offering safety advice on building sites to children. The children are invited to learn about the construction process by tracking a building project close to their school. In one instance, the project became part of the children's curriculum work for the year. The children have learned about the construction industry and their environments as well as about health and safety. The Association plans to extend this project to a local senior school to engage an older age group and link with employment and training opportunities.

63. The Association was working as development agent for the Local Authority on a major regeneration project at Trowbridge shops. Following demolition of the shops, the redevelopment of the site was to include a parade of modern shops, affordable housing and a community hall.
64. The Association had also worked with the Local Authority, as part of the Cardiff Partnering Scheme, at Coed y Gores, Llanedeyrn to oversee regeneration of this area of the Local Authority owned estate. The project included demolition of existing flats and the new build of family housing and flats, and involved extensive community engagement and consultation. The scheme was also to include the first Homezone in Cardiff, a scheme where the street space is redefined to meet the wider needs of the people who live in and use the street, rather than for the passage of motor vehicles. This meant that vehicles have to travel slowly, pedestrians can share the space on equal terms with vehicles and children can play safely.

### **The Association was providing a 'good' rents service to tenants**

#### **The Association had effective arrangements in place for debt prevention, although they needed to be better publicised and evaluated**

65. The Association's Tenants' Handbook detailed what tenants should do if they had problems paying the rent, and the Association provided a range of up-to-date leaflets on debt prevention and ways to pay rent. The Association also provided a comprehensive Dealing with Debt guidance pack to all tenants who were more than two weeks in arrears. The Association's staff used Ferret computer software to help maximise the take up of benefit at start of tenancy and when tenants were in rent arrears.

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66. The Association was also working in partnership with the Local Authority to encourage benefit take-up. The Association hosted a surgery for local community members in its offices one morning per week, which was run by the Local Authority Housing Benefit Verification Officer. Although the service was not advertised in either of the Association's offices, it was well used and there were plans to extend it to two days per week. The Association received some information on the service, for example during the previous six months most surgery cases had been Association tenants. However, no detailed analysis was provided on the nature and type of enquiry and how much additional income had been generated by providing the service.
67. Working arrangements with Housing Benefit staff were effective and the Association's staff were members of the Housing Benefit steering group which met quarterly.
68. The Association used the Cardiff Law Centre to provide a debt advice service for tenants. This service was promoted in the Dealing with Debt guidance pack and in standard rent arrears letters for more than £300, but it was not clearly advertised within the Association's offices or newsletter. No analysis was available of service take-up, either in terms of numbers using the service, the nature of enquiries or how much additional income had been generated as a result.
69. The Association carried out other specific initiatives to mitigate debt. The pre-Christmas edition of the CHAT newsletter included an article on the importance of paying rent. The Association had trialled a comprehensive approach to debt prevention for new tenants when letting a new scheme at Moorland Street, which included affordability information in the offer, a personal budget planner, rent payment leaflets and the use of direct debit for working tenants. The Association was planning to roll out this approach to all new tenants. Although there had been no formal evaluation of the outcomes of this new approach, officers told the inspection team that they sensed that the 'upfront' work had had a positive impact.

### **The Association has effective control and recovery mechanisms**

70. The Association was progressing a review of rent collection. As part of the review, the Association was working to shape the service to meet the needs of bad payers, with a focus on arrears hotspots, better knowledge and understanding of the client group and tailoring the service accordingly. The Association had sought views on its rent recovery service from 14 tenants with serious arrears cases. As a result the Association was, for example, gathering the information necessary to allow it to text and e-mail young people with arrears problems, rather than send letters.
71. The emphasis in the Association's rent arrears policy and procedures was on early, personal contact and rigorous monitoring. The Association offered a wide range of rent payments methods including Allpay, Paypoint and Payzone payment systems (which give access to payment facilities in a wide range of convenient retail outlets), direct debit and standing order, by internet, by telephone and by using credit or debit cards.

72. Rent arrears were monitored on a monthly basis by the Housing Manager, and monthly meetings were held with Housing officers to agree action on a patch by patch basis. Individual patch targets were agreed at appraisals and were linked to Corporate and Operational Plan targets.
73. Rent arrears performance had not changed significantly during recent years, but the Association had a clear understanding of what needed to be done to address this. The rent arrears of current tenants had deteriorated slightly over the previous two years, from 2.1 per cent to 2.2 per cent, and rent collected as a proportion of rent due had also deteriorated slightly, from 98.1 per cent to 97.8 per cent.
74. The Association made use of the Housing Act 1996, which allows for mandatory possession if arrears are above a specified level. However, possession in such circumstances was used only in exceptional circumstances and its use was monitored and reported to the Board.
75. The Association's performance on recovery of former tenant arrears was improving. All former tenant arrears written off were approved by the Board on the basis of reports detailing the reasons for proposing to write them off. The Association had evaluated the use of debt recovery agents and concluded that they would not improve the service. The Association is also involved with other Cardiff housing associations in developing a joint approach to tackling former tenant debt. This is likely to involve employment of a shared specialist officer to deal solely with former tenant debt.

