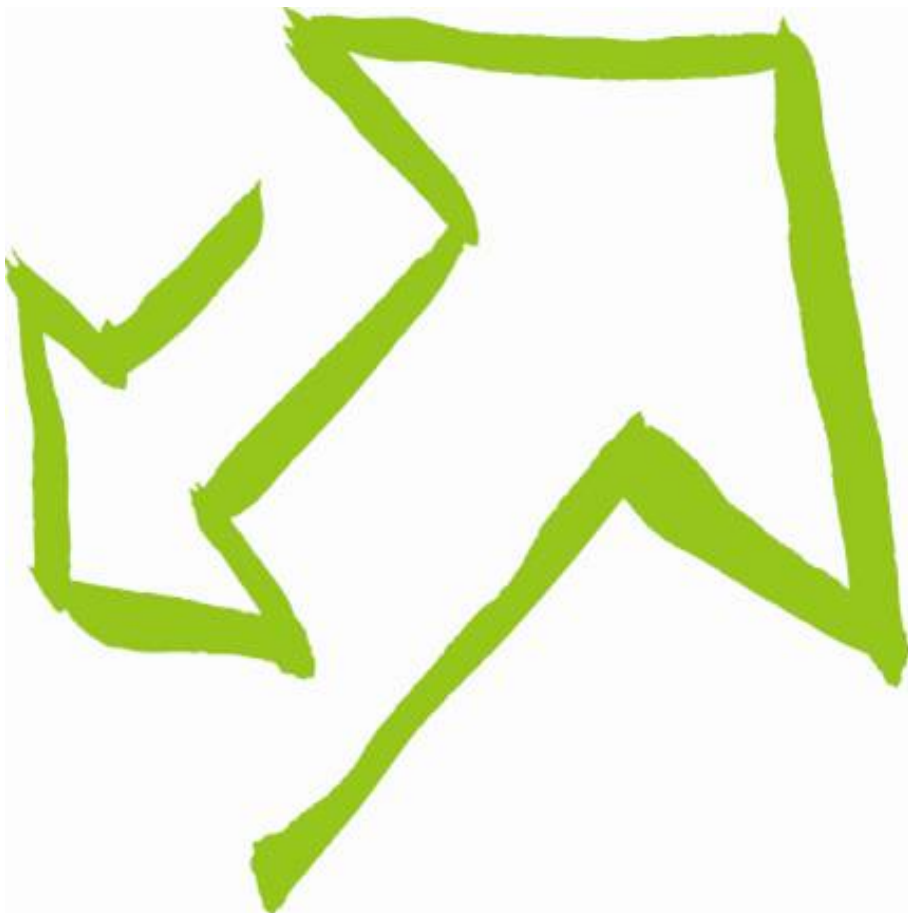


Re-inspection of Housing Management Services

Gloucestershire Housing Association Limited

October 2008



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Housing Association Inspections

The Audit Commission is an independent body responsible for ensuring that public money is spent economically, efficiently and effectively and delivers high-quality local services for the public.

Within the Audit Commission, the Housing Inspectorate inspects and monitors the performance of a number of bodies and services. These include local authority housing departments, local authorities administering Supporting People programmes, arms length management organisations and housing associations. Our key lines of enquiry (KLOEs) set out the main issues which we consider when forming our judgements on the quality of services. The KLOEs can be found on the Audit Commission's website at www.audit-commission.gov.uk/housing.

For housing associations our inspection role and remit is set out in sections 41(A) and 41(B) of the Audit Commission Act 1998 (as amended by section 109 of the Local Government Act 2003), and is in line with the Audit Commission's strategic regulation principles. In broad terms, these principles look to minimise the burden of regulation while maximising its impact. To meet these principles this inspection:

- is proportionate to risk and the performance of the association;
- judges the quality of the service for service users and the value for money of the service;
- promotes further improvements in the service; and
- has cost no more than is necessary to safeguard the public interest.

We are committed to working in partnership with other regulators, and the Audit Commission and the Housing Corporation are working together to improve the performance and efficiency of housing associations. Our shared objectives are to ensure that associations provide services for the diverse range of customers in their areas of operation, high standards of customer services and access, and value for money for both customers and the taxpayer.

The Housing Corporation is the statutory body which regulates housing associations to ensure that they are well governed, well managed and financially viable, as set out in its Regulatory Code. Its lead regulation staff work with housing inspectors to ensure that there is adequate information provided for the inspection and that the inspected body implements recommendations in the inspection report. The overall findings of the inspection are also used to inform the Housing Corporation Assessment (HCA) which determines eligibility for further public investment and may influence the Housing Association's future business prospects.

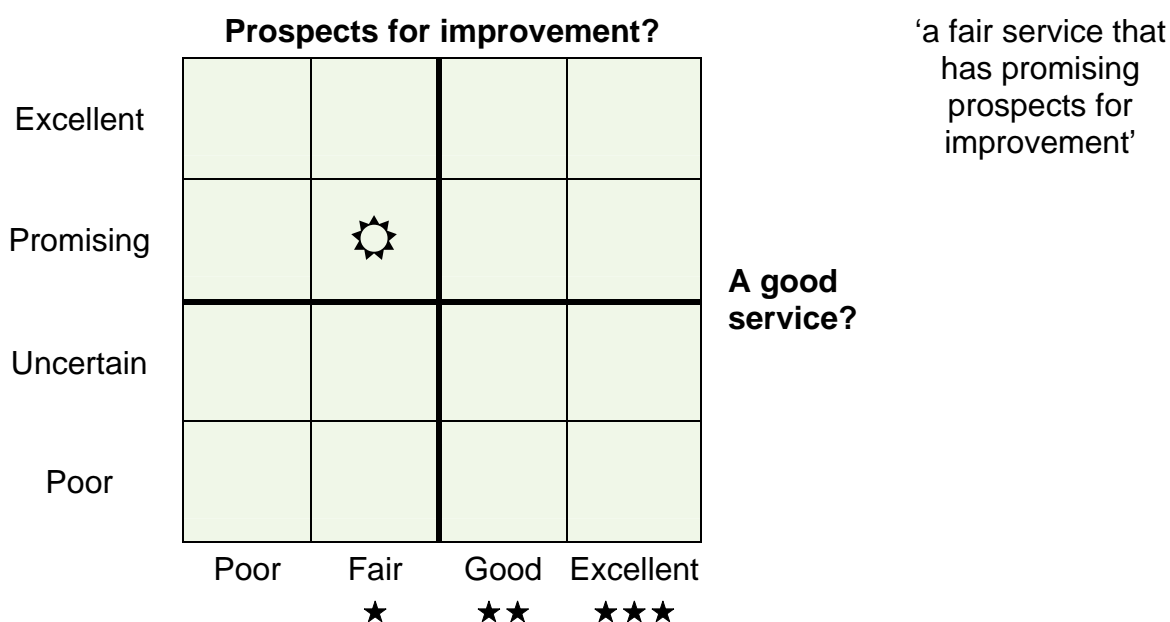
Summary

- 1 Gloucestershire Housing Association (GHA) provides a fair housing management service for tenants which has promising prospects for improvement.
- 2 The service has a number of strengths. It is easy for customers to access services and there is high quality information available about services. There is a clear strategic approach to equality and diversity that is supporting the delivery of some positive outcomes for community groups. Investment decisions are based on a reasonable understanding of stock condition and progress is being made on improving homes. Annual gas safety checks and disabled adaptations are carried out effectively. Performance on income collection is good and the association works well to minimise debt. Tenancy conditions are enforced and tenants are supported to maintain their tenancies with GHA taking an active role in supporting community development initiatives. Estates are generally tidy and well kept.
- 3 However, overall satisfaction with services is relatively low and service standards are not comprehensive. Leadership on diversity issues is not fully demonstrated at board level and resident involvement remains an area for improvement with the overall strategic approach to both resident involvement and customer access is underdeveloped. Performance in completing repairs on time is weak and properties are remaining empty for too long. Management costs are comparatively high and are not consistent with the quality of the services provided and there are significant weaknesses in the strategic framework for delivering value for money.
- 4 Some important improvements have been delivered that are having a real impact on customers and there is a positive track record of responding to external recommendations. The Board has demonstrated strong leadership to services and the organisation has established a clear strategic direction. A new performance management framework has been successfully implemented. Financial and risk management arrangements are in place. Staff capacity is good, management capacity has been enhanced and the capacity of board members is also improving. New HR policies are having a positive impact on capacity and the use of IT is generally effective.
- 5 Trends in performance indicators and customer satisfaction are generally positive but in some cases the scale of improvement has been weak and there is not a track record of improving value for money. There are weaknesses in target-setting, the performance management arrangements of some contracts and in the engagement of tenants in monitoring performance. The approach to learning is mixed while the distribution of the housing stock presents a barrier to efficient management and the approach to procurement is not maximising capacity.

Scoring the service

6 We have assessed Gloucestershire Housing Association Limited as providing a 'fair', one-star service that has promising prospects for improvement. Our judgements are based on the evidence obtained during the inspection and are outlined below.

Figure 1 Scoring chart¹



Source: Audit Commission

- 7 We found the service to be fair because it has a range of strengths including:
- it is easy for customers to access services through its website, telephone and reception facilities. The association also produces high quality information about its housing services;
 - there is a clear strategic approach to equality and diversity that is supporting the delivery of some positive outcomes for community groups;
 - the association has improved its understanding of its customer profile and is using this to inform service delivery;
 - the association has a clear strategic approach to equality and diversity that is supporting the delivery of some positive outcomes often delivered through partnership working;
 - investment decisions are based on a reasonable understanding of the stock and progress is being made on bringing homes to meet the 'decent homes standard';

¹ The scoring chart displays performance in two dimensions. The horizontal axis shows how good the service or function is now, on a scale ranging from no stars for a service that is poor (at the left-hand end) to three stars for an excellent service (right-hand end). The vertical axis shows the improvement prospects of the service, also on a four-point scale.

- annual gas safety checks and disabled adaptations are carried out effectively;
- performance on income collection is good and the association works well to minimise debt;
- tenancy conditions are being enforced and tenants are supported to maintain their tenancies; and
- estates are generally tidy and well kept.

8 However, there are some areas which require improvement. These include:

- overall satisfaction with services is relatively low and service standards are not comprehensive;
- resident involvement remains an area for improvement with the overall strategic approach to both resident involvement and customer access is underdeveloped;
- leadership on diversity issues at board level is underdeveloped;
- performance in completing repairs on time is weak;
- properties are remaining empty for too long and the quality of work is variable; and
- management costs are comparatively high and are not consistent with the quality of the services provided and there are significant weaknesses in the strategic framework for delivering value for money.

