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Author: Steve Barry

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

1. The Welsh Assembly Government (the Assembly Government) has appointed the Wales Audit Office to carry out inspections of housing associations in Wales, under Section 96c of the Government of Wales Act 1998. Inspections 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 Cynon Tâf Housing Association (the Association) was undertaken in September/October 2006. The inspection team comprised Steve Barry, Ciaran Johnson and Justine Morgan. 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 a range of 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

The Association was providing an excellent service in one service area, good services in six service areas and a satisfactory service in one area

4. The relationship with residents was excellent; equal opportunities, providing, managing, letting and maintaining housing, and services for people with support needs were good; and the rents service was satisfactory.

The Association was demonstrating strong corporate and strategic capabilities

5. The Association had a clear strategic direction and ensured that strategic objectives were met. A performance management framework was in place that evaluated a wide range of performance information and ensured the work of teams contributed to achievement of operational aims. A range of methods were being used to secure continuous improvement, resulting in improved outcomes for service users.
6. High levels of performance were being sustained for responsive repairs, and community development schemes had been introduced to encourage wider community engagement and sustainability of the communities in which the Association was operating. Strategies were in place for addressing lettings and rents issues.

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7. The Association's forward planning arrangements identified and took account of resource needs to ensure the capacity was in place to drive improvement.

The Association was demonstrating good practice in a number of service areas

Encouraging resident involvement

8. The Association provided a range of opportunities for residents to get involved and ensured new tenants received information about the options available. Tenants were empowered to influence the Association's agenda at Forum level and a pro-active review of all feedback, including formal complaints, was resulting in improvement of services.

Providing clear information about the full range of services

9. The Association produced a wide range of bi-lingual service information leaflets that were clear about the standards of service to be expected, enabling easy access to information by tenants. The provision of such information enabled tenants to reach an informed view when asked about the standard of service they had received.

Pathways to adapted housing

10. The Association, in partnership with the Local Authority, Rhondda Housing Association and Pontypridd and District Housing Association, had established a housing register specifically for people with a physical disability who were seeking to move to alternative accommodation. The project was originally supported by grant funding from the Welsh Assembly Government. It has identified the housing needs and preferences of clients, developed a database of existing adapted properties across all social landlords and developed a "matching" process to allocate adapted properties. Clients benefited from access to a wider range of premises and landlords have been able to let properties more efficiently.

This report makes recommendations to support the further development of the rents and lettings services

11. The detailed report includes recommendations for improvement of the rents and lettings services. These are brought together in Appendix 3.

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

12. This report and the Association's commentary on it will be available on the Wales Audit Office website (www.wao.gov.uk), which also includes reference to good practice found during this and other inspections.

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13. 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 setting out how it will respond to the inspection findings within eight weeks of publication. Because of the merger with Pontypridd and District Housing Association it is proposed to bring together inspection findings for both organisations and develop one response for the merged organisation.
 14. 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.

Cynon Tâf Housing Association is a long established Association providing housing services and support to communities in the Cynon Valley area of Rhondda Cynon Tâf County Borough Council

15. The Association was established in 1978 as a result of house condition surveys that had identified very poor housing conditions in the Cynon Valley. It is a Registered Social Landlord and an Industrial and Provident Society registered under charitable rules and, as at 31st March 2006, had 1,299 properties in management. The growth of the Association had been achieved initially through the rehabilitation of older terraced properties that had lacked basic amenities and, more recently, through the development of new build projects to meet the local authority's strategic priorities. Family accommodation accounts for 75 per cent of the stock; 20 per cent of the stock is for single persons and five per cent caters for older persons sheltered housing and supported housing units.
16. In 2003, the Association took responsibility for the line management of Care and Repair Rhondda Cynon Tâf, as a subsidiary of the Association. At the time of the inspection the Association was planning to merge with Pontypridd and District Housing Association.
17. The Association office was in the town centre of Aberdare, and all stock is located in the Cynon Valley.
18. The Chief Executive led a senior management team of six, and, as at 31st July, the Association had 31 permanent staff, including one temporary member of staff and two handypersons.
19. The Board of Management had 15 places, 11 of which were filled at the time of the inspection. Four of the five places reserved for tenants were filled. The Association planned to fill the vacant places with Board members from Pontypridd and District Housing Association following the merger. The Board met monthly and an audit committee met quarterly.
20. The Association was awarded the Charter Mark in 2001, which was renewed in 2005 for excellence in customer service. It gained Investors in People status in 2003 and 2004, and was accredited to level 2 of the Green Dragon Environmental Management Standard.

The Association had “excellent” arrangements in place for its relationship with residents

The Association actively encouraged resident involvement, offering an extensive range of opportunities for getting involved

21. The rules of the Association provided for up to one third of board members being tenants.
22. The ways in which the Association encouraged resident involvement were set out in a Tenant Participation Compact, which was subject to consultation with the Tenant Forum, and an updated version of the Compact was published in April 2006. The ways in which tenants could get involved were also set out briefly in a leaflet "Taking Part", which was provided to all new tenants.
23. The Compact recognised the right of all tenants to get involved, including the right to :
 - receive information about what the Association does;
 - be consulted on proposed changes to policies and procedures;
 - have satisfaction with service delivery monitored and remedial steps taken where necessary; and
 - get involved and have a say in how the Association works.
24. The inspection team identified specific examples of these rights being put into practice by the Association. These ranged from formal consultation with the Tenants Forum about policy issues such as dealing with Anti Social Behaviour, to the use of feedback from individual tenants to identify failures in the performance of a particular operative employed by a contractor.
25. The purpose of the Tenants' Forum was to ensure that the views of tenants were put forward and their position on any issue properly recognised and discussed by the Association. All tenants were encouraged to attend Forum meetings, which were held six times a year, usually at the Association's offices, the dates and times being circulated with 'Through the Keyhole' (the Tenant Newsletter) and the Tenant Information Calendar. The Chair and Chief Executive of the Association attended the second, fourth and sixth meeting each year.
26. The Forum was established in 1993 as a fully constituted Tenants' Association. The Forum was funded by the Association, based on an annual budget discussed with Forum members. The budget included provision for training, conference attendance and expenses, as well as general running costs. Support was dependent on membership of the Forum being open to all Association tenants, being restricted to that group only, and to there being a democratic constitution. The Forum was fully independent of the Association.
27. The Forum was consulted on policy and proposed changes, and included the opportunity to comment on the Corporate Plan and options being considered for working with Pontypridd and District Housing Association.