Recommendation	
Rents	
R6	Evaluate the impact and effectiveness of the Association's debt prevention services and ensure that existing tenants are kept aware of the availability of services.

## The Association was providing a 'satisfactory' letting service

### The Association was letting properties to a high standard. It could have let properties more quickly and efficiently, but had identified the action necessary to improve performance

76. The lettings process provided tenants with a good introduction to the Association. The process for new tenants in new homes was particularly comprehensive and included information on the affordability of the accommodation, an opportunity to view the property in advance of making a decision to accept and assistance with getting services connected.
77. The Association had a published lettings standard contained within the Tenants' Handbook that detailed the minimum standard properties should meet before being offered to new tenants. Properties we were able to view were of a high standard and complied with the published standard.

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78. Whilst trends showed declining performance in the time taken to re-let properties, from six days in 2003/2004 to eight days in 2004/2005, and the number of properties let within one week had reduced from 43 per cent to 34 per cent over the same period, the Association had a clear understanding of the reasons for this. It was taking longer to let properties due to the Association's progressive introduction of higher lettings standards and a more comprehensive lettings process which focused on community sustainability. The Association had identified action to improve performance and was putting measures in place to achieve this. For example, the Association was streamlining the administration of void management within the lettings team, in order to minimise void work and reduce re-let times.

### **The Association was ensuring that people in housing need were aware of and had good access to the Association's housing**

79. The Association used a range of methods to advertise availability of its homes – community-based offices, its website, the Housing Help Centre and the Cardiff Accessible Homes project. The Association had formal nomination arrangements in place with Tai Trothwy, Llamau, Wallich Clifford, Barnardos, Cardiff Mind and Cardiff Foyer.
80. The allocations policy had recently been amended in consultation with the Tenants' Representative Council and all tenants via CHAT newsletter. Clear guidance notes had been provided and a summary of the allocations policy was being issued with the application for re-housing form.
81. The Association operated an open waiting list and was responsive to national mobility and exchange schemes. Effective assistance was also being given to tenants seeking to move, and the Association assisted 29 mutual exchanges and 26 transfers during 2005. The Community Living element of the Association's allocations policy was actively assisting those who wanted to access Low Cost Home Ownership or smaller accommodation due to under-occupation.
82. The Association's inclusions policy aimed to keep exclusions to a minimum, and the Association was participating fully as a member of the Local Authority's Exclusions Panel.

### **The Association was working effectively in partnership with Cardiff Council on the allocation of housing**

83. The Association had a close working partnership with the Local Authority and work was in progress to negotiate a local lettings agreement with the Local Authority on two new developments in Cardiff Bay. Evaluation of the lettings profile at a recently completed scheme had provided information which had helped to formulate a marketing strategy with the Local Authority for the Cardiff Bay developments, and the Association was involved in a joint publicity campaign with the Local Authority to promote these new schemes.

84. The Association monitored nomination levels. However, whilst in 2004/2005 the Association had offered more than 50 per cent of its lettings to the Local Authority, only 35 per cent of those accepting offers of accommodation had been nominated by the Local Authority. The Association needed to evaluate why Local Authority nominees were not accepting accommodation, and to work with the Local Authority to improve performance.
85. The Association participated in the protocol drawn up by South Wales Police in dealing with re-housing of Schedule One offenders. The Association was also formally involved with the Multi-Agency Public Protection Arrangements (MAPPA), whereby the police, prison and probation services act jointly to establish arrangements for assessing and managing the risks posed by sexual and violent offenders and reviews and monitors those arrangements. The Association was also a member of the Local Authority's Exclusions Panel.

**The Association ensured that those housed were fairly selected and that there was a balance in housing allocation**

86. The Association ensured fair selection through its points-based allocation policy, and by monitoring the number of BME applicants on the waiting list and the number re-housed.
87. The Association ensured balance in housing allocation through regular review of its allocation policy in the light of outcomes. Following the first year of operation of its new policy, the Association had recently evaluated outcomes and, in consultation with residents, had used this information to amend the policy with the aim of ensuring an appropriate balance of lettings. The Community Living element of the Association's allocation policy helped to ensure that lettings were focused on housing need in both Cardiff-wide and local community contexts. Performance in relation to the proportion of lettings to waiting list applicants and transfers was regularly reported to the Board, and the Association had a range of targets for referral sources which were monitored at Board level.
88. The Association had developed a number of local lettings initiatives on new schemes, with the aim of achieving balanced and sustainable communities. However, whilst the agreed proportion of lettings by referral source was applied to first lets, subsequent re-lets were not monitored by source of referral. Local lettings initiatives with the Local Authority helped to integrate the Association's housing within the wider community.