9 The service has promising prospects for improvement because:

- some important improvements have been delivered many of which are having a real impact on customers;
- there is a positive track record of responding to external recommendations and trends in performance indicators and customer satisfaction are generally positive;
- the organisation has developed a clear strategic direction;
- the Board has demonstrated strong leadership to services;
- a new performance management framework has successfully been implemented;
- financial and risk management arrangements are in place;
- staff capacity is good and management capacity has been enhanced. The capacity of board members is also improving;
- new HR policies are having a positive impact and the use of IT is generally effective; and
- the move to a group structure has the potential to significantly increase capacity.

Scoring the service

10 However, there are a number of barriers to improvement. These include:

- the scale of improvements in some areas has been weak and there is not a track record of improving value for money;
- there are some gaps in strategic plans;
- there are weaknesses in target-setting, the performance management arrangements of some contracts and in the engagement of tenants in monitoring performance;
- the approach to learning is mixed;
- the distribution of the housing stock presents a barrier to efficient management; and
- the approach to procurement is not maximising capacity.

Recommendations

- 11 To rise to the challenge of continuous improvement, organisations need inspection reports that offer practical pointers for improvement. Our recommendations identify the expected benefits for both local people and the organisation. In addition, we identify the approximate costs² and indicate the priority we place on each recommendation and key dates for delivering these where they are considered appropriate. In this context, the inspection team recommends that the organisation shares the findings of this report with tenants and board members; and takes action to address all weaknesses identified in the report. Associations forming part of a group structure should share the lessons and findings of the report amongst the wider group. The inspection team makes the following recommendations.

Recommendation

R1 Strengthen the focus on customer care by:

- developing a customer care strategy;
- undertaking routine satisfaction surveys across all key areas of service and developing plans to respond to findings;
- publishing a suite of measurable and challenging service standards in consultation with tenants;
- improving the approach to estate inspections through promoting greater attendance and publicity of outcomes;
- ensuring that cleaning and grounds maintenance specifications meet the needs of individual estates and are robustly managed; and
- improving the handling of out-of-hours phone contact to address tenancy and estate management issues.

The expected benefits of this recommendation are:

- increased accountability to customers;
- a more responsive service; and
- increased tenant satisfaction.

The implementation of this recommendation will have high impact with medium costs. This should be implemented by April 2009.

² Low cost is defined as less than 1 per cent of the annual service cost, medium cost is between 1 and 5 per cent and high cost is over 5 per cent.

Recommendations

Recommendation

R2 Strengthen the approach to resident involvement by:

- reviewing and updating the resident involvement strategy;
- increasing the involvement of tenants in managing performance;
- developing new methods of involvement to engage a wider range of residents in the management of their homes; and
- ensuring that resident involvement structures are representative of the population.

The expected benefits of this recommendation are:

- increased accountability to customers;
- services are better shaped to meet customers needs; and
- increased tenant satisfaction.

The implementation of this recommendation will have high impact with low costs. This should be implemented by April 2009.

Recommendation

R3 Strengthen the approach to the management of responsive and voids repairs by:

- ensuring that all categories of repairs are completed promptly and in accordance with targets;
- setting challenging targets for the number of jobs completed in a single visit and ensuring that these are met;
- ensuring that work to empty properties is accurately coded to the appropriate budget;
- developing a long term strategic approach to the management of voids leading to significant reductions in the time properties remain empty;
- ensuring that detailed information is provided to new tenants on the voids standard and how decoration allowances are awarded; and
- ensuring that detailed information on asbestos is provided to tenants where it is known to be present.

The expected benefits of this recommendation are:

- improved value for money; and
- increased tenant satisfaction.

The implementation of this recommendation will have high impact with low costs. This should be implemented by April 2009.

Recommendation

R4 Strengthen performance management by:

- publishing performance reports and targets on the website;
- ensuring that performance reporting by the repairs contractor and aids and adaptations agency is robust, frequent and used to improve service delivery; and
- reviewing targets to ensure that they are challenging.

The expected benefits of this recommendation are:

- increased accountability;
- a stronger basis for scrutinising the quality of service delivery; and
- improved performance.

The implementation of this recommendation will have high impact with low costs. This should be implemented by April 2009.

Recommendation

R5 Strengthen the focus on equality and diversity by:

- completing equality impact assessments where there are gaps and developing robust action plans to address any negative impact of policies and strategies on equality;
- monitor contractors compliance with their equality and diversity policies and codes of conduct;
- making further use of knowledge held on tenants profile to tailor services; and
- developing the capacity of the board through training and appoint a board champion of equality and diversity.

The expected benefits of this recommendation are:

- improved service to diverse groups; and
- assurance that services do not discriminate against any individuals or groups.

The implementation of this recommendation will have high impact with low costs. This should be implemented by June 2009.

Recommendations

Recommendation

- R6** Strengthen the approach to value for money by:
- developing robust value for money and procurement strategies;
 - developing a robust understanding of management costs and how they compare with peers;
 - reviewing service contracts to ensure that they provide the optimum cost and quality; and
 - maximising income from recharges and reletting empty homes.

The expected benefits of this recommendation are:

- better services at reduced costs with efficiency savings enabling further improvements in services; and
- decision making based on informed data on cost and quality of services.

The implementation of this recommendation will have high impact with low costs. This should be implemented by April 2009.

- 12** We would like to thank the staff of Gloucestershire Housing Association Limited who made us welcome and who met our requests efficiently and courteously.

Dates of Inspection: 28 July to 1 August 2008

Regional contact details

Audit Commission

3 - 6 Blenheim Court

Lustleigh Close

Matford Business Park

Exeter EX2 8PW

Telephone: 01392 315657

Fax: 01392 427383

www.audit-commission.gov.uk

Report

Context

The locality

- 13 GHA operates in both urban and rural settings within 11 local authority areas: Cheltenham Borough Council; Cherwell District Council; Cotswold District Council; Forest of Dean District Council; Gloucester City Council; Herefordshire Council; Milton Keynes Council; North Wiltshire District Council; Stratford-upon-Avon District Council; Stroud District Council and Tewkesbury Borough Council.
- 14 Most of the stock is within Gloucester, Cheltenham and Tewkesbury with the rest spread out across a wide area. Areas range from three wards in Gloucester in the most deprived 5 per cent nationally, to relatively affluent suburbs and countryside. Stock is generally modern (68 per cent built post 1990) and of a range of types, individual houses and small blocks and estates.

The Association

- 15 GHA is a community based association providing homes and related services. It was established in 1965 and owns and/or manages in excess of three thousand homes. GHA employs in the region of 80 staff, including its Interim Chief Executive, Operations Director, Director of Development and Asset Management and Interim Finance Director. The Board has ten members of which three are residents and seven are independent. The Board is supported by three committees; operations, audit and risk, and governance and remuneration.
- 16 GHA's executive team has undergone change over the last year, with both the Chief Executive and Finance Director leaving the organisation in 2007. The Board decided to defer recruitment and selected an interim Chief Executive and interim Finance Director while it considered its strategic direction. It decided earlier in 2008 to join a group structure and due diligence is currently underway.

Scope of the inspection

- 17 The inspection covered the key areas of the housing management service including: stock investment and asset management; tenancy and estate management; housing income management; access and customer care; diversity; value for money as well as prospects for improvement.

How good is the service?

What has the service aimed to achieve?

18 The Business Plan 2008 -2010 sets out three strategic objectives. The primary objective is:

- to provide high quality homes and services, which customers want.

This primary objective is supported by the two other objectives:

- be financially strong, efficient, and generate value for money for customers; and
- continuously improve services through organisational development.

19 The association has not developed any detailed aims to support these strategic objectives although individual departmental service improvement plans support the Business Plan.

Is the service meeting the needs of the local community and users?

Access and customer care

20 In the last inspection weaknesses outweighed strengths. Tenant satisfaction was low and resident involvement in shaping services was limited. Customer access could be difficult, particularly at busy times, the website was not being used to improve access and tenants were not properly informed of service standards. However, customer feedback was used to improve services and the main office reception offered a good service to visitors.

21 This inspection, strengths and weaknesses are in balance in this area. It is easy for customers to access services through its website, telephone and reception facilities. The association also produces high quality information about its housing services. Complaints are dealt with promptly and efficiently. However, overall satisfaction with services is relatively low and service standards are not comprehensive or consistently challenging and resident involvement remains an area for improvement. The overall strategic approach to both resident involvement and customer access is underdeveloped.

22 The association produces high quality information about its housing services. New tenants are provided with a comprehensive 'sign-up' pack which includes a comprehensive tenants' handbook and clear printed leaflets on the full range of useful information needed for a successful tenancy. These leaflets are also clearly displayed in the association's reception area and can be downloaded on the website. All publications include translated straplines explaining that the documents are available in different languages and can be provided in large print, Braille and on tape.

- 23** Effective access to services is provided through the association's website. The website has been redeveloped since the last inspection and now provides a useful alternative to telephoning or calling in person to the association's offices. Services available on-line include repairs reporting, rent payment and making complaints. Large print, 'brousealoud' and language straplines assist diverse groups. It is particularly strong on responsive repairs, anti-social behaviour (ASB), rents and advice. Contact details and opening times are clearly displayed and there are links to other useful websites. Website access is particularly important for GHA tenants given the wide distribution of the housing stock.
- 24** Complaints are generally dealt with promptly and efficiently. The complaints policy is applied consistently and there are well maintained records of complaints history with a simple computer spreadsheet supported by clear manual records. Staff are clear about what to do as the procedure forms part of the induction process. Procedures are clearly communicated to tenants through leaflets. The website has been upgraded to make it easy for tenants to complete complaints on-line. The process is 'user-friendly' for complainants (friends and relatives can attend the third stage panel meetings). However, a few complaints are not being responded to within target times. Information is kept on informal complaints and the Service Improvement Team rings people to encourage them and to offer the formal service. Compensation is paid where services fail. This positive approach encourages customers to report service failure and this facilitates further service improvement.
- 25** Reception facilities are welcoming and effective and services have been brought closer to tenants. Reasonable adjustments have been made to the reception facilities including automatic doors, lowered counters and provision of a loop system to make access relatively easy for disabled visitors although physical building constraints mean that parking facilities are not fully compliant with the Disability Discrimination Act (DDA) although two accessible parking spaces are now provided on the road. Seating arrangements and children's toys make the visit pleasant. A duty officer system has been introduced which ensures that there is always a housing officer based behind the reception area to provide support and guidance to reception and call centre staff. Customer service officers, have access to housing officers' diaries and make home visit appointments at the first point of contact. The establishment of housing officer surgeries at four locations have brought services closer to residents on some estates.
- 26** Telephone calls are managed effectively. The handling of telephone calls has been significantly improved since responsibility for handling repairs calls was transferred to the maintenance contractor earlier in 2008. This has enabled repairs calls to be dealt with by knowledgeable staff via a free phone number 24 hours per day. It has also freed up GHA reception and call centre staff to respond more effectively to other customer contact. This has been further enhanced by the implementation of new telephony which makes sensible use of a menu system to direct calls to the appropriate staff. Wall displays and recording systems make customer services officers accountable for performance. This has resulted in an average of 97 per cent of calls being answered within the association's target time and a relatively low number of calls being abandoned (3 per cent).