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28. The Association's framework for involvement also recognised local committees of tenants that worked with and through the Tenants' Forum. In practice no local committees had been formed, although the Association was working with two Communities First Groups to develop residents associations that included its own tenants as well as other residents in particular communities. At the time of the inspection discussions were in progress about ways in which the Association might provide funding support in recognition that the majority of its tenants lived in mixed tenure communities. As such, a residents association was likely to be the most effective forum for providing opportunities to meet the Association's Compact objectives.
 29. In order to improve consultation in a particular locality the Forum had been successful in obtaining Tenant Empowerment Grant funding from the Welsh Assembly Government. The Forum had worked in partnership with the Tenant Participation and Advisory Service (TPAS) Cymru to consult local tenants about the key issues that concerned them and develop an action plan in response. The report and action plan were published in July 2006 and were being implemented at the time of the inspection.
 30. Responsibility for development of the strategic approach to tenant involvement was designated to the Performance Manager who was supported by the Performance Officer. The Performance Officer was providing support to the Tenant Forum and developing the approach to involving Key Tenants – people willing to be consulted on specific policy or service issues - and Mystery Customers – people willing to participate in regular review of their experience of using Association services. Generic Housing Officers provided new tenants with information about how they could get involved when offering them a tenancy. The Performance Officer aimed to visit all new tenants six months after the commencement of their tenancy, and asked for feedback about services received and explained options for future involvement. The Association was monitoring the level of successful contact and, in the period 1 April 2005 to 31 March 2006, 71 per cent of new tenants had been contacted. Those tenants that may not wish to get involved in the Forum or local committees were provided further options of becoming "Key Tenants" or "Mystery Customers".
 31. At the time of the inspection the Association had registered 97 people as "key tenants" who usually got involved in the context of a formal service review, and had a register of 72 people who were prepared to act as "mystery customers". These tenants were known only to the Performance Manager and Performance Officer and were being contacted by the Performance Officer on a six monthly basis and asked in a structured interview about the services they had received.

Good practice – Encouraging resident involvement

The Association provided a range of opportunities for residents to get involved and ensured new tenants received information about the options available.

Arrangements enabled tenants to select an option for getting involved that suited them and the Association had tailored its approach to accommodate feedback from tenants – for example changing a process that involved “mystery customers” completing feedback forms and substituting this with a personal visit to obtain feedback information.

Tenants were empowered to influence the Association agenda at Forum level and a proactive review of all feedback including, formal complaints, was resulting in improvement of services.

The Association was using a range of methods to obtain the views of residents and taking positive action in response

32. Key tenants had participated in a focus group set up to review the Association’s lettings procedures. New tenants were provided the opportunity to give their views about their experiences of the lettings procedure and issues that were identified, such as the complexity of the application form and the need for more information for applicants, had been taken forward following the review.
33. The Association adapted its methods for obtaining tenants’ views as a result of feedback from the people it was trying to engage. For example, mystery customers had originally been requested to complete and return forms about their experiences of using services. However, the Association found that forms were often not returned for each occasion that a person had used a service, and therefore replaced the forms with a six monthly personal visit at which the use of services by tenants and their views were sought.
34. Responses from mystery customers were being analysed and remedial action taken. For example, one respondent had identified the standard of a completed repair as “very poor”. The Association compared this with information gathered in the “minor complaints” system and supported a wider analysis that identified weaknesses in the performance of a particular operative, resulting in the contractor taking remedial action. The results of feedback from mystery customers were also presented to the Tenants’ Forum.
35. The Association undertook a “STATUS” standardised tenant satisfaction survey in 2005, achieving a 51 per cent response rate. Results indicated that 92 per cent of tenants were satisfied with the Association as a landlord, 93 per cent felt that the Association kept them well informed and 85 per cent were satisfied with opportunities for participation.
36. The Association also asked tenants a “question of the quarter”. The most recent question prior to the inspection asked for tenants’ views about the range of options available for rent payment, with 94 per cent of respondents indicating they felt the options available were either excellent or good. The results were published in the Autumn 2006 newsletter. The Association invited tenants to suggest their own “question of the quarter”.
37. The Association provided all staff with a compliments and complaints notebook so that officers could note any issues raised by tenants when they met them during the course of their duties. These were collated and recorded as “minor

complaints" and analysis was undertaken to address any identifiable trends in service failure.

The Association provided a comprehensive range of plain language, bi lingual service information leaflets from an easily accessible town centre office

- 38. The Association had produced a series of short leaflets explaining its policies and procedures across a range of service areas, including a general "Our Service Promise" that set out what tenants should expect when contacting the Association and when staff or contractors contact them. There were more specific leaflets for particular services or issues, such as "Your New Home", which set out what to expect when offered a property. All service information leaflets were available in Welsh or English.
- 39. More detailed information was available within the Tenants Handbook and, for specific policies, on request.
- 40. Tenants gave positive feedback about the provision to them of the Tenants' Information and Calendar 2006, which incorporated service specific information and telephone contact numbers within a calendar.
- 41. A quarterly Newsletter "Through the Keyhole" provided information about the outcome of surveys, the development of specific policies and community based activities.
- 42. Whilst the Association encouraged the involvement of tenants in the production of information and in contributing to the newsletters, tenant input had been limited in practice.

Good practice – Clear information about services
The Association produced a wide range of service information that was readily accessible to tenants and clear about the standards of service to be expected. The provision of such information enabled tenants to reach an informed view when asked about the standard of service they had received.