<b>Recommendations</b>	
<b><i>Letting housing</i></b>	
R7	Work with the Local Authority to improve nominations performance.
R8	Ensure that agreed lettings targets are applied to re-lets within schemes subject to local lettings initiatives.

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## **The Association was providing a ‘good’ housing management service**

### **The Association ensured that residents were offered the most secure form of occupancy compatible with the purpose of the housing and the sustainability of the community**

- 89. The Association was using assured tenancies as standard, with all new tenants being given an initial probationary tenancy which automatically converted to assured tenancies on the 12 month anniversary of tenancy commencement. The Association had not evaluated the impact of using probationary tenancies, although only five or six tenancies had not been converted during the five years the Association had been using probationary tenancies. Assured shorthold tenancies were being used in some supported housing schemes and licences were being used in support projects with Wallich Clifford.
- 90. Tenants were provided with information on their rights and responsibilities through the Tenants’ Handbook. An explanation of the nature of the tenancy offered was detailed in the Association’s offer pack, and all new tenants were provided with a copy of the Welsh Assembly Government’s Guarantee for Housing Association Tenants.

### **The Association was helping to safeguard the quality of life of residents and neighbours through its approach to dealing with anti-social behaviour**

- 91. A Tenants’ Survey in 1999 had identified the need for the Association to tackle nuisance and anti-social behaviour more effectively, and the Association developed an Anti-Social Behaviour Strategy following a Best Value Review in 2000. In partnership with its tenants, the Association had also developed a mediation service – Community Solutions – which had three year, part funding from the Social Housing Management Grant.
- 92. The mediation service, which was developed in partnership with agencies such as the police and the Local Authority, has been highlighted as a success by a range of partners, including the police, the Local Authority, tenants and the Head of the UK Government’s Respect Agenda. The work of the team, and its partnership with tenants, received widespread publicity as a result of the award of the first Dispersal Order in Cardiff (whereby the police, with Local Authority agreement and in a specified area, can disperse groups of people who could potentially harass, intimidate, alarm or distress members of the public).

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### **Good practice – Dealing with anti-social behaviour – Community Solutions**

The Association had a specialist team running its anti-social behaviour service. The Community Solutions team was formed in January 2004. Since its establishment, the service had resolved 233 cases and, at the time of the inspection, had 123 live cases. Before the introduction of the service, the Association was dealing with 356 live cases.

Through a focus group, tenants provided advice and assistance in the development of the service. The Association also engaged effectively with residents in relation to particular issues. For example, the Association worked with residents on a particular estate, with the support of the Community Safety Partnership and the police, to address severe anti-social behaviour problems. This resulted in funding of physical improvements using secure by design principles, and 'hotspots' on the estate being addressed, for example, by placing prickly shrubs against walls to prevent youths congregating, improving street lighting, and redesigning the square in the middle of the estate.

The Association had a clear position on how it would respond to anti-social behaviour. The Tenants' Handbook explained the Association's approach and an advisory leaflet set out what residents could do themselves and the response they could expect to receive from the Association.

The Association was taking a proactive approach to tackling problems and used a range of measures appropriate to individual cases. These have included the use of Acceptable Behaviour Contracts, demoted tenancies and Anti-Social Behaviour Injunctions.

The Association had also developed strategic partnerships operating across the city, designed to sustain the communities in which it operated.

Systems and documentation had been developed which ensured that a consistent approach was taken to tackling anti-social behaviour cases and that reference was made to relevant external agencies. Management information systems allowed review and evaluation of the impact of action taken. The Association was using its paper-based system as the basis for a new IT based system to produce standard letters, checklists and prompts and ensure effectively co-ordinated action. The Association was taking all instances of anti-social behaviour and harassment very seriously and had taken legal action to resolve incidents of nuisance and harassment, was about to introduce demoted tenancies and had evicted a tenant for racial harassment.

The service took a client-centred approach with an emphasis on support for victims and keeping everyone fully informed.

93. Given the potential positive impact of effective action on perpetrators and victims of anti-social behaviour, the Association should do more to promote the successes of its approach to tackling anti-social behaviour.
94. The Association supported its anti-social behaviour strategies through the use of technology. With the support of Cardiff Council's Community Safety Partnership, the Association had installed CCTV at a number of locations, and had its own remote monitoring system.

<b>Recommendations</b>	
<b><i>Managing housing</i></b>	
R9	Evaluate the impact in use of probationary tenancies.
R10	Ensure that residents are made aware of the successes of the Association's approach to anti-social behaviour.