How good is the service?

- 27** Overall satisfaction with services is mixed. The latest STATUS survey was carried out in April 2008 and initial results available in July 2008 indicate that overall satisfaction has risen in the past three years from 74 per cent to 78 per cent. This level of satisfaction is below the Housing Corporation comparison group average. Satisfaction with the overall quality of the home is higher at 82 per cent (an increase from 77 per cent in 2005). Satisfaction with the repairs service was rated at 69 per cent, although an increase from 65 per cent in 2005 this is still low.
- 28** The measurement of ongoing satisfaction with individual services is underdeveloped. Although satisfaction is collected for a significant number of areas, satisfaction with income management, complaint handling and estate management services is not routinely monitored. This means that the association is not fully aware of customer's views on services and this hinders the development of service improvements.
- 29** Service standards are not comprehensive or consistently challenging. A customer charter clearly sets out what tenants can expect in areas such as responding to complaints, telephone calls and written communication. Compliance with the charter is measured and reported on. Information leaflets also contain a broad range of defined service standards for example, times taken to complete minor aids and adaptations, time taken to respond to reports of ASB and racial harassment and responsive repairs times. However, some service standards are not challenging (for example 30 seconds to answer telephone calls). There is not a coordinated or consistent approach to the management of services standards, with the exception of the customer charter, there is no routine measurement or reporting of the effectiveness of the association in complying with its stated service aims. Nor is there a single document which summarises all service standard commitments. This makes it difficult for tenants to fully understand what they can expect or how well GHA performs in relation to these commitments.
- 30** Resident involvement remains an area for improvement. Generally residents are not widely involved in significant decision-making, such as policy setting and there is a lack of a strategy setting out how this may be achieved in future. However, the association has developed a broad range of methods by which tenants can become involved in the management of their homes. A leaflet setting out a menu of options describes 11 different ways in which tenants may become involved including attending estate inspections, resident meetings, becoming street or block representatives or participating on design or editorial panels. There are some positive outcomes, for example tenants have made decisions about the type of materials used in kitchens and they have played an important role in the editorial of the quarterly newsletters and have had an input to other publications and the website. Effective working between housing officers and resident associations has resulted in improvements which have transformed previously 'challenging' estates into attractive places where people choose to live. There are three places on the Board for residents and the Operations Committee includes four residents (including co-optees) and this means that there is some input from residents into wider decision making on policy and budget issues.

- 31** Arrangements for contacting the association out-of-hours are not comprehensive. While repairs calls are dealt with effectively, only a limited response is available to support residents outside the limited office hours for other matters. Calls received by the repairs contractor may be referred to named officers but as there is not an established rota, there is no guarantee that tenants will receive any support from the association out-of-hours on issues such as tenancy management and reliance is placed on the emergency services to respond.
- 32** The overall strategic approach to customer access is underdeveloped. The association has not developed a clear and overarching strategy to guide the future direction of services. This is significant given the wide dispersal of the association's stock. It means that initiatives to develop services such as surgeries may be driven more by the initiative of individual officers than the overall business needs of the organisation and the requirements of its customers.

Diversity

- 33** In the last inspection weaknesses outweighed strengths. Progress on equality and diversity had been slow and the association did not have embedded systems for understanding the needs of residents and information was not being used strategically to tailor services to meet local needs.
- 34** This inspection, strengths and weaknesses are in balance in this area. There is a clear strategic approach to equality and diversity this is supported by leadership of senior officers. The association has improved its understanding of its customer profile and is using this to inform service delivery. Progress is being made on understanding the impact of policies on diverse groups and awareness of diversity is being positively raised among staff and board members. Partnership working with community groups is leading to some positive outcomes. However, leadership on diversity is not fully demonstrated at board level and GHA is not fully representative of the communities it serves. Steps are not being taken to ensure that resident involvement is inclusive and the approach to diversity issues with contractors is underdeveloped.
- 35** The associations' approach to diversity is supported by a clear strategic framework. An Equality and Diversity Strategy provides the main framework and a clear set of tasks is set out in a Diversity Action Plan. The Action Plan has recently been updated to take account of external challenge provided by consultants earlier in 2008. Policies and procedures indicate that the association gives appropriate priority to diversity issues, for example there are clear policies on domestic violence and harassment and new disability and gender equality schemes have been adopted in accordance with Housing Corporation timescales. The Equality and Diversity Strategy was adopted in 2006 and is scheduled to be rewritten later in 2008 to reflect the new business plan and an improved understanding of tenant profile. This is important in ensuring that services are non-discriminatory.

How good is the service?

- 36** Leadership in relationship to diversity is mixed. The Interim Chief Executive and Operations Director take a clear lead in overseeing the development of strategy and the delivery of action plans. Progress on the diversity Action Plan is monitored every six months by the Board and board reports clearly highlight the equality implications of any recommendations. However, there is currently no nominated diversity champion on the Board nor any champions within specific service areas. There is no officer/board members group which oversees the delivery of the action plan. This means that there is a risk that responsibility for diversity may rest too heavily with senior officers and not be shared more widely.
- 37** The association has improved its understanding of its customer profile and is using this to inform service delivery. A customer profile programme is ensuring that the organisation has an increasingly strong understanding of its tenants. A wide range of approaches has been used to increase understanding including using the annual gas servicing contract as a way of encouraging tenants to return information in reply paid envelopes. Currently the association has a comprehensive understanding of the gender and age of all tenants; it understands the ethnicity of 87 per cent of tenants, the economic status of 75 per cent. Understanding is weaker on religion (32 per cent) and disability (37 per cent). Positively, this information is used to tailor services. For example, analysis of tenants with rent arrears has highlighted a need to target financial advice at young women and information on contact preferences was used in shaping the design of the new website.
- 38** GHA is making progress on understanding the impact of its policies and procedures. An Equality Impact Assessment Framework ensures that new policies and procedures are now subject to impact assessments. External consultants have carried out impact assessments on ten existing policies including sensitive policies such as starter tenancies, rent payment and arrears framework, recruitment and anti-social behaviour. These assessments have highlighted some areas of weakness in policies for example, that most policies do not have diversity built into their core rationale and purpose. To date, only the redundancy policy has been fully revised to ensure all issues raised in the impact assessments have been addressed. This means that the association is aware of the implications of some of its key policies but that action has still to be taken to address all the issues raised and impact assessments have still to be undertaken on some other policies.
- 39** Effective steps are taken to ensure awareness of diversity issues is raised among staff and board members. There is an on going training programme being delivered to help strengthen understanding about diverse needs. Specific training is being delivered in areas such as disability, family support, sexual orientation and drug/alcohol awareness. This is being delivered in monthly 'bite size' sessions which staff from across the organisation find informative. Courses are not currently mandatory for all staff and board members although this is planned.

- 40 Partnership working with local community groups is leading to positive outcomes for residents. Some examples are given below.
- Sponsoring a council project on the educational needs assessment of black African Caribbean Communities in Gloucester.
 - Working closely with a local community trust to determine the community languages used in literature and the website and to undertake quality control of translated documents.
 - Participation in all Crime and Disorder Reduction Partnerships (CDRPs) has led to some active engagement in local initiatives such as the Family Intervention Project in Gloucester which is helping to sustain tenancies of vulnerable households.
 - The development of working with Stroud Care and Repair has helped improve access to aids and adaptations for tenants with disabilities.
 - Further examples of how the association plays an active role in supporting community development initiatives are given in the tenancy management section of this report.
- 41 GHA is not fully representative of the communities it services. Positively, the staff profile reflects the diversity of the local population. Approximately 18 per cent of staff are from BME communities. However, disabled staff are under represented in the workforce and although some steps are taken to accommodate disability the physical layout of offices and the lack of lifts mean that there is a significant barrier to recruiting and retaining staff with mobility difficulties. The current Board profile does not reflect the tenants' population. The largest tenant group is females yet all tenant board members are male. Targeted action has not been taken to address this issue.
- 42 Steps are not taken to ensure that resident involvement is inclusive. There has not been targeted action to ensure that resident involvement achieves wider engagement. Although steps are taken to ensure that resident meetings are accessible, there is a lack of a strategic approach to ensure that engagement is achieved with all parts of the community. For example, GHA does not actively promote engagement with young or disabled tenants. This means that services may not fully reflect the needs of specific groups.
- 43 The association's approach to diversity issues with its contractors is underdeveloped. Contractors do not have targets set for diversity issues and discussion of performance on these issues is not part of the normal contract and performance monitoring arrangements. Contractors are required to provide diversity training to their staff but this is not actively monitored. Contractors are required to comply with a code of conduct but this is not measured. As a result, the association cannot be confident that its contractors are acting in the interest of all customers.

Stock investment and asset management

Stock improvement, planned and cyclical maintenance, major repairs work

- 44 The last inspection found that weaknesses outweighed strengths. The association had not developed a long term programme of major works and the existing programme was not customer-focused. Management of some budgets was weak and the management of asbestos presented a risk. However, the association had developed an asset management strategy.
- 45 This inspection, strengths and weaknesses are in balance in this area. Investment decisions are based on a reasonable understanding of stock condition and progress is being made on improving homes including energy efficiency measures. The planned maintenance programme is generally customer-focused although tenants are not sufficiently involved in developing the overall programme and standards of improvement work are relatively minimal. Cyclical programmes are delivered efficiently however a lift maintenance contract has proved ineffective. The approach to asbestos management is mixed. There is not a comprehensive strategic approach to asset management and insufficient focus on long term sustainability issues.
- 46 Stock investment decisions are based on a reasonable understanding of the condition of the stock. A survey of 25 per cent of the stock carried out in 2004 has been enhanced by a further 30 per cent sample carried out in 2007. Surveys include assessments against the decent homes standard, Housing Health and Safety Rating System and energy efficiency. Surveys are also undertaken by in-house surveyors (although a target of 20 per cent per year is not being met). Overall, the association has externally validated data either through direct surveys or cloned information on over 90 per cent of the stock. This information has enabled the association to develop long term investment plans.
- 47 Progress is being made on improving the condition of the housing stock. In 2006, at the time of the last inspection 15 per cent of the stock failed the decent homes standard (DHS); this has reduced to 9.76 per cent. Most failings are due to electrically heated homes not meeting thermal efficiency standards. These are all due for upgrading in 2008/09. The association is on target to meet full compliance with the DHS by 2010. The current year's programme also includes bathroom, kitchen, window and door replacements. Despite some contracts starting later than planned, budget has been committed in line with expectations and the association projects that it will spend the full £2,147,900 budget within the year. In 2007/08 GHA achieved 98 per cent expenditure on a budget of £1,277,735. This is important as it demonstrates that GHA is taking the necessary steps to bring its homes up to an acceptable standard.
- 48 GHA has delivered improvements to the energy efficiency of homes. An effective affordable warmth programme has been delivered which has increased SAP (energy efficiency) ratings to 69. Further investment in 2008/09 is projected to increase the rating to 71. GHA has taken advantage of energy efficiency grants to supplement its budgets by approximately £64,000. Improvements in thermal comfort are particularly important given the relatively high proportion of income spent by tenants on fuel.