The Association adopted a positive approach to dealing with service user complaints, the formal complaints procedure operated effectively, and tenants were being provided with information to enable them to evaluate the performance of the Association in comparison with other similar organisations

- 43. The Association records "formal complaints", which are governed by the complaints procedure and "minor complaints". However, there is no clear definition to distinguish the two. In practice we found that, in the absence of a complainant requesting the complaint be registered as "formal", officers were using their discretion when registering complaints.
- 44. The Association provided a leaflet "Making a Complaint", which advised service users to complain whenever they were "not happy with something that Cynon Tâf has done or failed to do". The leaflet explained the procedure adopted by the Association and how a complaint may be pursued if the complainant remained

dissatisfied, including direct contact with the Public Services Ombudsman for Wales.

45. The Management Team actively reviewed all complaints, whether being dealt with as “formal” or “minor”, as a means of tracking progress and identifying whether trends could be identified that required a new or revised policy. The action taken in relation to complaints was summarised on a quarterly basis and reported to tenants.
46. We reviewed the “formal” and “minor” complaints systems by comparing action against the stated policy, and found that complainants were being kept informed of the progress of their complaint. Although there were some cases that were not resolved within the 10 working day target, this was usually because they involved the need to secure information from third parties. In two instances where complaints were upheld, contractors were required to ensure particular operatives would not be engaged in providing services to the Association’s properties in the future.
47. The Association provided comparative performance information to tenants in its Annual Report, setting out its own performance in comparison with general performance across Wales and with three other local housing associations.

The Association had “good” arrangements in place to ensure equal opportunities

The Association was actively promoting respect for diversity and equality of opportunity, and was particularly effective at tailoring accommodation and providing opportunities for people with disabilities and disadvantaged groups

48. .A relatively high proportion (25 per cent) of the Association’s new developments were of properties designed to meet the needs of individuals or households with disabilities, with five per cent of total stock being built or adapted for people with disabilities. The Association actively encouraged engagement of residents who might otherwise be disadvantaged by ensuring meetings were held in accessible locations, the material provided accounted for individual needs (such as large print) and meetings were conducted in a way to ensure inclusion (for example, accommodating the needs of the visually impaired by use of discussion rather than visual aids).
49. The 2001 Census indicated a Black and Minority Ethnic (BME) population of 1.2 per cent in the Rhondda Cynon Tâf area. The Association had an Equal Opportunities Policy and Harassment Policies covering general harassment and BME specific harassment. Training had been provided to staff and Board members on BME and diversity issues. Some operational staff covering the reception area had been trained to communicate in British Sign Language in response to the needs of some service users. The tenancy agreement included a clause covering harassment and threatening behaviour on grounds of race, colour, ethnic origin, nationality, age, sexuality, religion or disability - including writing threatening, abusive or insulting graffiti.

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50. The Association was a partner in the delivery of the Rhondda Cynon Tâf BME Strategy and had produced a Race Equality Plan for 2004-2007, which was accompanied by an Action Plan to support the delivery of specific tasks. Progress against the Action Plan was being reported to the Board. Key tasks completed in the early years of the Plan included the establishment of an infrastructure to support monitoring, and provision of training to Board members, staff and contractors.
 51. Information about the ethnic origin of housing applicants was collected by the Local Authority, which managed the Common Housing Register. The Association and other partners had been working towards improving the way in which information about ethnic origin was collected during the application process to ensure consistency in information capture.
 52. The Association's Equal Opportunities Policy stated that "appropriate targets would be set wherever practicable". However, no specific target had been set for allocations based upon the BME population of the area because of the very low percentage. The Association routinely reviewed at officer and Board level the number of applicants from, and the number of allocations made to, people from BME groups. No people of BME origin were re-housed in 2005-06, but information about the origin of the 97 applicants indicated one was of "black/other" origin and one was of Chinese origin.
 53. The Association also monitored the ethnicity of job applicants, but there had been only two job vacancies in the two years prior to inspection. The local Job Centre was utilised when advertising vacancies, and records indicated no applicants were of BME origin or had disabilities.
 54. The Association had worked in partnership with Hafal, an organisation that works with people recovering from severe mental illness, to provide work opportunities in the decoration of empty properties prior to re-letting. At the time of the inspection, the Association was in discussion with Hafal about continuing the arrangement.

The Association had a Welsh Language Scheme that was responsive to local needs and was providing a comprehensive range of service information in Welsh

55. The 2001 Census data identified that 79 per cent of respondents living within the Association's area of operations had no knowledge of the Welsh language, with only 0.8 per cent describing it as the main language used in the home. The Association's comprehensive survey of tenants in 2005 indicated that one per cent of respondents were Welsh speakers.
56. The Association had a comprehensive range of leaflets providing information about all its services. These were all published in both Welsh and English.

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57. The Association had a Welsh Language Scheme dated June 2005, which stated that the Association would respond to requests in Welsh, adopting the same targets as applied to dealing with other enquiries. We asked to discuss a matter in Welsh and the Association was able to respond in accordance with its policy. One member of the Association's staff was able to converse in Welsh, the Association operated a bi-lingual website and a translation service was used to provide, on request, documents in Welsh.
58. The Scheme stated that performance in delivering the Scheme would be monitored and an annual report submitted to the Board. However, at the time of the inspection the Association had not reviewed the delivery of the Scheme in anticipation of potential changes arising following a proposed merger with an Association that employs four Welsh speakers.

The Association had a “good” approach to providing housing

The Association was working effectively in partnership with Rhondda Cynon Tâf County Borough Council and other agencies to identify and provide for the housing-related needs of the area

59. The Association had developed effective partnership working and was helping to address specific needs with the local authority, for example, by involvement in the Pathways to Adapted Housing project, which enabled people with physical disabilities to access accommodation in a more systematic and tailored way. There were a number of families that the Association had assisted with re-housing, either through building specifically adapted properties or by carrying out adaptations to existing properties.
60. The Local Authority and partners were able to cite examples and provide an evaluation of the Association's contribution to help deliver strategic priorities, such as the Home-step Strategy and assistance with low cost homeownership; the homelessness strategy and links to the Best Value Review of lettings and the Common Housing Register.
61. A Community Housing Agreement with the Local Authority had been in place for some years, although strategic relationships and partnership delivery were happening both within and outside of the Agreement framework. There were clear examples of outcomes to illustrate effective strategic partnership working. These included contributions to the development of the Housing Strategy and Operational Plan and the Supporting People Operational Plan, and support to the Local Authority's Area Regeneration Partnerships.