## **The Association was providing a 'good' maintenance service**

### **Responsive repairs were being carried out effectively**

- 95. A wide range of ways to report the need for a repair was available – in person, by telephone, by e-mail and via the Association's website. An out of hours service was provided by Newport Council. Although this service operated satisfactorily when tested during the inspection, the Association had no arrangements in place to check the quality of the service and did not collect customer satisfaction information. When tested during the inspection, the website repairs reporting did not operate effectively; subsequent checking indicated staff error as the cause.
- 96. No technical information was provided to either tenants or staff to aid in the accurate diagnosis of repairs requirements. This could have had an impact on the accuracy of reported repairs requirements and on the Association's ability to get repairs right first time. However, the Association did not routinely monitor the accuracy of reported repairs. Also, there were no targets for inspections to be carried out prior to ordering repairs (pre-inspections) and the Association did not monitor how many pre-inspections were carried out.
- 97. The Association operated an appointments system which offered morning or afternoon appointment slots. The Association aimed to inspect 10 per cent of completed repairs, and performance against this target was being regularly monitored.
- 98. Arrangements to meet the needs of vulnerable tenants were sensitively tailored. However, there was no comprehensive system in place to identify vulnerability, meaning that it would have been possible that appropriate account might not have been taken of the needs of some vulnerable tenants.
- 99. The Association had four repairs categories which comply with Assembly guidance: within three hours; within 24 hours; within five working days; and within 28 days.

<b>Repair categories: extract from the Association's Tenants' Handbook</b>
<b>Priority 1: Emergency – within three hours</b> These are repairs that immediately reduce your protection, safety and security.
<b>Priority 2: Very urgent – within 24 hours</b> These are repairs that reduce your protection, safety and security.
<b>Priority 3: Urgent – within five working days</b> These are repairs which, while they do not reduce your protection, safety and security, still need doing quickly.
<b>Priority 4: Routine – within 28 days</b> These are repairs mainly to the internal fixtures and fittings.

100. The Association issued satisfaction questionnaires with non-emergency, responsive repairs, the results of which were regularly reported to the Board. These recorded high levels of tenant satisfaction with the responsive repairs service, which were confirmed by tenants during the course of the inspection.
101. A two person DLO and eight estate caretakers were carrying out a responsive, local minor repairs service, but no comprehensive evaluation of the service had been undertaken. For larger repairs, the Association helped to ensure value for money by procuring works on a tendered, schedule of rates basis. The Association's contracts had been procured in partnership with three other local housing associations. Jobs were automatically allocated by the IT system to the appropriate contractor in the proportions agreed as part of the schedule of rates contract.
102. The Association's contractors were working to a Code of Conduct which was published in the Tenants' Handbook. Contractor performance was monitored via analysis of completions and post-inspections. The Association had recently reinstated regular meetings with each contractor, to review performance and ensure that action was taken to deal with any issues which had arisen.
103. The Association had acknowledged the need to carry out a more thorough analysis of repairs performance in order to fully understand and respond to performance. The need for this was highlighted by the following inspection findings:
- Analysis of the number of repairs between 2002/2003 and 2004/2005 indicated an increase in numbers of urgent repairs and a decrease in numbers of emergency or very urgent repairs carried out by the Association. During 2004/2005, the Association carried out a lower proportion of emergency or very urgent repairs (9 per cent) than the Welsh average of 24 per cent, and a higher proportion (61 per cent) of urgent repairs than the Welsh average of 42 per cent. The Association had been unaware of this change and was unable to offer an analysis-based explanation.

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- A survey of tenants carried out during the course of the inspection highlighted a potential issue regarding the extent to which repairs were completed on the contractor's first visit. Although the Association did not feel this was a problem, it was unable to produce an analysis of the extent of the practice.
104. At the time of the inspection, the Association was developing an improved management report for maintenance, which would provide a comprehensive suite of performance information and allow more proactive management of the responsive repairs service. The availability of appropriate management information would also allow the Association to manage more proactively the relationship between responsive and planned repairs.

### **The Association was managing statutory servicing effectively**

105. The Association had comprehensive and effective procedures in place for the management of statutory servicing. These included a range of methods to gain access, emphasising personal contact and the use of local knowledge. At the time of the inspection, all gas servicing was fully up to date with no services outstanding.