- 49** The planned maintenance programme is generally customer-focused. A five-year programme is published in advance meaning that tenants can plan ahead. A resident design panel ensures that tenants have an input to decisions relating to the procurement of materials. The panel which meets every three months has chosen the type of kitchen units procured. On an estate basis, staff from the planned maintenance team attend regular site meetings with tenants to help ensure that contractors act sensitively to customers' needs. Tenants are offered a reasonable choice of colours and styles for kitchen and bathroom renewals. An option is available to have a shower fitted in all new bathrooms and there is an opportunity to pay for additional items to be fitted. Improvements to homes have led to positive levels of tenant satisfaction with 93 per cent of customers satisfied with the completed works. Tenants have commented on the sensitive way in which the programme is now being delivered.
- 50** The programme is sensitive to the needs of vulnerable tenants. The planned maintenance team works with an independent home improvement agency to ensure that where appropriate, tenants are assessed and aids and adaptations are delivered as part of the planned programme. Planning is now more sensitive to the needs of older people and commitments are made to minimise disruption caused where water supplies are cut.
- 51** Cyclical maintenance programmes are delivered efficiently. A five-year cyclical redecoration programme continues to be in place. Although the programme is reducing with the installation of low maintenance components the programme continues to be delivered according to schedule. The contract now includes gutter clearance. A ten-year programme of electrical testing is also carried out to all properties. This approach protects to safety of tenants, helps maintain a positive appearance of estates and reduces the need for responsive maintenance.
- 52** The association is not ensuring that its lifts are maintained in good working order. The association has servicing contracts in place for plant and equipment including fire equipment, communal heating and lifts. However, the lift maintenance contract has proved ineffective. A passenger lift at a sheltered housing scheme has been out of operation for over six weeks. The lift is only 13 years old and the contract is with a major international lift company. This level of service is completely unacceptable for many tenants including some older people and disabled people.
- 53** The approach to asbestos management is mixed. Asbestos policies and procedures have been adopted. A leaflet is circulated to tenants which provides a general description of asbestos and shows where it may be found in the home but tenants are not provided with details where it is known that asbestos is present. The association maintains an asbestos database which is made available to contractors. A flag on the housing management computer system warns of the presence of asbestos. Surveys of all communal areas have been completed and loaded on to the database. However, surveys of individual properties are not yet complete and some survey work remains outstanding (as surveys are only completed when properties are due to be included in the planned maintenance programme). This presents a risk to the association and its tenants.

How good is the service?

- 54 Improvement work is only carried out to meet the national minimal standards. On the whole GHA is updating its properties to the basic Decent Homes Standard and has not agreed an enhanced standard with tenants. This means that tenants have not had an opportunity to discuss with GHA their aspirations and to discuss whether higher standards may be a priority compared to other services they receive. However, there is now some emerging work with tenants through the tenants design panel.
- 55 Programming of work is not fully sensitive to the needs of tenants. Although tenants are involved in the selection of materials and finishes, they have not been fully involved in determining the priorities or timetables for the overall work carried out. In some cases tenants will receive kitchen replacements a year after bathroom replacements with no consultation on whether customers would prefer the work to be combined. Delays in letting contracts means that boiler replacement work is expected to start in October 2008 rather than during the more convenient summer months.
- 56 There is not a comprehensive strategic approach to asset management. The draft asset management strategy 2008 is an interim document that allows planning in the short term and refreshes the original 2006 strategy. The 2008 draft strategy does not reflect key factors such as demand data and demographic trends. It also lacks links to other programmes and issues such as disposal and rationalisation of stock. The strategy was not developed with the input of residents. The document does not demonstrate a strategic and holistic approach to ecological or sustainability issues. The strategy has a number of action points noted to strengthen the strategic approach but there is no plan to take this forward. This means that the focus is on the relatively short term focus of meeting minimal standards with no firm direction on which to base the longer-term future management and maintenance of the stock.

Responsive repairs

- 57 The last inspection found that the overall management of responsive repairs was weak. Systems and procedures were not in place to deliver effective services. Repairs were not completed within target times, inspections were not targeted and the arrangements for out-of-hours repairs were not effective.
- 58 This inspection, weaknesses outweigh strengths in this area. Action was taken to address performance issues but as yet performance on completing repairs on time remains weak. A relatively high number of jobs are completed as urgent rather than routine work. The quality of work is often low and budget management is not fully robust. However, there have been some important customer-focused improvements including the introduction of wider service opening hours, strong repairs diagnosis and an appointment system. This has all contributed to relatively high levels of tenant satisfaction.
- 59 Arrangements for the management of responsive repairs are not embedded. The delivery of responsive repairs has been significantly impaired by problems experienced in 2007. Action was taken to address performance issues and GHA appointed a new contractor in December 2007 to ensure there was no gap in service delivery. Although performance has improved under the new contract, systems are not yet fully effective.

- 60** Performance in completing repairs on time is weak and there are weaknesses in performance management arrangements. A performance report produced by the contractor for the first three months of the contract (January to March 2008) indicated that 100 per cent of emergency and routine and 94.8 per cent of urgent repairs were being completed within the respective timescales. However, a review conducted by an external consultant has indicated lower performance levels of only 91.01 per cent of emergencies, 94.06 per cent of urgent and 97.56 per cent of routine works being completed on time. A separate report for June 2008 indicated that 89.01 per cent of emergencies, 88.51 per cent of urgent and 98 per cent of routine work was completed on time. This highlights inconsistencies in performance and indicates that high priority jobs which may involve health and safety risks are not always being responded to quickly enough. It also demonstrates that performance management arrangements for the responsive maintenance contract are not yet fully reliable and embedded.
- 61** A relatively high proportion of jobs are completed as urgent repairs. Cumulative reports for the year to date are not routinely produced but performance in June 2008 showed that 7 per cent were categorised as 24 hour/emergencies, 31 per cent were five day/urgent and 63 per cent were categorised as routine repairs to be completed within 28 days. This means that operatives have to travel long distances to carry out individual repairs when costs could be reduced by batching more jobs together as routine work.
- 62** The quality of repairs work completed is often low. Post inspections are showing that responsive repairs are completed to an inconsistent standard. In March 2008, of those jobs inspected only 69 per cent were considered to meet the standard, in June 2008 this had increased to 78 per cent but this still represents an unacceptably high failure rate.
- 63** Budget management of repairs work is not robust. Monthly management accounts have identified that repairs to voids are being inaccurately coded to the responsive repairs budget. Also, there is a risk that responsive repairs budgets are picking up work that should have been carried out during the void period. The inspection team was alerted to this when a tenant was advised to report a faulty kitchen work surface as a repair after moving into a property. Repairs carried out as responsive repairs cost more than those in empty properties.
- 64** Important customer-focused improvements have been made in the service. Positive steps have been taken to widen service opening hours. The new contractor provides the first point of contact for tenants through a national call centre accessed by a free phone number 24 hours a day. This has delivered significant improvement in diagnosis of repair requests. Performance reports indicate that between January and April 2008 over 95 per cent of jobs were completed in a single visit. Tenants are offered an appointment (choice of morning or afternoon) at the time of first reporting the repair and written confirmation of this is sent. This positive development has had an impact on tenants' perception of the service as overall satisfaction with the repairs service is 92 per cent although this is based on a low return rate of approximately 10 per cent. However, further work is needed on keeping appointments as only 82 per cent of appointments made in June 2008 were kept.

How good is the service?

65 There is a targeted approach to carrying out inspections of work. Pre-inspections are being minimised through accurate diagnosis by the call centre. There is a target to post inspect 10 per cent of work. Jobs are selected according to risk with a smaller selection of randomly selected work. This approach is enabling service failures to be identified and remedial action taken to overcome incomplete repairs work.

Empty (void) property repairs

66 At the time of the last inspection this was another area where weaknesses outweighed strengths. It took too long to relet properties and they were not being consistently repaired to the published standard, arrangements for ordering work were inefficient and some systems with the new partnering contractor were not working effectively. However, the quality of relet properties was found to be positive.

67 This inspection, weaknesses significantly outweigh strengths in this area. Properties are remaining empty for too long and the quality of work is variable. Tenants are not sufficiently involved in empty property management and internal contract management arrangements are not fully coordinated. However, the relet standard is relatively clear and costs of void repairs work are relatively low.

68 It takes too long to relet empty properties. As with responsive repairs, previous contract arrangements proved unsatisfactory and the new responsive repairs contractor has also taken on voids work with effect from March 2008. Overall, GHA and the contractor are fire-fighting to manage empty homes rather than having a longer-term strategic approach. There is a shortage of labour available particularly for specific works such as cleaning. The average time that properties remain empty is currently 56 days. This has increased from 43 days at the time of the last inspection in 2006 and far exceeds GHA's own target of 35 days. The number of empty properties is also increasing meaning that prospective tenants have to wait longer for their new home to become available and significant income is being lost.

69 The quality of work carried out in empty properties is variable. The association has only recently started to conduct satisfaction surveys of new tenants meaning it is too early to draw conclusions from early responses. However, reality checks and discussions with tenants indicate that properties are not always being let to the published voids standard. Examples of work not completed satisfactorily include low standards of cleaning. Tenants are asked to report repairs again when they have moved into their new homes. This does not provide a positive first impression of the landlord to new tenants.

70 Tenants are not sufficiently involved in empty property management. A new relet standard has been adopted by the association since the last inspection. However, the standard was developed without consultation with tenants (other than those on the Operations Committee). Tenants are not involved in checking whether void properties meet the standard. It is difficult for new tenants to know what to expect as the voids standard is not included within the welcome pack (although it is published on the website).

- 71 Internal contract management arrangements are not fully coordinated. Fragmentation of supervision of voids and responsive repairs contracts between housing management and property services staff does not act in the best interests of the organisation. It increases the risk that the contractor will withhold carrying out work when the property is empty so that a higher rate can be charged later.
- 72 The relet standard is relatively clear and easy to understand. Although there are weaknesses in how the standard is applied, it is positive that the standard provides a reasonably clear description to the contractor of what is required. The standard has been simplified since the last inspection and this makes it easier to hold the contractor to account. However, in some areas the standard is too vague, for example the definition of cleaning is open to misinterpretation and there is no clear definition of when and to what value decoration allowances are payable. This could lead to subjective decisions being taken.
- 73 Costs of void repairs work are relatively low. Average voids costs are approximately £1,000. However, this must be seen in the context of some works being deferred until the tenant moves in and the fact that void properties are not brought up to the decent homes standard. A discount is applied for work carried out in void properties with an uplift on the national schedule of rates of 14 per cent applied rather than 24 per cent for responsive repairs.