Good Practice – Pathways to Adapted Housing:

The project has developed a Housing Register specifically for people with disabilities seeking to move to alternative accommodation. Grant funding from the Welsh Assembly Government enabled the establishment of a partnership of housing, social care, health and voluntary agencies in the county borough. The partnership has identified the housing needs and preferences of clients, developed a database of existing adapted properties across all social landlords and developed a “matching” process to allocate adapted properties.

The outcome for clients is an improvement in the options available to remedy unsuitable accommodation. For landlords improvement in letting times was being achieved and existing adapted properties are being utilised 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 need for people with physical disabilities to help inform provision at a strategic level.

The Association was participating in community development, neighbourhood renewal and regeneration initiatives that were helping to sustain and support communities

- 62.** The Association had made a strategic commitment to support the local authority Area Regeneration Partnerships and Communities First activity, and each forum was supported by a senior officer of the Association. There were clear outcomes and benefits of the Association’s support and involvement such as professional advice, support and financial resources to help sustain specific partnerships; new business opportunities at Ynysybwl and links with the development consortium partner, DEVCO. The Association was also providing support for a ‘Timebroker’, who was actively engaged in facilitating projects in communities that were tailored to meet specific local needs.
- 63.** The Association was making connections between local authority sponsored neighbourhood renewal schemes and social housing grant opportunities to improve homes. Neighbourhood renewal activity led by the Local Authority in Penrhiwceiber and Miskin, was enabling the Association to address the external fabric and environment of its more difficult to let older terrace properties. This was being complemented by support within the Social Housing Grant programme to address internal improvements such as re-wiring, new windows and new kitchens, which were required for older, terraced properties.

The Association rents service was “satisfactory”

The Association had evaluated its arrangements for debt prevention and identified a need to extend the range of advice services available

64. To assess whether the Association had an effective debt prevention service we looked for a service that ensured tenants were informed about how they could mitigate the risk of debt occurring (for example by making debt advice information leaflets available to all), that sign posted to specialist agencies and promoted income maximisation. The Association was not providing this complete range of services, although at the start of a tenancy staff were assisting with Housing Benefit form completions, and were obtaining contact details from tenants to enable easy contact if arrears started to accrue on individual rent accounts. Staff worked effectively to tackle Housing Benefit issues once they had arisen on rent accounts by using the services of the Local Authority Welfare Benefits Advisor. Staff also assisted tenants in arrears to complete housing benefit application forms, and would advocate on behalf of tenants with the Local Authority Housing Benefit department.
65. The findings of the Association’s own audit of eviction process against procedure in June/July 2006 indicated no evidence of debt advice being recorded on its computer QL data base. The Association subsequently put measures in place to ensure staff ‘signpost’ to appropriate agencies for specialist advice and record action on the QL database. As a result, the rent collection policy was reviewed in July 2006 and the Association had updated its ‘*signposting policy*’, Although the specialist debt/money advice organisations’ contact details were still not listed on leaflets to tenants, they were referred to in arrears letters.
66. The Association had no service level agreement with Shelter or the Citizens Advice Bureau for specialist debt advice, although tenants were able to access the services of Shelter at any time. The Association facilitated a meeting once a case had reached the stage of county court action.
67. The Association had been involved with supporting and developing the local credit union, Dragon Savers. The credit union was actively promoted to all new tenants and the Association regularly raised awareness of its services, as a source of affordable borrowing and saving, through the tenants’ newsletter.
68. The Association was aware that it operated in communities of high financial deprivation and benefit dependency, and that it had tenants who were often in short term employment. Although the Association checked progress with housing benefit claims, when applicable, at post-tenancy acceptance visits (approximately six weeks after acceptance of a tenancy), file checks indicated little evidence of debt prevention and income maximisation advice to ensure that arrears did not occur in the first instance. Other than mitigating the risk of debt arising at the start of tenancy by helping to complete housing benefit forms, the focus of activity was in relation to provision of advice and recovery of debt once it had arisen.

The Association had effective control and recovery arrangements that were sustaining performance

69. Thirty per cent of tenants paid rent directly to the Association. A limited range of payment options were available, including PayPoint and standing order. Having appraised payment options, the Association intended to introduce Direct Debit payment facilities and was considering the use of debit card payments over the phone and on-line over the internet. It had decided not to offer credit card payment facilities to avoid the potential for debt arising from interest charges for credit.
70. The Association had revised its rent collection policy and file checks indicated that new procedures were being followed. A range of methods had been adopted for contacting tenants in arrears such as letter, text, e mail and telephone, but with the main focus being on personal contact.
71. The Association had a comprehensive understanding of its performance and where problems were arising. A fall in the number of tenants in receipt of housing benefit appeared to be having an impact upon the level of arrears outstanding, with performance being almost static over a three year period (Exhibit 1).

Exhibit 1: Rents performance indicators

Figures have remained almost static

Indicator	2003-04	2004-05	2005-06
General Needs and Sheltered - Rent due from current tenants but unpaid as a percentage of rent roll (net of unpaid housing benefit).	3.2%	3%	3.1%
Number of tenants in arrears	39%	38%	38%
Rent collected as a percentage of total rent collectable	98.7%	98.6%	97%

Sources: *Performance Indicators for Registered Social Landlords in Wales 2004-05 National Assembly for Wales; Cynon Tâf Performance Indicators report*

72. The Association aimed to sustain tenancies and keep people in their homes. This approach had resulted in a reduction of evictions from 18 in 2002-03 to 12 in 2005-06. Figures for the first two quarters of 2006-07 showed eviction on grounds of rent arrears to have reduced to two. The level of evictions, however, is still having an impact on the former tenant arrears figures and write-off levels at 1.8 per cent and 2.4 per cent respectively.