#### **Good practice – Gas servicing**

The Association had developed highly effective procedures for managing statutory gas servicing. Gas servicing was carried out through a partnering contract which emphasised a joint approach between the Association and the contractor to achieve timely servicing. This approach included regular meetings between the Association's staff and the contractor's management and operational staff. Servicing was managed through a database, which was updated on a daily basis and was supported by robust and creative approaches to gaining access. This was informed by local knowledge and the involvement of all sections of the Association, which emphasised the importance of personal contact. In cases where it was proving very difficult to achieve access, the Association fitted service control timers which cut off the electrical supply to the boiler. At the time of the inspection, 32 properties had been fitted with timers. The Association also used warning notices attached to doors where access was proving problematical. The IT system flagged those properties where servicing was outstanding, allowing access issues to be raised with residents when contact was made for other repairs. The up-to-date position with regard to servicing was being regularly monitored by the Director, Management Teams and the Board. Regular information was provided to residents on the importance of gas servicing with an emphasis on key health and safety messages. Gas servicing was a high priority for all staff and good liaison between teams assisted in achieving timely servicing.

106. The Association was working to an Asbestos Management Plan. Asbestos surveys of communal areas had been carried out and data was available on the IT system. Properties where asbestos was present were flagged to ensure that relevant information was made available to contractors. The Association ensured that cyclical and planned maintenance was carried out effectively.

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107. The Association was operating a rolling programme of cyclical maintenance covering painting, gas servicing, lifts, portable appliance testing and fire alarms. All works were carried out under tendered contracts. Tenants were advised of the programme where it directly affected them, but the programme was not available generally to all tenants.
108. The Association operated a separate programme of planned works. The programme of planned works was based on stock condition survey information held on the Association's property database, with additional input from the responsive maintenance team regarding issues arising from responsive repairs works. Planned works were either tendered or carried out under the Association's Schedule of Rates. The Association tendered against the Schedule of Rates to ensure value for money.
109. Tenants were advised of their inclusion in the planned programme prior to tendering and were offered, where appropriate, choices of finish. All tenant liaison was carried out by the surveyor responsible for the particular programme. Although the planned programmes were not published, the Association intended to do so in the future. Residents with whom we made contact expressed a high level of satisfaction with the planned and cyclical maintenance service.

**The Association had a clear plan to fully identify the maintenance and improvements necessary to meet the Welsh Housing Quality Standard (WHQS) and had put in place specific programmes to meet the standard by 2012**

110. The Association had developed a WHQS Strategy and Achievement Plan, which included clear plans to complete all survey, planning and programming work related to the WHQS by September 2006, and to allow the standard to be met by 2012.
111. The Association was carrying out the final stock condition surveys to allow it to fully identify the maintenance and improvements necessary. The target date for completion was September 2006. The results of surveys to date were incorporated into the Association's property database and work had commenced on developing works programmes. The Association proposed to keep the survey information up to date via a three year rolling programme of surveys.
112. Based on stock condition survey information available to date, the Association had costed WHQS requirements and a 30 year business plan had confirmed affordability. These costings were to be updated when the final survey information became available.

**Good Practice – WHQS residents' survey**

The Association's WHQS programme will be informed by a survey of all Association residents. Each resident was sent a personalised survey form, including information in community languages, requesting their views on standards within their homes. The Association intended to use the information to take account of cultural or physical aids which might be required, and other issues such as affordable warmth.

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113. Whilst the Association did not have an Affordable Warmth Strategy, it had carried out various related initiatives. These included the provision of communal heating schemes in flatted developments, and working with HEES and British Gas to upgrade thermal efficiency within the Association's stock and provide low energy light bulbs.

<b>Recommendations</b>	
<b><i>Maintaining housing</i></b>	
R11	Ensure that the out of hours service is appropriately monitored and evaluated.
R12	Develop improved management information to better inform management of the maintenance service.
R13	Ensure that the September 2006 target date is met for completion of surveying, planning and programming of works to meet WHQS by 2012.

## **The Association had 'good' arrangements in place for people with support needs**

### **The Association was making housing available for people with a wide range of support needs and ensured they had access to appropriate services**

114. The Association provided for a wide range of support needs. It planned provision in consultation with key stakeholders and worked in liaison with the Supporting People team at the Local Authority to meet the identified needs of vulnerable people. The Association provided for:
- young people leaving care;
  - young people in housing need undertaking training;
  - homeless people;
  - adults with learning disabilities;
  - adults with mental health problems; and
  - vulnerable ethnic minorities.
115. The Association ensured that people with support needs had access to appropriate services by providing individuals with tailored support packages, which were systematically reviewed to ensure progress. Vulnerable tenants accessed support via a support assessment and a referral to the most appropriate agency with which the Association was working. Clear move-on arrangements, linked to the housing register database, were in place. Vulnerable tenants with support needs were dealt with by a specialist officer.

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- 116. The Association had an inclusions policy that ensured that people with support needs could access the Association's accommodation fairly and appropriately and that tenancies could be maintained. The Association was working to provide appropriate arrangements to deliver support services by agreement with other support providers.
  - 117. The range of provision available enabled the Association to offer appropriate accommodation to reflect the needs of the individual. For example, there was clear evidence of individuals moving from accommodation for 16-18 year olds in the Dispersed Foyer Scheme to independent single person's accommodation in an affordable market renting scheme in St Mary's Street.
  - 118. The Association was able to meet the needs of existing tenants who became vulnerable by working with local voluntary and statutory services. The Association was also providing an extensive range of floating support. When appropriate, the Association had successfully secured funding from the Welsh Assembly Government for adaptations to properties for disabled tenants.