Gas servicing

- 74 The last inspection found this to be an area of weakness. The association was not meeting its obligation to carry out annual servicing although records were maintained efficiently and tenant satisfaction was positive.
- 75 This inspection, strengths significantly outweigh weaknesses. Annual gas servicing is carried out promptly and effectively. Procedures ensure that access is gained before certificates expire and work is independently validated. Customer satisfaction is high.
- 76 Annual gas safety checks are carried out promptly. Data in August 2008 indicates that 100 per cent of properties with gas appliances had an up-to-date certificate. Performance has improved due to additional resources invested in the service supporting a more frequent servicing regime based on a ten-month cycle. An independent contractor is employed to check the quality of work on a random sample of 10 per cent of jobs. These checks have found that work is carried out according to contractual requirements. However, access difficulties have meant that the 10 per cent target has not been achieved. In May 2008, 52 checks had been completed out of 1,914 jobs.
- 77 Procedures are effective and have been independently audited. Recommendations from an audit carried out in November 2007 have been implemented. Late evening and Saturday appointments are available (but this is not publicised). There is a clear escalation procedure that is sensitive to vulnerable residents. The use of a flag on the IT system alerts staff when tenants make contact, prompting them to make gas servicing appointments.

How good is the service?

- 78** Awareness of the importance of gas safety is promoted. There are regular articles in the tenants' newsletter. Letters to arrange appointments are clear and set out the importance of providing access for the contractor. There is also a strong focus on making contact with tenants who are not providing access and time has been invested to win the confidence of vulnerable tenants to gain access, this is supported by engineers being available at short notice to respond quickly where access has been provided. As a result of the focus on access arrangements GHA has not had to take any court action to force access.
- 79** There is a customer-focused approach to gas servicing. The opportunity is taken to undertake servicing and replacement of smoke and carbon monoxide detectors while gaining access for gas servicing. This both improves customer safety and reduces the inconvenience of a second appointment having to be made. Service quality is reflected in high levels of satisfaction with 98 per cent of tenants recording positive feedback after the completion of work.

Aids and adaptations

- 80** This was an area of significant weakness at the time of the last inspection. There was no strategic approach, there was no understanding of the needs of disabled tenants, budget and performance management was not effective and the service was not publicised.
- 81** This inspection, strengths outweigh weaknesses in this area. Clear arrangements are in place for delivery of prompt minor adaptations supported by a specialist agency. GHA understands the demand for adaptations and promotes the availability of services. Minor works are completed effectively and tenants are supported to receive major adaptations. However, performance management arrangements are underdeveloped.
- 82** Clear policies and procedures have been developed in relation to aids and adaptations. Recognising that it did not have the in-house skills and capacity to support tenants in securing adaptations, GHA has developed a partnership with a home improvement agency. Under the terms of a service level agreement, the agency is responsible for providing prompt and specialist assessments. Procedures are based on positive practice recommended by the College of Occupational Therapists. This means that the respective responsibilities for undertaking assessments and carrying out work are clearly understood by staff.
- 83** GHA has developed a strong understanding of the demand for adaptations. As part of the customer profiling project, information has been collected on the disability profile of tenants. In addition to this, all tenants have been written to and informed of the availability of adaptations. This has led to a manageable increase in requests for adaptations.

- 84** Aids and adaptations work is promoted. In addition to writing to tenants, the association has produced a leaflet which clearly explains the availability of adaptations work. The leaflet sets out the respective responsibilities of GHA, councils and the agency. It also publicises the service standards of 14 days for an assessment to be undertaken and 28 days for adaptations to be completed. This means that it is made clear what tenants can expect from the service and they are therefore able to hold GHA to account for failure to meet targets.
- 85** Minor works are completed effectively. A budget of £40,000 has proved sufficient to ensure that minor works are being completed within the 28 day target. There is no waiting list for work. Tenant satisfaction is reasonably high at 92 per cent.
- 86** GHA supports tenants who need major adaptations to their properties. The SLA with the specialist home improvement agency ensures that all tenants requiring major adaptations are supported to apply for DFG funding. The HIA also acts as an advocate in liaising with the respective councils and home improvement agencies to ensure that grant work is completed. This approach represents a positive use of resources as the association does not have the in-house expertise to undertake this work.
- 87** Performance management of aids and adaptations is underdeveloped. The agency is not providing performance reports on a regular basis on the number of tenants receiving assessment, the length of wait for assessments and the average costs of adaptations work. This indicates that the association is not actively involved in managing the aids and adaptations process. This presents a risk that the association will not be in a position to intervene if performance does not meet published service standards.

Housing income management

- 88** The last inspection found that there was a balance of strengths and weaknesses. Income collection performance was mixed, rent collection was good but service charge collection was poor. There was an emphasis on debt prevention and early intervention in arrears. However, there was a lack of focus on low-level arrears and the ICT system was ineffective. Payment methods were flexible and new tenants were encouraged to establish positive payment patterns.
- 89** This inspection, strengths outweigh weaknesses in this area. Performance in collecting rent is effective. The association works well to minimise debt, maximise income and prevent arrears occurring. Resources are applied to support housing officers in delivering clear targets. Positive relations with partners help promote welfare benefits take up. Tenants are well informed about rent issues and a wide range of payment options are available. However, incentives are not offered to encourage prompt and efficient payments. Information on rent and service charge setting is not clearly communicated and some elements of the service are not customer-focused. Former tenant arrears are being tackled but remain high.
- 90** Performance in rent collection is good. GHA has improved rent collection significantly since the last inspection and performance indicators at the year end 2007/08 show that rent arrears have reduced to 3.29 per cent of debit compared to 6.09 per cent in 2006/07. This means that the association is among the top 25 per cent of performers.

How good is the service?

- 91** There is a clear strategic focus on minimising debt and maximising income. Objectives set out in the association's first Financial Inclusion Strategy developed in 2006 have largely been achieved and a new strategy has been adopted to cover the years 2007-2010. The strategy places a clear focus on the importance of arrears prevention and support for those facing social exclusion while at the same time emphasising the need to provide appropriate reactions to non-payment of rent. This is important as it shows that GHA recognises the role that it can play as landlord in supporting those potentially experiencing financial exclusion.
- 92** GHA provides the resources which enables housing officers to act effectively in tackling rent arrears and minimising debt. Individual arrears targets are set for offices which reflect the areas they manage. A specialist Financial Inclusion Officer (FIO) is employed who provides a strong resource in delivering training and support to new and existing staff. The FIO is equipped to take on more complex cases, and serves as an in-house expert on welfare benefits. Customer Services Officers support housing officers by carrying out more routine rent arrears work on low level cases. A significant development since the last inspection has been the application of new IT software which automatically prompts the appropriate action in accordance with internal policies and procedures. Officers make use of computer systems to calculate tenants' benefit entitlements. This ensures that GHA has the capacity to deal with all levels of arrears in a timely and appropriate manner.
- 93** The association works well with a range of partners to help promote welfare benefits take-up. A service level agreement has been entered into with Citizens Advice (CAB) to provide an independent 'fast track' debt referral service. GHA makes use of the CAB to negotiate realistic repayment amounts. The association works closely with credit unions to promote low cost loan arrangements. Staff actively take part in welfare benefit take up campaigns run by local authorities. This is important in ensuring that tenants have access to up-to-date information about a range of benefits.
- 94** Tenants are well informed about rent issues. The association provides high quality information about rent and the availability of support. The importance of paying rent is emphasised prior to tenancies being offered through nomination interviews. This is followed by clear information given at the signing-up meeting and again when housing officers visit new tenants after four to six weeks. All tenants living on estates covered by the starter tenancies are contacted by the Financial Inclusion Officer. The website has clear information on rent and money matters with useful links to other related websites. The welcome pack includes useful leaflets on rent issues. Quarterly rent statements are clearly set out and include further useful information on the back. Standard rent arrears letters are clear and easy to understand. These measures provide positive steps which help to prevent rent arrears arising.
- 95** A broad range of payment methods are available. Further payment options have been added to the already wide choice offered at the time of the last inspection. Payments can be made via the internet, by direct debit, standing order, by payment card at post offices and an increasing number of shops. Payments can also be made by credit or debit card at the office or over the phone. This ensures that there are suitable payment options to reflect different individual circumstances.

- 96** There are positive working relationships with housing benefit departments. Service level agreements are in place with most of the 11 councils where GHA has stock. Where liaison meetings are held, GHA frequently attends these. In Gloucester, GHA officers have access to the council's 'open access' computer system and this enables staff to check progress on applications and entitlement calculations.
- 97** Positive steps are taken to prevent eviction. The association has been successful in reducing evictions for rent arrears from 19 in 2006/07 to 13 in 2007/08. Protocols have been signed with councils which ensure that homelessness departments are routinely informed where notices of seeking possession are served. In Gloucester the association participates in a tenancy rescue scheme which provides emergency funding in return for a moratorium on eviction. This is important in avoiding the social and economic cost incurred when people lose their home.
- 98** GHA is on course to meet target rents within Housing Corporation timescales. It is implementing its rent plan and convergence for the majority of properties is expected to be achieved by 2012.
- 99** GHA does not provide incentives to encourage prompt and efficient payments. Although campaigns have been held to encourage payment by direct debit (the most cost effective payment method) there is no financial incentive offered to encourage this. Consequently, relatively few pay by this method (14 per cent), preferring to use bank standing order and other methods. Incentives are not offered for prompt payment of rent accounts.
- 100** Information on rent and service charge setting is not clearly communicated to tenants. Customer surveys have highlighted that tenants would like more information about how service charges are set and what they cover. There has been limited consultation over service charge levels and generally awareness is low. There is a section on the website entitled 'what your rent covers' but there is little useful information here and no reference to service charges. Neither the website nor the tenants' handbook includes information explaining how rents are set. This has the impact of reducing the level of accountability that the association has to its tenants for the services provided.
- 101** The service is not fully customer-focused. Service standards have not been set for income management. For example, there is no formal commitment stating how quickly requests for debt advice will be responded to. Satisfaction with the service is not formally measured. This means that tenants are not well placed to judge the performance of the service and an opportunity for learning from customer feedback is being missed.
- 102** Collection of other debts is not fully effective. The association has placed greater importance on the collection of former tenant rent arrears since the last inspection and a dedicated housing assistant post is now responsible for administration of these arrears. Write-off of arrears is now more frequent and use is made of a debt recovery agency. However, former tenant arrears remain high at £174,557. New policies have been developed for the collection of rechargeable repairs but so far there has been little success in the recovery of these costs. Rent statements do not support the recovery of sundry debts as these are not shown on the documents. This means that the association is not maximising its income.

How good is the service?