Recommendation	
R1	Develop access to debt prevention and income maximisation advisory services and raise awareness of its availability to all tenants.

The Association had a “good” lettings service

The Association was letting general needs properties quickly and efficiently but low demand in one sheltered scheme was impacting upon average re-let times

73. The Association’s lettings standard was provided to all new tenants in its “Your New Home” leaflet. Empty properties viewed by the inspection team that were ready for letting met the lettings standard, and feedback from new tenants was positive about their experience.
74. The re-let process was efficient and involved a single person contact for all lettings. The lettings process was customer focussed, and included accompanied viewings, with follow up visits to new tenants by Housing Officers six weeks after the commencement of a tenancy to ensure the resolution of any outstanding issues.
75. The impact of the difficulty in letting a small number of long term empty sheltered housing units for older people was skewing performance figures. The overall average time taken to re-let properties and the percentage of properties let within one week was not improving, although the Association was able to distinguish between the average time taken to let general needs properties (7 days for 2005-06) from the average time taken to let sheltered housing (39 days in 2005-06).
76. The Association recognised it had low demand in one of its sheltered housing schemes and had introduced a range of initiatives to raise the profile of the scheme in the local community.
77. There was effective monitoring of the letting process once properties were ready to be let, but the length of time when properties were empty due to maintenance work over £500 was not being actively monitored at management level to determine the effectiveness of the repairs process. The Association implemented a recording system to improve its monitoring when this shortcoming was highlighted during the inspection.
78. One hundred and eighty seven lettings took place during 2005-06, representing 14 per cent of the stock. Such a high turnover of properties has an impact on the staff resources dedicated to managing empty homes, maintenance costs and performance in relation to re-let times. For three years prior to the inspection, the Association had been focusing on re-let quality, rather than speed of re-letting and to reduce the overall number of properties becoming vacant by supporting tenants to sustain their tenancies.

The Association ensured that people in housing need were aware of and had good access to its housing

79. The Association made people aware of its accommodation and availability via the Rhondda Cynon Taf Common Housing Register. There were a range of options for people in housing need to access the Association’s housing – by telephone, in person and electronically.

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80. The Association further promoted awareness of itself; its services and the availability of its accommodation in the Big Issue, a weekly homeless magazine sold by homeless people. It was a member of “Move-UK” and “Homes Outside Cardiff” to facilitate mobility opportunities and let low demand properties, although there had been only a limited take up to date in re-housing people.
 81. Applicants for accommodation with the Association completed a common housing application form that was available in large print & audio, but not in any language other than English. Although the Association could provide a bilingual copy of the application form from their website, the common housing application form did not identify the availability of this facility. The Association had carried out an analysis of housing applicant satisfaction with the common housing application form, including views about how easy the form was to use. This identified a fall in satisfaction amongst applicants and new tenants, and the information was being used to inform the joint Best Value Review on lettings that it was leading in partnership with three other local housing associations that were also members of the common register. New tenants told the inspection team that they found no problem with the application forms because Association officers offered assistance in completing the forms.
 82. The Association operated an open waiting list. Applicants were provided a “Need a Home” leaflet that explained the demand for properties. The leaflet was available in Welsh or English.
 83. The application of the Common Housing Register Suspensions policy was in the process of being developed and, at the time of the inspection, implementation of the policy was not fully compliant with Assembly guidelines. This was because there were no formal mechanisms for regular review and reporting to the Board of applicants that were suspended from the Register. Limited information was available for suspended applicants detailing the right to review and the appeals process.

The Association had an effective partnership with Rhondda Cynon Tâf County Borough Council on the allocation of housing

84. The Association participated in the common housing register managed by the local authority, which, at the time of the inspection, had been in place for two years. Partners had identified a need to improve some aspects of the way applicants were dealt with. These included: providing assurance that all applicants were dealt with equally and fairly; analysing and monitoring the respective workloads of partners in receiving and processing housing applications; developing a framework to ensure that information was shared amongst partners; simplifying the application form for applicants seeking re-housing; and ensuring that the monitoring of black minority ethnic applicants was consistent across the scheme.
85. The Association was working in partnership with the local authority and other local housing associations on the Pathways to Adapted Housing and supported the local authority’s Move-on strategy. Early contact with relevant local authority staff meant that the needs of people with disabilities were incorporated into the design of the homes to which they were to be allocated.

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86. The Association was a member of the local authority MAPPA and had appropriate arrangements in place for dealing with confidential information associated with potentially high risk applicants.

The Association ensured that those housed were fairly selected and sought to achieve a balance in housing allocation

87. The Association's strategic focus was on the sustainability of tenancies and the communities in which it operates. This was reflected in its approach to allocating and managing tenancies. The Association's transfer policy gave preference to existing tenants of the Association who had a need to transfer to a more appropriate property. The resulting empty property was offered to an applicant from the common housing register, using the Association's points based assessment of needs. The Association had monitoring systems in place, which demonstrated a balance in the housing allocations achieved.

Recommendations	
Letting housing	
R2	Produce clear information for those who may be suspended from consideration for housing to explain the reason for suspension, the action they may need to take and arrangements for appeal against suspension decisions.

The Association had “good” arrangements in place for managing its housing

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

88. From October 2005 all new tenants were provided with an assured shorthold (starter) tenancy for a 12 month trial period. Tenants were provided with a copy of the Welsh Assembly Government's Guarantee for Housing Association Tenants. The Tenant Information pack provided to all new tenants sets out their rights and responsibilities and the standard of services provided.
89. The Association proposed to carry out an evaluation of the use of starter tenancies on the anniversary of its introduction, against agreed criteria for assessment and evaluation that had been set out in its starter tenancy policy.
90. The Association introduced starter tenancies as a result of tenant feedback, mainly as a tool for dealing with anti-social behaviour. The Association considered that the new arrangements had had no impact on the incidence of anti-social behaviour among new tenants because, at the time of the inspection, no tenants had lost their tenancy. However, the Association was considering taking action under the terms of the shorthold agreement (use of a section 21 notice) in one case.