**The Association was applying all key expectations equitably to customers who required support, and tailored service delivery to meet their specific needs, but it did not have a robust system for identifying those customers who required support**

- 119. The Association was meeting the needs of its tenants with support requirements by offering a flexible and responsive frontline service. Service delivery was sensitively tailored to meet needs. However, the Association did not have a comprehensive system to identify all residents who had support needs. The Association had a dedicated officer dealing with a specific patch of tenancies receiving support and older persons' accommodation. The Association's staff relied on knowing that residents within this particular officer's patch had support needs and on good local knowledge to identify the particular residents who had support needs. There was no systematic flagging on the IT system of residents with support needs, although the Association had plans to implement a red flagging system for potentially dangerous residents.
- 120. The Association was not providing information and advice on services in formats that met the needs of all people with support needs. For example, no minicom and hearing loop was provided, although Braille was available on request.
- 121. For particular support projects, the Association granted tenancies which were appropriate to the particular project. For example, probationary tenancies were used for tenants in receipt of support and in some projects, such as the Dispersed Foyer and a Barnardo's Floating Support Schemes, assured shorthold tenancies were used. Licences were in use in certain homeless projects with Wallich Clifford. In circumstances where possession was being sought, the Association engaged with relevant support providers to ensure that appropriate advice and support was given.

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122. Whilst there were no specific provisions within the Tenant Compact regarding the engagement of residents with support needs, the Association was working with the Disability Action Group, which was intended for people with a disability and their carers and parents. With the Association's support, the Group had recently received Tenant Empowerment Grant funding.

Recommendation
<i>Housing for people with support needs</i>
R14 Develop a robust system to ensure that vulnerable residents are identified.

## **The Association's approach to securing continuous improvement was raising standards in service delivery**

**The Association had carried out a wide range of continuous improvement activity but recognised that it needed to further improve its arrangements for performance management and continuous improvement and was working to achieve that**

123. The Association was in the first year of a new approach to performance management and continuous improvement. Central to this new approach was its Operational Plan, which sought to incorporate all key corporate actions into a single document covering corporate plan, strategic and operational objectives, Best Value Reviews, risk assessments, Internal Audit recommendations and other important corporate action plans such as the Race Equality Action Plan.
124. The Association's strategic direction was captured in its Corporate Plan 2005-2008, which was to be reviewed annually and included a clear mission statement. From this, the Association had developed five key objectives which formed the basis of a range of strategic and operational priorities for 2005/2006. Through the annual staff appraisal process, staff members agreed individual targets and objectives linked to strategic priorities. Progress towards delivery of the strategic objectives within the Operational Plan was being reviewed on a quarterly basis by the Board and monthly by the Directors' and Management Teams.
125. The links between strategic, operational and individual targets could have been clearer. In addition, further work was required to fully align reporting and monitoring with the content of the Operational Plan and to ensure that the objectives within the Operational Plan are SMART – specific, measurable, achievable, relevant and timebound.

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126. Whilst there were examples where evaluation had been carried out, the Association did not routinely evaluate the outcomes of its work. For example, there had been no formal evaluation of the outcomes of community development, neighbourhood renewal and regeneration initiatives to ensure lessons were learned and that the initiatives were effectively delivering planned outcomes. Also, there had been no evaluation of the effectiveness of the Association's debt prevention services or of new approaches to mitigating debt, such as the intensive new tenancy induction work done on the Moorlands Road development. In addition, the Association produced very limited management information to allow it to proactively manage its maintenance services.
127. Much of the Association's continuous improvement activity had occurred outside its Best Value arrangements. For this reason, the Association was developing its Operational Plan as the central element of planning its continuous improvement processes, with the aim of ensuring that all of its continuous improvement activity was planned and managed within one improvement plan. This work had not been completed at the time of the inspection, and the Association was working between two different systems in relation to planning its continuous improvement work. The Association had started work on its second Operational Plan with which it intended to fully realise its new approach to continuous improvement.
128. The Association acknowledged that the Best Value element of its approach to continuous improvement had had only a limited impact. The Association was continuing to work to complete reviews within its Best Value Performance Plan. Staff and tenants had input into the priorities within that plan and tenants had been kept up to date on progress through an annual Best Value Review, the Annual Report, the Corporate Plan and the CHAT newsletter. At the time of the inspection, four reviews had been completed and nine others were almost complete. A further six reviews were programmed to begin before the end of March 2006. As part of the process of developing its Operational Plan, the Association was reviewing its Best Value Review programme to ensure that it was achievable. Whilst the Association had a comprehensive review methodology, this had been used as a list of options to be considered for individual reviews, rather than as a template for each review. The Association was planning an early review of the methodology.
129. Tenants had been involved in reviews through a variety of mechanisms. The Association had recently set up a sub-group of the Tenants' Representative Council to facilitate tenant involvement in continuous improvement.