Tenancy and estate management

103 The last inspection found that there was a balance of strengths and weaknesses. A wide range of measures were used to address anti-social behaviour (ASB), with effective partnership arrangements with other organisations. Some use was made of diversionary activities and efforts were made to support people to maintain their tenancies. However, monitoring arrangements were weak, service standards were not in place for estate management and grounds maintenance was not provided to a consistently high standard.

Tenancy management

104 This inspection, strengths outweigh weaknesses in tenancy management. There is a robust framework for tackling tenancy management issues and policies are clearly communicated to tenants. Tenancy agreements support effective management and a broad range of remedies to tackle anti-social behaviour are used in partnership with other organisations. GHA plays an active role in supporting community development initiatives. However, there is a lack of service standards and customer satisfaction is not being measured in all cases. Success in sustaining tenancies is also not formally monitored.

105 Clear policies and procedures provide a robust framework for tackling tenancy management issues. An ASB framework incorporates policies covering prevention, support and enforcement. Policies cover racial harassment and domestic abuse. GHA has signed up to the Respect Standard and its Respect Action Plan provides clear direction for service development. Procedures are clearly set out ensuring a consistency in case management. Since the last inspection, a specialist ASB officer has been appointed to provide operational support, particularly where legal action is taken. Housing Officers are provided with a broad range of training on all procedures. This means that the association is equipped to tackle challenging tenancy management problems.

106 GHA communicates effectively about tenancy management issues. The welcome pack includes specific leaflets on anti-social behaviour, racial harassment and domestic abuse. All these publications provide definitions of the various forms of harassment, abuse and anti-social behaviour and make it clear how incidence can be reported and sets timescales for responding (interviews within 24 hours in emergency cases and five days in non-urgent cases). This information is also available on the website and cases can be reported on-line. This makes it easy for tenants to understand the action that GHA will take and encourages tenants to report cases.

107 Tenancy agreements support effective management. Tenancy agreements are easy to read and have been awarded a plain English crystal mark for clarity. They include clauses defining examples of nuisance, annoyance, disturbance and harassment including on the grounds of race and sexuality. There is a clear policy on starter tenancies which are used on specific estates where there is a history of tenancy sustainment problems. This is important as it makes it easier for GHA to tackle anti-social behaviour using legal remedies.

- 108** The association works effectively with partners on tenancy management issues leading to some positive outcomes for local people. The association participates in Crime and Disorder Reduction Partnerships (CDRPs) across the districts in which works. This has led to some effective collaboration including a joint housing surgery which is held with the Police on one Gloucester estate. The association also actively participates in a Family Intervention Project in Gloucester and is represented on the board of management. Participation in Safer Estates meetings has enabled information sharing and a joined-up approach to be taken with other landlords on multi tenure estates. Successful outcomes from partnerships have included coordination of police action on estates and work to improve the behaviour of tenants including parenting courses with the result that tenancies are sustained.
- 109** Support is provided to victims of anti-social behaviour. The association has a service level agreement with a local mediation service and mediation is promoted as a form of resolving disputes (although there have only been two referrals in the first six months of 2008). GHA makes use of the availability of floating support services delivered by separate service providers.
- 110** An effective range of remedies are used to tackle anti-social behaviour. Use is made of CCTV technology to provide witness support and to provide evidence. A dedicated budget is available for taking practical steps to tackle problems. For example, as a form of reassurance to a victim, the association has installed a fire proof letter box in one location. Estate budgets are used to provide defensive planting. Legal powers are used and during the first six months of 2008, four injunctions have been obtained, three notices of seeking possession served, one acceptable behaviour contract (ABC) applied and one outright possession order obtained. The association has recently started to publicise successful legal action as a way of demonstrating that it is taking reports of ASB seriously.
- 111** There is robust performance management of ASB supported by effective use of specialist IT software. The system is managed by the ASB officer and all housing officers have access to it. Where time targets are being missed the system automatically sends a warning to staff and managers. The system makes it easy to collect performance information on all live cases. The system also demonstrates that clear records of all action taken are recorded and where cases are closed clear reasons are given.
- 112** GHA plays an active role in supporting community development initiatives. The association has been involved in promoting a range of diversionary and community activities. For example:
- at Brockworth a community grant was provided to support a playgroup. It has also funded Parentline Plus to enable support to be targeted on a particular estate;
 - on another Gloucester estate funding has supported the mother and toddler group which has enabled learning about child health care and family health issues;

How good is the service?

- in Quedgeley, GHA has contributed approximately £6,000 per year towards youth outreach work; and
- in Cheltenham, GHA contributes £5,000 per year towards the post of community investment worker. Funding is provided to support various activities such as fun days and youth music sessions.

This is important as it demonstrates that the association engages with communities and is investing in measures which will help to make areas more sustainable places to live.

- 113** The tenancy management service is not fully customer-focused. Service standards are limited to basic response times (as detailed above) and do not include a full summary of what tenants can expect. For example, there is no formal commitment to write to complainants when a case is being closed. Until very recently there has been no customer satisfaction monitoring. A pilot scheme has recently commenced but so far this has only covered cases which have been led by the ASB Officer.
- 114** Success in sustaining tenancies is not formally monitored. The association does not set targets or report on its performance in maintaining new tenancies. This means that although steps are taken to support tenancies, such as new tenant visits and use of starter tenancies, the association cannot be sure that these actions are resulting in people being able to maintain their tenancies.

Estate management

- 115** This inspection, strengths and weaknesses are in balance in estate management. Estates are generally tidy and well kept and budgets allow tenants some input to decisions on estate improvements. Estate inspections are carried out but are not fully effective and there is insufficient involvement of tenants in shaping and monitoring estate management contracts.
- 116** Estates are generally tidy and well kept. A proactive approach is taken by housing officers, often in liaison with street or block representatives to tackle abandoned vehicles, fly tipping and graffiti. Play equipment is subject to annual inspection as part of insurance requirements. The appearance provides a positive impression of GHA managed developments as places to live.
- 117** Minor estate improvement budgets allow housing officers to undertake 'quick fixes' on estates. Each of the nine housing officers has a budget of £1,500 which is used for a range of issues including gardening enhancements such as planting to improve estate security. In addition to this, there is an environmental improvement budget of £20,000 for larger projects where tenants are involved the decision-making process. This provides a valuable way of engaging residents in decisions which enhance the appearance of estates.

- 118** Estate inspections are not fully effective. It is positive that estate inspections which involve joint walkabouts between housing officers and tenants have been introduced. These have taken place on approximately 20 estates so far. In one case the housing officer has produced a leaflet providing feedback on the estate inspection. However, these inspections have not been well attended and there is little information provided about them either on the website or in newsletters and it is therefore not always clear that they have had an impact in improving estate management.
- 119** There is insufficient involvement of tenants in shaping and monitoring the cleaning and grounds maintenance contracts. Although both contracts are delivering reasonable quality of service, there is currently a lack of flexibility to meet local needs as a single specification applies across all estates. There is a lack of defined service standards for estate management, the specification is not publicised and therefore tenants cannot judge whether it is being met. There is also some fragmentation in the supervision of estate management services, although housing officers are responsible for minor estate improvement expenditure they are not responsible for supervision of the cleaning or grounds maintenance contractors which is managed by property services staff. This reduces the level of accountability of estate management services to tenants.

Is the service delivering value for money?

- 120** Weaknesses outweighed strengths at the time of the last inspection. Costs were not consistent with the quality of service provided. The association had not developed a comprehensive understanding of how costs compared with others and the approach to procurement was underdeveloped. However, a value for money strategy had been approved and the cost effectiveness of financial arrangements had improved.
- 121** In this inspection, weaknesses significantly outweigh strengths in this area. Management costs are comparatively high and are not consistent with the quality of the services provided. There are significant weaknesses in the strategic framework for delivering value for money and the strategic approach to procurement is weak. The association does not fully understand its costs and is failing to maximise income and a culture of value for money is not fully embedded. However, some practical steps are being taken to secure economies and budget control is effective.

How do costs compare?

- 122** Benchmarking has indicated that costs are high compared to other similar organisations and are not consistent with the quality of the services provided. Based on comparisons carried out through the HouseMark benchmarking club in 2006/07 housing management costs are approximately 20 per cent higher than other traditional housing associations. Total core housing management costs were £850 compared to £683. Higher costs are not always reflected in higher levels of service. Overall tenant satisfaction was rated as 74 per cent for GHA compared with an average of 79 per cent for other traditional housing associations. This means that there is not a positive relationship between cost and quality.

How good is the service?

123 There is self awareness of GHA's position in relation to value for money. A report to the Audit and Risk Committee in May 2008 made the position clear. It stated: 'GHA has relatively high costs without commensurate performance'. However, the association also recognises that it does not fully understand why its costs are higher than others. It is therefore currently in the process of carrying out a review of its costs with a focus on the high levels of overheads.

How is value for money managed?

- 124** The strategic framework to deliver value for money is underdeveloped. The VFM strategy agreed in 2006 has not been taken forward. A commitment in the strategy to rewrite the VFM Action Plan annually has not been met. It is positive that the strategic objectives outlined in the Business Plan highlights the need to generate value for money for customers but this has yet to be translated into a clear and up-to-date strategy.
- 125** GHA's strategic approach to procurement is weak. There are some positive examples of modern procurement methods being utilised such as in the use of purchasing consortia but there is a lack of a corporate approach to effective procurement and it is largely left to the initiative of individual officers to seek to achieve value for money. Many high-cost contracts such as responsive repairs, and voids repairs are let on traditional schedules of rates. Other contracts such as lift maintenance are relet annually rather than on a more efficient long-term basis. Without a holistic approach to procurement the organisation will continue to miss opportunities to reduce costs and improve quality.
- 126** GHA is failing to maximise income. There has been a poor track record identifying where recharges should be raised. Although there is now a written procedure in place this is not being applied across either voids or responsive repairs.
- 127** Overall a culture of value for money is not demonstrated across the organisation. A review of the training programmes for the past two years indicates that staff, board members and tenants have not received training on value for money or procurement.
- 128** GHA is taking some practical steps to secure economies. At the highest level, the move to a group partnership offers the opportunity to draw on the wider resources of a large housing organisation which should have a positive impact on overheads. The association is disposing of some stock which because of its location is uneconomical to manage.
- 129** Budget control is effective. The previous practice of producing budgets by category of expenditure has been replaced by a cost centred approach with managers involved in the development of the accounting structure and in agreeing budgets. This provides greater individual accountability than before and creates a firm basis for understanding costs and undertaking meaningful service reviews.