The Association was providing a customer focused housing management service aimed at safeguarding quality of life

91. Observations on-site and feedback from tenants indicated that schemes were well maintained by staff and contractors. There was a systematic estate/scheme inspection timetable and an up-to-date estate maintenance policy. To help combat anti-social behaviour, the Association's staff were involved in partnership working with local police and attended meeting of the local PACT and Community Mediation Services. The Association offered additional services to vulnerable customers.
92. The anti-social behaviour service was comprehensive, and reflected the Association's role in the Living in Harmony project that had been developed in partnership with two other local housing associations. It also provided a guide to action and support available to people experiencing nuisance. The Association had revised its anti-social behaviour policy to reflect its experience in a case that had led to court action against a perpetrator and extend the range of potential action available through the possible use of Anti-Social Behaviour Orders, Anti-social behaviour Injunctions and victim support services.

The Association had "good" arrangements in place for maintaining its housing

The Association was providing a highly effective responsive repairs service that ensured high standards of workmanship and the completion of repairs on time

93. Repair requests were received by clerical assistants who had been trained to undertake an initial "diagnosis" of the request. Tenants we spoke to told us that it was easy to report repairs, that they were given clear information about what was to happen with their request, and that contractors responded promptly. The comprehensive survey of tenants undertaken in 2005 indicated that 90 per cent of respondents were happy with the way the Association dealt with repairs, with 96 per cent highly praising the attitude of workers and the speed of work.
94. Information for tenants about how to order repairs was included on the Tenants' Calendar, which tenants told us was a useful reference source. Where pre-inspection was required to assess the kind of repair needed, tenants told us that the inspector attended promptly.
95. Tenants were provided with written confirmation of the work ordered and the target completion date, informed of the contractor code of conduct, and provided with a return slip to enable them to give feedback about the quality of the service received.

The Association was ensuring almost all work was completed on time and has been sustaining this performance for a number of years (Exhibit 2).

Exhibit 2 Repairs performance against completion targets 2003-04 to 2005-06

The Association was sustaining an excellent level of performance

Indicator	2003-04 On time	2004-05 On time	2005-06* On time
Emergency (complete within 24 hours)	100%	100%	100%
Urgent (complete within 7 days)	100%	100%	99.6%
Non urgent (complete within 30 days)	99%	99%	99.6%

Source National Assembly for Wales Performance Indicators for Registered Social Landlords 2003-04 and 2004-05. Data for 2005-06 from Cynon Tâf Housing Association

96. We were able to test the data for 2005-06 and found it to be reliable. We also analysed those jobs where the Association had amended the target completion date in the two months prior to the inspection and found that such amendments were subject to managerial scrutiny and represented five per cent of total jobs completed in the period. Of this number, half were because access could not be gained.
97. The Association had set its own target completion times that were more challenging than the Welsh Assembly Government's expectations, by the inclusion of a "non urgent" category for completion within 15 days.
98. The Association worked with one contractor for general responsive repairs, employed two "Handypersons" who undertook general repair work and employed a specific contractor for gas servicing and the maintenance of appliances. The responsive repairs contract was awarded following a tendering exercise in February 2006. The Association considered that the success of its responsive repairs service was partly due to the main contractor carrying out work solely for the Association and the strong working relationships that had developed between tenants, staff and the contractor. The main contractor also managed the out of hours emergency service, which operated effectively when tested during the inspection.
99. The Association had set itself a target of 10 per cent for pre-inspection and aimed to post-inspect all completed jobs valued over £500 plus a further 10 per cent sample. Whilst the Association was monitoring performance against these targets, no timescale had been set for completion of pre-inspections. The Association aimed to pre-inspect "as promptly as possible" but, although feedback from tenants suggested prompt action was taken, there would be an advantage in the Association setting a completion target, so that it could review performance and be able to plan resources in the event of the absence of the one officer undertaking the work.
100. The Association utilised a "flagging" arrangement on the IT system and the knowledge of staff to identify potentially vulnerable tenants when repairs were reported. Although files held information about those tenants for whom specific arrangements needed to be made, not all the information was up to date.

Annual gas servicing was being managed effectively

- 101. The Association had undertaken a review of the effectiveness of its arrangements for managing gas servicing three months prior to the beginning of the inspection. It identified a need to improve management information and ensure effective communication between staff and contractors to secure access.
- 102. Tenants had been made aware of the need to ensure regular servicing of appliances in the Tenant Newsletter, and advice was also provided on a routine basis to all new tenants. In addition, in the event of a tenant making contact to report a repair, the repairs reporting system raised an alert to indicate that a service was outstanding.
- 103. By the time of the inspection, the management database had been further developed to allow prompt access to information about services outstanding and to enable prompt action to secure access. Policies had been revised and responsibilities for implementing action clarified.
- 104. At the time of the inspection, 96 per cent of services were up to date and action was being taken to secure access to premises to complete outstanding work. There were six properties where the previous service had been undertaken more than two years ago, although investigation by the Association had found that four had no gas supply.
- 105. The Association was reviewing feedback from tenants, and 98 per cent of respondents were satisfied with the work undertaken. Feedback from tenants also helped to identify poor performance, which the Association in partnership with the contractor was able to address.

An asset management strategy and stock condition information provided the basis for decision making and the planned and cyclical maintenance programmes

- 106. The Association brought together information about the range of activities intended to ensure adequate standards in its housing stock in an Asset Management Strategy, which was produced in July 2006. The Strategy supported the efficient maintenance of stock by including information about the demand for homes, reviewing the balance between planned and responsive work, and integrating the requirements for achieving the Welsh Housing Quality Standard (WHQS) with programmed works.
- 107. The Association was undertaking planned and cyclical maintenance based upon a stock condition survey that was kept up to date by a five year rolling programme of surveys. Stock condition data had been entered onto a new database in 2006 that enabled improved forecasting and projections.
- 108. The Association was a member of the DEVCO consortium which was in the early stages of assessing the potential for securing savings by means of purchasing agreements, in particular with kitchen suppliers and a paint manufacturer.
- 109. The Association was undertaking a programme of kitchen replacement and external re-painting but had not been providing tenants with a choice, for example of work tops or colour of paint. However, tenant satisfaction surveys undertaken in respect of all planned works were producing positive responses from tenants.