### **The Association could demonstrate evidence of service improvement in a range of service areas**

130. Whilst outcomes from the Association's Best Value processes had been limited, the Association had carried out a wide range of continuous improvement activity based on reviews which followed the 4Cs of Best Value, ie Challenge, Consult, Compete, Compare. Examples which led to service improvement included induction of new tenants, anti-social behaviour, gas servicing, review of allocations approach, Cardiff Accessible Homes, Cardiff Young Builders, information for tenants, and the approach to recovery of former tenants' arrears.

131. Performance levels were generally improving. Void performance had improved in relation to vacant properties, longer term voids and void rent loss (although average re-let times had deteriorated). Rent arrears performance had improved in relation to former tenant arrears and the proportion of tenancies in arrears. The cost of providing the housing management services had also reduced.
132. During the course of the inspection, residents expressed positive views of all service areas.

### **The Association recognised the need to develop more robust plans for further improvement**

133. The Association was developing its Operational Plan to act as its Improvement Plan. The Association recognised that to be fully effective, the Operational Plan needs to include SMART objectives and targets, resourcing requirements, and must be robustly managed.
134. Improvement plans resulting from the Association's Best Value processes were limited and were not SMART. These plans were to be incorporated within the Operational Plan.

### **The Association had the capacity to deliver improvements**

135. The Association was able to demonstrate a range of successfully managed and implemented improvement processes, although its track record in delivering improvements through Best Value processes was limited.
136. Whilst the Association had the capacity to deliver improvements, it needed to be realistic about the range and scope of improvement activity which it could tackle effectively. The Association had begun work on its second Operational Plan, was able to provide evidence of strict prioritisation of improvement objectives, and recognised the need to ensure that reviews were adequately resourced and robustly managed.
137. The Association also recognised the need to improve the quality of its management information and was working to achieve that, for example in relation to its maintenance service.

<b>Recommendations</b>	
<b><i>Continuous improvement</i></b>	
R15	Further develop Operational Plan approach to include: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• clear alignment with reporting and monitoring arrangements;</li> <li>• SMART objectives; and</li> <li>• clear arrangements for, and resourcing of, continuous improvement activity.</li> </ul>
R16	Ensure that the work of the Association is routinely evaluated.

## Appendix 1

## Summary of relevant Welsh Assembly Government Regulatory Code expectations

Aspect	Summary of Regulatory Code expectations
Relationship to residents	<p>Encourage resident involvement. (Regulatory Code 2.2.4)</p> <p>Provide readily accessible, clear and accurate information and advice for residents. (Regulatory Code 2.2.1)</p> <p>Be answerable to residents for the quality of services provided. (Regulatory Code 2.2.2)</p> <p>Ask for, listen to, and take account of the views of residents. (Regulatory Code 2.2.3)</p>
Equal opportunities	<p>Actively promote respect for diversity and equality of opportunity, work towards the elimination of discrimination in all their activities, and promote good relations between people of different racial groups. (Regulatory Code 2.3.1)</p> <p>Treat the Welsh and English languages on the basis of equality. (Regulatory Code 2.3.2)</p>
Providing housing	<p>Work in partnership with local authorities and other agencies to identify and provide for the housing-related needs of the area.</p> <p>Have effective Community Housing Agreements with relevant authorities, wherever possible.</p> <p>Participate in community development or neighbourhood renewal and regeneration initiatives. (Regulatory Code 1.1.1)</p>
Rents	<p>Keep rent arrears to a minimum through the use of effective debt prevention, control and recovery mechanisms. (Regulatory Code 1.2.2)</p>
Letting housing	<p>Ensure that, as far as possible, people in housing need are aware of and have good access to the Association's housing. (Regulatory Code 1.3.1)</p> <p>Work in partnership with relevant local authorities on the allocation of housing. (Regulatory Code 1.3.2)</p> <p>Ensure that those housed are fairly selected, and should seek to achieve a balance in housing allocation. (Regulatory Code 1.3.3)</p> <p>Let properties quickly and efficiently. (Regulatory Code 1.3.4)</p>
Managing housing	<p>Ensure that residents are offered the most secure form of occupancy compatible with the purpose of the housing and the sustainability of the community. (Regulatory Code 1.4.1)</p> <p>Help to safeguard the quality of life of residents and neighbours. (Regulatory Code 1.4.2)</p>
Maintaining housing	<p>Ensure that homes are let in good condition. (See letting housing). (Regulatory Code 1.5.1)</p> <p>Maintain homes in good condition by ensuring that cyclical maintenance and responsive repairs are carried out effectively. (Regulatory Code 1.5.2)</p> <p>Identify, plan for, and carry out the maintenance and improvements necessary to meet the Welsh Housing Quality Standard (WHQS) by 2012. (Regulatory Code 1.5.3)</p>