130 There are some other practical examples where positive steps are taken to secure value for money.

- Efficiencies have been achieved in capital work. According to the Annual Efficiency Statement gains of £454,000 were reported in capital works in 2007/08. This contrasts very clearly with substantial efficiency losses of £572,000 in maintenance reported in 2006/07.
- Housing Officers undertake their own court proceedings and make use of on-line possession application processes, saving legal costs.
- Additional funding to support investment has been attracted for example £64,427 of energy grants which has enabled improvements to 343 homes.
- Approximately £60,000 has been saved by outsourcing repairs call handling.
- The budget for 2008/09 shows that there is a good balance between responsive and planned expenditure. Excluding repairs to voids 21 per cent on responsive work and 78 per cent on planned and works.
- Investment in IT is delivering more efficiency. For example there has been significant automation of IT resulting in prompt crediting of rent accounts with DD and HB payments.

What are the prospects for improvement to the service?

What is the service track record in delivering improvement?

- 131** The last inspection found that the recent Service Improvement Plan had delivered some important improvements for tenants. The general direction of travel of key performance indicators was positive albeit from a low base. There was not an effective track record of improving value for money.
- 132** In this inspection we found that strengths outweigh weaknesses in this area. The association has a positive track record of responding to external recommendations. Some important improvements have been delivered many of which are having a real impact on customers. Trends in performance indicators and customer satisfaction are generally positive but in some cases the scale of improvements has been weak. In addition, there is not a track record of delivering value for money.
- 133** GHA has responded positively to the last inspection. The inspection led to a programme of change. Service Improvement Plans have largely addressed the recommendations we made in the 2006 inspection. There were eight broad recommendations and 30 supporting tasks arising from the last inspection. Appendix 2 lists these and indicates progress in each area. It shows that positive progress has been made on all eight recommendations. Of the 30 tasks, all with the exception of seven tasks have been fully completed. Key recommendations which have been implemented include the development of a clearer strategic long term vision, improvements to access and customer care, particularly an improved understanding of customer profile, improvement in diversity awareness, effective implementation of gas servicing policies and an improved out-of-hours repairs service. The most significant recommendations not yet fully implemented relate to value for money and the enhancement of human resources (HR) services.
- 134** Trends in performance indicators are generally positive but in some cases the scale of improvement has been weak. Rent arrears have significantly fallen from 5.05 per cent in 2005/06 to 3.29 per cent in 2007/08. The proportion of stock failing the decent homes standard has reduced from 12.5 per cent in 2005/06 to 9.76 per cent in 2007/08. The percentage of homes with valid gas safety certificates has risen from 96.2 per cent at the time of the last inspection in September 2006 to 100 per cent in August 2008. However, performance in reletting empty properties has remained consistently weak with current performance of an average of 56 days being the same as in 2005/06. The association is also yet to demonstrate that improvements in responsive repairs are embedded: in 2005/06, 95.8 per cent of routine repairs were completed in target time, while in the first three months of 2008 this indicator showed performance of 94.06 per cent.

What are the prospects for improvement to the service?

- 135** Some important improvements have been delivered through the implementation of service improvement plans. Significant improvements have been delivered through the implementation of new IT. For example, new anti-social behaviour and rent management software has delivered improvements in working practices. The development of the customer services centre and enhancements to the website have improved access to services. Many of these improvements have been complex and have involved effective project management.
- 136** There has been a focus on making improvements which have a positive impact on customers. Tenants have noticed improvements in the way that repairs calls are handled. Appointments are now made at the first point of contact. It is now easier for tenants to obtain support and advice about paying their rent and to receive aids and adaptations. The development of local surgeries and estate inspections in some areas demonstrates a visible improvement in access to housing officers. Positive outcomes from resident involvement include the creation of a customer charter, revised kitchen design specification and a revised repairs manual.
- 137** Trends in user satisfaction are generally positive. Overall customer satisfaction, although comparatively low, has improved from 74 per cent in 2006 to 78 per cent in 2008. During the same period satisfaction with the overall repairs service increased from 65 per cent to 69 per cent. (Satisfaction with individual repairs jobs marginally improved from 91.3 per cent in 2006 to 93 per cent in March 2008). Satisfaction with gas servicing has improved from 89 per cent in 2006 to 98 per cent in 2008. GHA is now collecting satisfaction information in more areas than it was in 2006 although there are still some significant gaps.
- 138** There is not a track record of delivering value for money. Although there are some individual examples of achieving savings, this is not supported by a comprehensive strategic framework. Work has started on developing a better understanding of how costs compare but this has yet to lead to positive outcomes.

How well does the service manage performance?

- 139** The last inspection found that the management team had recently been strengthened and there was a willingness to take tough decisions. There was a high level of self awareness and openness to learning. There had been investment in service planning and performance management although day to day performance management was not fully effective. There were weaknesses in future plans, some important areas of weakness had not been addressed and the long-term strategic direction had not been developed.
- 140** This inspection found that strengths outweigh weaknesses in this area. The Board has demonstrated strong leadership to services by taking some tough decisions and the organisation has established a clear strategic direction. A new performance management framework has been successfully implemented and there is regular scrutiny of performance. Financial and risk management arrangements are in place and there is now a greater focus on value for money in managing performance. However, there are weaknesses in target-setting, the performance management arrangements of some contracts and in the engagement of tenants in monitoring performance. The approach to learning is mixed.

What are the prospects for improvement to the service?

- 141** The Board has demonstrated strong leadership to services by taking some tough decisions. It has taken steps to strengthen the executive management team and in July 2008 the decision was taken to enter a group structure of a large, national housing association. While the Board recognises that this decision will result in a loss of some autonomy, it is confident that the decision will bring benefits both financially and in terms of the quality of service delivery. The Board acted decisively in dealing with contractor performance issues and in its plans to dispose of housing stock in Milton Keynes. This indicates that the leadership of the organisation is seeking to improve services for its customers.
- 142** The organisation has established a clear strategic direction. A new Business Plan sets a clear direction. The plan was developed following wide ranging consultation with board members, staff and tenants, with focus groups being led by independent consultants. The plan sets out broadly how objectives are to be delivered. It describes how the three strategic objectives are to be delivered and lists some key indicators of performance. A range of strategies and action plans provide future direction. For example the Equalities and Diversity Strategy has a related action plan and progress on this is reported to the Board every six months.
- 143** A new performance management framework has been effectively implemented. The Service Improvement Plan (SIP) converts the high-level business objectives into manageable improvement tasks that are the specific responsibility of the respective executive team members. The SIP is supported by individual departmental plans. These plans pick up current weaknesses in service delivery arrangements including strategic development, development of value for money and procurement strategies, and service specific improvements such as developing more customer focus grounds maintenance services. This is important as it provides confidence that many of the weaknesses identified in the first part of this report will be addressed.
- 144** Objectives are clearly communicated to all staff. Work plans have been updated to reflect changes in SIPs. Staff are set clear targets and these are reviewed at regular one to one meetings with line managers. Ninety five per cent of staff appraisals were completed within the target time of April and May 2008. This is positive as it ensures that staff have an understanding of how they contribute to objectives.
- 145** There is regular scrutiny of performance. Weekly performance reports are generated on income and repairs management. The Board receives a set of performance indicators to monitor progress on key activities such as customer responsiveness, income management, human resource management and financial growth. They also receive indicators to monitor progress against regulatory requirements such as gas servicing and decent homes. The Operations Committee receives a set of performance indicators covering how effective, economic and efficient each service area is. These include a focus on levels of customer satisfaction. The Audit and Risk Committee review the performance against internal audit actions and the Governance and Remuneration Committee monitors human resource management performance specifically, for example recruitment and selection performance. The quality of reports to the Board is high and this makes it easier for board members to take decisions effectively.

What are the prospects for improvement to the service?

- 146** Risk management arrangements in place. A risk map is independently appraised by a specialist management consultancy. Key risks are considered by the Board through the Audit and Risk Committee. This informs the internal audit requirements for each year and day-to-day activities through the management of the Service Improvement Plan. A risk map has been completed for the move to the group structure which demonstrates an understanding of potential risks and the actions required to mitigate against them.
- 147** Project management arrangements are in place for the move to a group structure. A joint board steering group is being established to oversee the process supported by a high level officer steering group and eight implementation groups. A project plan and sub plans are in place. This provides assurance that the complex process of moving to a group structure is being thoughtfully approached and this should act to minimise disruption to services.
- 148** Financial management arrangements are effective. Management accounts reports have been simplified to make them easier for board members to understand and challenge. The move to a cost centred accounting system has improved individual budget holder accountability. The implementation of a new purchase ordering system has created better controls and ensures that orders cannot be placed unless there is a budget available. The system also shows where expenditure is committed but not yet incurred.
- 149** There is now greater focus on value for money in performance management. Performance reports now include value for money indicators and comparative performance with other landlords enables managers and board members to judge the relative quality of performance. New management accounts have separated overhead costs which makes it easier to understand direct management costs. The association is actively working with peers to develop a stronger understanding of how its cost compare. Although this work is not complete the building blocks are in place to deliver a more robust approach to cost benchmarking.
- 150** The approach to learning is mixed. GHA treats complaints positively and amends policies and practices as a result of learning from complaints. Complaints are reported to Operations Committee bi-monthly. The association has employed external consultants to undertake reality checks and provide challenge. This has informed service improvement plans. However, there are few examples of how the association has learnt from neighbouring high performing landlords.
- 151** Tenants are not sufficiently engaged in performance management issues. Tenant involvement in performance management is largely restricted to the three board members and the four tenants who sit on the Operations Committee. Few steps are taken to encourage tenants to challenge levels of performance. Although performance is reported to tenants through an annual report and the tenants' forum receives an annual report, performance reports have not so far been published on the website. This is a particular weakness as tenants are currently not involved in service reviews which have recently been focused on internal officer groups based on the Audit Commission Key Lines of Enquiries (KLOEs).

What are the prospects for improvement to the service?

- 152** There are weaknesses in the performance management arrangements of some contracts. Performance management of the repairs contractor is not fully effective. The robustness of performance reports produced by the repairs contractor has been tested by independent consultants. They have raised concerns over the validity of some information on appointments and calculation of voids performance. It is also concerning that the contractor reported a large increase in responsive repairs in July 2008 but there appeared to be little understanding of why this had occurred. GHA do not receive performance information to indicate how effectively the contractor is dealing with telephone calls (although computer software has recently been installed by the contractor to enable this). There are also weaknesses in the performance monitoring of the aids and adaptations agency which means that GHA does not have comprehensive information on issues such as waiting times.
- 153** There are some gaps and weaknesses in strategic plans. For example, strategic plans have not been developed for human resources, value for money, customer services, resident involvement and procurement. This reflects limited capacity and reinforces the decision to join a group structure. There are also some weaknesses in the asset management plan which are highlighted in the first part of this report. Without clear strategic plans in these areas future direction remains unclear.
- 154** There are some weaknesses in target-setting with some targets not ambitious. During the inspection several areas were identified where unambitious targets had not been set. These included 30 seconds for responding to telephone calls, a target of 7 per cent for abandoned phone calls, 35 days for reletting empty properties. It is positive that the association has responded by cutting some of these targets; nevertheless this indicates that challenge in setting targets has not always been robust.

Does the service have the capacity to improve?