The Association had evaluated the requirements for achieving the Welsh Housing Quality Standard (WHQS) and had informed tenants of the standard

- 110. The Association had collected data on 537 of its 1299 properties to assess what was needed to achieve the WHQS. The Association had estimated the expenditure required, and had identified some properties that may not be able to fully comply with the standard. Work was continuing within the DEVCO consortium to bring together the experiences of partner organisations and produce proposals about the way in which consortium members would seek to fully comply with the WHQS where practicable, and where there may be properties where consortium members would not be able to fully comply.
- 111. In May 2005 the Association provided Tenant Forum members with a briefing about the WHQS and the implications for the Association's stock, and had undertaken two tenant surveys on the standard, explaining the expectations to tenants and obtaining views from tenants of their own assessment of how the standard was, or was not, being met in their homes.

The Association had robust arrangements in place for the management of asbestos

- 112. The Association had an asbestos management register which identified the presence of asbestos in communal areas. The system also included information about asbestos that had been identified in individual properties. There was a link between the planned maintenance register and the reactive maintenance data base that ensured that officers and contractors were warned about the presence of asbestos in advance of raising any orders or letting any works. Tenants were also provided with advice following a survey of their property.

The Association actively encouraged tenants and applicants with disabilities to discuss adaptations required to meet their needs

- 113. The Association had a continuing programme of developing and adapting homes for people with disabilities, and incorporated the needs of individuals at early the design stage following discussions with the appropriate Occupational Therapist. The Association was also maintaining good relationships with the Local Authority and Care and Repair Rhondda Cynon Tâf in order to enable needs to be met through various routes of funding. The Association would employ an Occupational Therapist if necessary, carry out adaptations up to the value of £1,000, maintain any new equipment installed and would financially support a larger adaptation in advance of receiving funding.

The Association had “good” arrangements in place for people with support needs

The Association made housing available to people with a range of support needs, tailoring the design of new build properties for the individual applicant, and ensured access to appropriate services

114. The Association made housing available to people with a range of support needs, including:
- two Sheltered housing schemes;
 - one project providing eight bed-spaces for women and children fleeing domestic violence;
 - five learning disabilities schemes;
 - one mental health project;
 - access to floating support services, via the Local Authority wide floating support scheme; and
 - specially adapted bungalows for people with physical disabilities.
115. The Association was working with external support providers, such as Cartrefi Cymru, Gofal, Cwm Cynon Women’s Aid, NCH Cymru, Supporting People Tenancy Support Scheme and the Community Care Division of Rhondda Cynon Tâf County Borough Council, to deliver support to tenants to enable them to sustain their tenancies. To help ensure that appropriate support services were being provided, the Association was involved in annual review meetings with accredited support providers.
116. The Association had adopted a joint, Authority-wide Move-on Strategy with the local authority that was subject to an annual review. This relatively new framework had replaced the Association’s more regular quarterly monitoring of move-on provision.
117. Access to floating support services was via an Authority-wide arrangement, whereby an individual needs assessment form was completed and then assessed by the Local Authority, and then an appropriate support partner was identified and matched. Management agreements were in place for all supported housing partners, and the Association had reviewed its monitoring arrangements with the Community Care Division of Rhondda Cynon Tâf County Borough Council in relation to support for tenants with learning disabilities. However, there was no evaluation or analysis of floating support to determine whether the arrangements were being effective in enabling vulnerable tenants to sustain their tenancies.

The Association was tailoring service delivery to meet individual requirements

118. The Association sought to tailor service delivery to accommodate the specific needs of tenants. Feedback from telephone surveys identified that tenants with support needs were very positive about the service being provided.
119. However, in checking how information was being recorded and used, it was apparent that there was scope to develop systems to ensure greater consistency of approach amongst front-line staff. This included the need for more clarity in defining the nature of the support need for, for example, people with learning difficulties, blind people, deaf people, non-english speaking people, and people with poor literacy and numeracy.
120. The Association had been operating a paper file system to identify tenants with specific support needs, and introduced a flagging arrangement on the IT system during the course of the inspection.

The Association demonstrated strong corporate and strategic capabilities

The Association had a clear strategic direction and a robust system in place to ensure that strategic objectives were being met

121. The Association had a Corporate Plan in place for the period April 2006 to March 2011. The Plan included financial assumptions and projected financial statements for each financial year throughout the period. The Plan also included performance information and the proposed Best Value Review Programme to be delivered during the period.
122. The Plan identified the following corporate objectives:
 - To make people matter
 - To improve the quality of services provided
 - To sustain the property portfolio
 - To develop community relations and partnerships
 - To ensure management control and probity
123. Strategic tasks to be completed during the subsequent 12 month period were assigned to each objective. Progress against these tasks was reviewed by the Management Team and the Board on a six monthly basis. The delivery of strategic tasks at operational level was supported by Directorate Operational Plans that set out the associated operational aims and targets. Progress against operational targets was reviewed by the Management Team and the Board on a quarterly basis.
124. The Inspection team was able to identify progress against the strategic tasks. However, the task to “address all essential issues to allow the merger with Pontypridd and District HA to take place” was not progressing as quickly as had originally been anticipated. This suggested that there was a need to revise

proposed completion date targets, in the context of the understanding of the complexity of the situation that had developed in the months prior to the inspection.