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<b>Aspect</b>	<b>Summary of Regulatory Code expectations</b>
Housing for people with support needs	Make housing available for people who have support needs and ensure they have access to appropriate services. (Regulatory Code 1.6.1) Apply all key expectations equitably to customers who require support, tailoring service delivery to meet their specific needs. (Regulatory Code 1.6.2)

## Appendix 2

## The two questions and terminology applied

### Does the Association deliver good quality services?

Conclusion	Description
Excellent	The Association demonstrates all the positive characteristics of a 'good' association. Over and above that, performance is of a very high standard, strongly influenced by best practice in the sector.
Good	The Association demonstrates a strong commitment to, and effective delivery of, high standard services, given context and resources.
Satisfactory	Performance generally meets the standard you would expect of an association working in that context with those resources. Any failures to comply with regulatory guidance are minor.
Scope for considerable improvement	Although performance does not breach Regulatory Code, the Association's performance is unimpressive compared with peer group. Performance may not comply in all respects with regulatory guidance.
Fails to comply with the Regulatory Code	Performance fails to achieve outcomes specified in the Regulatory Code.

### Does the Association secure continuous improvement in services?

Conclusion	Description
Demonstrates strong corporate and strategic capabilities	The Association is working to be a 'learning organisation'. It demonstrates all the positive characteristics of an association which is raising standards in service delivery. In addition, there is a systematic programme of cross-cutting reviews which are not only delivering service improvements but are also informed by the Association's high level strategic goals, with clear monitoring and measurement against these goals.
Is raising standards in service delivery	The Association uses formal processes, participation and consultation, training in basic continuous improvement, reward and recognition systems, within a range of service areas. Measurable improvements have happened as a result. However, any cross-functional reviews and resulting improvements have been ad hoc rather than a result of a structured programme of such reviews.
Shows weaknesses in processes and performance	While some service improvements are evident, these result from one-off initiatives (such as a new product or process, a training initiative), or an initiative by a particular individual or team, rather than from a structured ongoing programme of reviews. Consultation with service users and their involvement in change is weak. The Association lacks challenging targets for performance improvement and cannot demonstrate a convincing track record.
Fails to demonstrate capability	The Association's approach to changes is reactive and unstructured. Improvements (if any) arise from tackling manifest problems, ad hoc suggestions, etc, rather than the systematic approach outlined by Assembly Government guidance on Best Value.

## Appendix 3

## Summary of inspection recommendations

<b><i>Relationship with residents</i></b>	
R1	Improve links between resident involvement and community development activities to ensure joint working to achieve maximum opportunities to engage with community members.
R2	Make it easier for residents to access and make use of the Association's service standards and customer pledge.
<b><i>Equal opportunities</i></b>	
R3	Provide information and advice in an appropriate range of formats and languages and ensure that all residents have the same opportunities to express their views through Association surveys.
R4	Set, monitor and report on an appropriate range of equalities targets for housing services.
R5	Progress the Association's draft Welsh Language Scheme in the context of the work being undertaken by the Welsh Federation of Housing Associations and the Welsh Language Board.
<b><i>Rents</i></b>	
R6	Evaluate the impact and effectiveness of the Association's debt prevention services and ensure that existing tenants are kept aware of the availability of services.
<b><i>Letting housing</i></b>	
R7	Work with the Local Authority to improve nominations performance.
R8	Ensure that agreed lettings targets are applied to re-lets within schemes subject to local lettings initiatives.
<b><i>Managing housing</i></b>	
R9	Evaluate the impact in use of probationary tenancies.
R10	Ensure that residents are made aware of the successes of the Association's approach to anti-social behaviour.
R11	Ensure that the out of hours service is appropriately monitored and evaluated.
R12	Develop improved management information to better inform management of the maintenance service.
R13	Ensure that the September 2006 target date is met for completion of surveying, planning and programming of works to meet WHQS by 2012.
<b><i>Housing for people with support needs</i></b>	
R14	Develop a robust system to ensure that vulnerable residents are identified.

**Continuous improvement**

R15 Further develop Operational Plan approach to include:

- clear alignment with reporting and monitoring arrangements;
- SMART objectives; and
- clear arrangements for, and resourcing of, continuous improvement activity.

R16 Ensure that the work of the Association is routinely evaluated.





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