- 155** The last inspection found that steps had been taken to increase management and staff capacity through training and organisational changes had allowed the association to focus resources on service weaknesses. However, there was limited capacity to deliver change while delivering day to day services. Specialist capacity in some key areas such as IT was weak and there were sickness and staff retention difficulties.
- 156** In this inspection we found that strengths outweigh weaknesses in this area. Staff capacity is good, management capacity has been enhanced and the capacity of board members is also improving. New HR policies are having a positive impact and the use of IT is generally effective although greater links could be made between systems. In addition, the move to a group structure has the potential to significantly increase capacity. However, the distribution of the housing stock presents a barrier to efficient management and the approach to procurement is not maximising capacity.

What are the prospects for improvement to the service?

- 157** Staffing and management capacity has been enhanced. Interim steps have been taken to strengthen the executive management team. Two interim appointments have been made to the post of Chief Executive and Finance Director. Internal staffing restructures have enhanced capacity. Staff previously working on development have been brought in to support the delivery of planned maintenance work. Dedicated officers focusing on Financial Inclusion and Anti-Social Behaviour provide valuable specialist support to generic housing officers. This has had a positive impact on performance with more homes being brought up to the decent homes standards, reducing rent arrears and more effective responses to breaches of tenancy conditions.
- 158** The capacity of board members is being developed. The Board has been working with a specialist consultancy that has been assisting them in undertaking self assessment as a board and as individuals. This is also helping the Board to develop itself as a team. All board members now have personal development plans. Work has also included an approach to ensure that it successfully moves from operational matters (historically there was some focus on this) to maintain a higher level strategic overview.
- 159** GHA is generally making effective use of ICT. Investment in ICT has been significantly strengthened since the last inspection. A new customer relations system is being implemented and is resulting in improved telephone call handling. Mobile technology has been implemented making it easier for officers to access and record information when working away from the office. Rents and anti-social behaviour systems are resulting in more automation and better performance management. Payment systems have been automated, reducing the need for manual postings to be made. The capacity of the IT team has been doubled from two to four officers which means that staff are now better supported and systems have become more stable and less likely to crash.
- 160** Staff capacity is good. Staff have access to a broad range of training and development. Annual appraisals lead to the development of an individual staff development plan. A budget of £84,000 per year is allocated to training. The training programme addresses a broad range of issues. Staff are also supported to obtain professional qualifications. In addition, staff morale is good. The results of a staff survey carried out earlier in 2008 were not available at the time of the inspection but generally staff morale appeared to be positive. Staff welcomed the open approach being taken to communicate forthcoming organisational changes and were open and supportive of them.
- 161** The move to a group structure has the potential to increase capacity. GHA has identified savings of a minimum of £400,000 as a direct result of the group structure proposal. In addition, there is a specific commitment from the group partner to contribute £50,000 to community development initiatives. The capacity of the wider group will enable the organisation to develop more strategic approaches in areas that are currently underdeveloped such as human resources.
- 162** New human resources policies are having a positive impact. A suite of HR policies and procedures have been developed covering issues such as sickness management and redundancy. These policies are having a positive impact. Staff turnover has reduced from 25 per cent at the time of the last inspection to 20 per cent in July 2008. During the same period sickness has reduced from an average of 11 days to 2.82 days.

What are the prospects for improvement to the service?

- 163** The distribution of the housing stock presents a barrier to efficient management. We reported in the last inspection that the range of activities managed by GHA presented a barrier. It is positive that the association has decided to rationalise some of its activities including the disposal of stock in Milton Keynes, swapping stock within the proposed new group structure, withdrawing from management agreements and supported housing management. However, the wide distribution of stock still presents a challenge. Work carried out by the board in preparation of the Business Plan identified that there was insufficient critical mass in some areas. Working in 11 local authority areas requires considerable duplication of work such as attending crime reduction and housing benefit meetings. Housing officers travel long distances for individual meetings with tenants. This means resources are not being used to optimum capacity.
- 164** There is some reliance on agency staff. GHA has experienced some difficulty in recruiting technical officers and has not been able to fill some posts. It has appointed two temporary staff to fill these gaps. This is a more expensive way of filling vacancies.
- 165** There are some weaknesses in computer interfaces. Housing management computer systems are not fully linked to other systems. This has an impact on updating stock condition databases with information when responsive repairs are carried out. The lack of an interface with accounting systems means that rental income has to be manually posted. Managers are not currently able to view up-to-date budget reports from their computers. This means that there is more dependency on manual processes and printed records than there could be.
- 166** The approach to procurement is not maximising capacity. As highlighted earlier, the use of traditional types of maintenance contracts and annual renewal of some contracts places an administrative burden on the association. There is not a comprehensive and up to date approach to procurement to ensure that the limited budgets available are used in the most effective way.

Appendix 1 – Performance indicators

Performance Indicator	2004/05	2005/06	2006/07	2006/07 Comparison Group Mean	2006/07 Comparison Group Median	2006/07 Quartile Position in Comparison Group
Stock Failing Decent Home Standard	0.2%	12.4%	8.2%	14.4%	13.5%	1
Average GN SAP rating	71	74	65	68	67	3
Routine repairs completed in target	75.0%	95.8%	89.3%	91.8%	93.5%	4
Vacant Dwellings	-	-	1.5%	1.9%	1.2%	3
Vacant General Needs Dwellings	-	-	1.2%	1.6%	0.8%	3
Re-let time (all managed stock)	-	-	44.6 days	40.2 days	32.3 days	4
GN Re-let time (for managed stock)	-	36 days	45.4 days	32.3 days	27.8 days	4
Current tenant arrears at FYE	-	-	6.9%	3.7%	3.7%	4
Tenant satisfaction overall	41%	75%	75%	81%	83%	3
Tenant satisfaction with participation	74%	63%	63%	61%	63%	3
Tenants satisfied with repairs & maintenance	-	-	65%	78%	81%	4
Shared owner satisfaction overall	59.9%	59.0%	59%	66%	-	-

Source: Housing Corporation

Appendix 2 – Previous recommendations

Recommendations of 2006 inspection

Recommendation	Progress
<p>Define a long-term vision and strategy with clear and challenging targets for the Association that:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • reflects the needs and aspirations of all residents; • ensures that the financial priorities of the Association match the needs and aspirations of its residents; and • informs the key future plans and strategies of the Association and its partners. 	<p>Achieved</p>
<p>Ensure continuous improvement by:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • ensuring that the range of actions contained within the Service Improvement Plan are delivered according to the timetable. 	<p>Achieved</p>
<p>Improve the access and customer care arrangements by:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • developing a robust understanding of the needs/requirements of all sections of the local community through effective monitoring systems; • developing a clear understanding of current patterns, volumes and types of customer contact and allocating resources to meet this need; • developing an action plan to ensure that that all information produced is clear, uses plain language and is widely available in appropriate alternative formats; • reviewing the need for and benefits of adopting more customer-focused opening hours; • reviewing the content of the website and the services it offers to residents; • developing a strategic approach to the provision of aids and adaptations; and • continue to embed equality and diversity and a customer-focused culture across the Association, for example, through training, and by setting challenging targets and objectives for improving outcomes for the whole community. 	<p>Achieved</p>

Appendix 2 – Previous recommendations

Recommendation	Progress
<p>Improve the Association’s approach to value for money by:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • developing a comprehensive understanding of how its costs compare; • routinely reviewing service cost alongside service performance; • implementing effective procurement practice across all services; • improving the arrangements for managing planned maintenance budgets and day-to-day performance management; and • regularly testing the service's value for money. 	<p>Work in progress: not yet achieved</p>
<p>Effectively manage risks to the Association, by:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • ensuring the effective implementation of the gas servicing policy and procedures; • ensuring that information on specific customer needs is consistently shared across the organisation and with contractors for example, for ‘potentially violent’ persons; and • implementing and monitoring the asbestos policy and action plan to ensure that there are robust systems and procedures to protect staff, contractors and tenants. 	<p>Achieved, but further work to complete asbestos surveys</p>
<p>Ensure existing capacity is effectively utilised by:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • ensuring that improvement priorities are clear and that responsibility for their delivery is delegated to the lowest practicable level; • challenging the range of services currently provided and exploring ways that these could be better delivered for example, through partnership; and • enhancing the Association’s focus on HR issues to ensure that all HR policies are effectively implemented and that the HR plays a key role in supporting organisational change. 	<p>Partially achieved: Approach to HR is not strategic</p>
<p>Monitor the new responsive repairs contract to ensure it addresses the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • day-to-day budgetary control; • key performance outcomes including the number of jobs completed in target and right first time, the quality of the service and the role of tenants in quality control; • develop a repairs diagnostic tool; and • improved out-of-hours service. 	<p>Partially achieved. Performance management of new contractor not yet fully effective</p>

Appendix 2 – Previous recommendations

Recommendation	Progress
<p>Deliver an improved repairs and maintenance service by:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• reviewing the policy of undertaking 20 per cent stock condition surveys to ensure that it meets the business needs of the Association;• publicise the five-year cyclical maintenance programme;• broadening the responsive repairs satisfaction surveys to ensure that they collect more information on the performance of contractors;• ensuring that the survey form used for voids inspections reflects the lettings standard;• providing all new tenants with a copy of the lettings standard;• publicising the fact that gas servicing can be arranged at the weekends; and• developing a suite of service standards for aids and adaptations.	<p>Partially achieved. New tenants were not receiving a copy of the lettings standard</p>

Appendix 3 – Reality checks undertaken

- 1 When we went on-site we carried out a number of different checks, building on the work described above, in order to get a full picture of how good the service is. These on-site reality checks were designed to gather evidence about what it is like to use the service and to see how well it works. Our reality checks included:
 - focus groups with staff, tenants and contractors;
 - interviews with staff and partners;
 - viewing property improvements and repairs;
 - inspection of ready to let properties;
 - shadowing staff carrying out their activities;
 - observation at customer services centre;
 - estate inspections;
 - talking to tenants;
 - observation of meetings and tenancy sign up;
 - various file checks; and
 - review of web site, leaflets; and mystery shopping.

Appendix 4 – Positive practice

‘The Commission will identify and promote good practice. Every inspection will look for examples of good practice and innovation, and for creative ways to overcome barriers and resistance to change or make better use of resources’. (Seeing is Believing)

Targeting financial advice at those most susceptible to rent arrears

- 1** GHA carried out a review of starter tenancies and identified that tenants living on estates where there is a policy of using starter (introductory) tenancies are more susceptible to rent arrears. In response to this, the association's financial Inclusion Officer now makes contact with all new tenants to offer support and advice.

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For further information on the work of the Commission please contact:

Audit Commission, 1st Floor, Millbank Tower, Millbank, London SW1P 4HQ

Tel: 020 7828 1212 Fax: 020 7976 6187 Textphone (minicom): 020 7630 0421

www.audit-commission.gov.uk