The Association had a performance management framework in place that evaluated a wide range of performance information and ensured that the work of teams contributed to achievement of operational aims

- 125. The performance management framework connected the delivery of operational aims with the performance of staff teams, ensured that appropriate training and development opportunities were provided for staff, and took account of the experience of service users when evaluating service delivery.
- 126. The Management Team systematically reviewed progress against proposed action arising from Best Value Reviews and Internal Audit Reports within Directorate Operational Plans and Action Plans. The Management Team also regularly reviewed complaints registered as formal and minor, to ensure the timely resolution of issues and to determine if patterns were emerging that warranted a review of policy and procedures. The Board received reports indicating progress against plans and the implementation of the Best Value Review programme.
- 127. The Association had set up a skills register of all staff which held information about the qualifications and experience of individual staff members. A staff development and appraisal process formally appraised performance and identified development/training needs every six months. Staff also indicated that additional training opportunities could be identified and, where the Association believed there was merit, courses identified by individuals could be made available to all staff. Specific examples could be identified of the provision of generic training, such as in dealing with deaf people and the opportunity to learn British Sign Language, which were originally identified by one staff member and then made available to a wider group of staff.
- 128. Operational Plans included specific aims and associated tasks intended to address weaker areas of performance, such as “to reduce the amount of arrears owed by current tenants”, which had six key actions and measures against which outcomes would be evaluated. The Association was monitoring outcomes against these measures.
- 129. The Association was aware of the continuing challenge of ensuring that its sheltered housing schemes were fully let and had introduced initiatives to achieve this, such as community consultations, fast track lettings, and local publicity and promotions. It was planning an evaluation of the actions taken to raise the profile of Cwrt Alun Lewis in the community of Cwmaman. At the time of the inspection, there were six (20 per cent) empty units at Cwrt Alun Lewis, one of which had been empty since May 2005.
- 130. The Association collected and reviewed a wide range of performance information about its services, covering costs, service user views and national performance indicators.

The Association adopted a range of methods for securing continuous service improvement and could demonstrate improved outcomes for service users

- 131.** Corporate responsibility for managing the delivery of the formal Best Value Review programme was assigned to the Performance Manager. The Association had developed a template of guidance for review teams that supported the scoping of reviews and the identification of cross cutting issues. The Association had completed its first five year programme of reviews and the Board had agreed a new five year programme commencing in February 2006. The Board and Tenant Forum had been presented with the rationale for the review programme, which included a focus on weaker performing areas such as lettings in 2006-07 and rents in 2007-08.
- 132.** Review teams included tenant representatives and, in addition to using feedback from service users collected by surveys, the Association had begun to use service user focus groups. For example, in the lettings review focus groups were used to obtain service user experience of the way in which services were being delivered, as a means of identifying potential areas for improvement. The Association also used feedback from its Mystery shopper responses to help inform decisions on improvements.
- 133.** The Association had reached agreement with other housing association partners to the Common Housing Register to undertake a joint best value review of lettings in 2006-07, which had also been identified through the Association's participation in a Housemark benchmarking exercise as a high cost, poor performance activity. The Association had also used the outcome of the Housemark analysis of other service areas to prioritise reviews on services identified as high cost/poor performance, and also on low cost, but poor performing services such as rent arrears. The review of rent arrears was scheduled for 2007-08, having regard to requirements to support the joint review of the common housing register.
- 134.** Recent Best Value Reviews had focused on internal system reviews, such as finance and IT, with a service user focused review of Care and Repair.
- 135.** The Association also used feedback from service users to address service specific problems as they arose, and there was evidence of action being taken, particularly in response to problems with contractors. During our focus groups, tenants referred to anti-social behaviour and litter as issues of concern to them. The Association had included a review of tenancy management in its review programme.

The Association was sustaining high levels of performance for responsive repairs and had introduced community development schemes to encourage wider community engagement and the sustainability of the communities in which it operates. Strategies were in place for addressing lettings and rents issues

- 136. Evidence of service improvement could be identified in a range of areas. The high levels of performance in responsive repairs were being sustained and the introduction of handypersons provided an additional means of responding to tenant repair requests. Weaknesses in arrangements for the management of gas servicing had been identified and improvements, in particular for ensuring access to homes, had been implemented prior to the inspection.
- 137. The Association had been working in partnership to support a Timebroker scheme, which began work in 2005 to develop and strengthen community networks, in particular communities using approaches tailored to address local circumstances. The scheme has facilitated activity based projects to attract disaffected youths, health promotion projects and landscaping works, as a means of focussing activity on local situations.
- 138. The Association had evaluated the impact of a high turnover of its properties on its long term viability, its reputation in the communities in which it operates and the budget spend and staff resources to ensure value for money. As a result it has prioritised retaining its tenants, by responding to issues around anti-social behaviour, increasing tenancy support and seeking continuous feedback from its tenants. As part of this shift in thinking, the Association had sought to create a positive impression with new tenants by investing time and money in ensuring its empty properties were of a high standard when re-let.
- 139. Rents performance had been relatively static over the three years prior to the inspection, the number of tenants in receipt of housing benefit had decreased and the number of tenants in arrears had increased. The Association had a clear understanding of where its hot spots were and was focussed its resources accordingly.

Forward planning arrangements identified and took account of resource needs to ensure that the Association had the capacity to drive improvement

- 140. The Management Team evaluated information about the financial aspects of service delivery, the resources being deployed, performance issues and staff capacity when developing plans for change. This meant, for example, that the Corporate Plan included fewer strategic tasks for 2006-07 than in previous years, to account for the time it was expected that senior managers would be engaged in merger discussions.

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

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 Association. 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 Recommendations

Recommendations	
R1	Develop access to debt prevention and income maximisation advisory services and raise awareness of its availability to all tenants.
R2	Produce clear information for those who may be suspended from consideration for housing to explain the reason for suspension, the action they may need to take and arrangements for appeal against suspension decisions.



Wales Audit Office
2-4 Park Grove
Cardiff CF10 3PA
Tel: 029 2026 0260
Fax: 029 2026 0026
Textphone: 029 2026 2646
E-mail: info@wao.gov.uk
Website: www.wao.gov.uk