

## NOTTINGHAM CITY HOMES

### REPORT OF DIRECTOR OF STRATEGY & PARTNERSHIPS.

**THE BOARD  
19 MARCH 2009**

#### AUDIT COMMISSION INSPECTION 2008

### 1 SUMMARY

- 1.1 This report outlines the findings of the Audit Commission Report into Nottingham City Homes.

### 2 RECOMMENDATIONS

- 2.1 It is recommended the Board accept the Audit Commission's report and its recommendations and note the proposals for addressing the recommendations and weaknesses identified by it.

### 3 BACKGROUND

- 3.1 Nottingham City Homes was re-inspected by the Audit Commission in September 2008 to assess the standard of the housing service. This follows a previous inspection in 2005 when the Audit Commission assessed Nottingham City Homes as providing a 1star (Fair) service, with uncertain prospects for improvement.
- 3.2 The Audit Commission assess the service using the Key Lines of Enquiry as the basis of their Inspection. The Audit Commission's rating system is based on 2 judgements.

Judgement 1 – How good is the Service?	
0 Star	Poor
1 Star	Fair
2 Star	Good
3 Star	Excellent

Judgement 1 measures the level of service currently provided by the organisation

Judgement 2 – What are the prospects for improvement?
Poor
Uncertain
Promising
Excellent

Judgement 2 is an indication of the direction of travel in the future, based

primarily on evidence of recent improvements and commitment throughout the organisation, as well as consideration of the robustness of business planning which the organisation has in place.

#### 4.0 THE AUDIT COMMISSION REPORT

4.1 A copy of the report was previously circulated to Board Members. The report includes:

- A summary of the findings
- The rationale for scoring the service
- A summary of the 5 key recommendations
- Detailed analysis of the Inspectors findings broken down by service area
- The inspectors view on the prospects for improvement
- Updates on performance, previous recommendations and positive practice identified by the Inspectors

		Prospects for improvement?				
Excellent				☀		A good service?
Promising						
Uncertain						
Poor						
		Poor	Fair	Good	Excellent	
			★	★★	★★★	

#### 5.0 REPORT SUMMARY

5.1 The Audit Commission, in this latest inspection rated us as providing a good 2 star service, with excellent prospects. Listed below are the highlights as reported in the report.

1 Nottingham City Homes is providing a good, two-star service which has excellent prospects for improvement.

2 Staff at all levels show a strong focus on customers when delivering services and those services are shaped and influenced by involved tenants and leaseholders. Services are generally easy to access and the range of customer information is comprehensive and of good quality.

3 NCH is making positive use of information on customers' needs and preferences to inform the way it delivers services. There is also a strong focus on identifying and meeting the needs of more vulnerable customers.

4 Tenants have been closely involved in shaping the way in which the investment programme is being planned and delivered. NCH is meeting its responsibilities to carry out annual gas safety checks to homes with gas appliances. Tenants with disabilities needing adaptations to their homes receive these quickly.

5 Anti-social behaviour (ASB) is effectively tackled and the standard of housing estates and communal areas in flats is high and improving. Homes are effectively allocated with choice available for customers through the HomeLink choice based lettings scheme. NCH is also achieving good value for money for its customers in a number of services through greater efficiencies and good procurement decisions.

6 Some areas require improvement. Some customers experience delays when contacting the repairs call centre. Not all services have had a full assessment to show that access to them is fair and equal. There are no opportunities for tenants with disabilities to self-refer for minor adaptations such as grab rails.

7 A high number of customers are refusing offers of housing and so some homes are empty for longer than necessary. Common areas in sheltered housing schemes have not yet been assessed to see if they meet the needs of people with disabilities.

8 NCH has successfully addressed weaknesses identified in the last inspection and also strengthened its governance, structure and successfully changed the culture of the organisation. At the same time, it has improved existing services and developed new services. There is a strong focus on managing performance and service users play an important role in monitoring service quality. Partnership working is effective and is supporting service delivery with improved outcomes for service users.

9 Performance, while improving, remains among the poorer performers in some service areas. Progress in moving some aspects of equality and diversity forward has been slow and there are some gaps in performance monitoring activity. However, the progress made to date, NCH's strong self-awareness and the fact that key weaknesses are included in improvement plans indicates that the prospects for further improvement are excellent.

There has clearly been a significant improvement in services since the 2005 Inspection and this is recognised by the Audit Commission in this report. There is a clear focus by all staff in relation to customer service which in effect underpins the improvement. However the report does demonstrate a number of recommendations.

## 6.0 **AUDIT COMMISSION RECOMMENDATIONS**

- 6.1 The Audit Commission made five formal recommendations in the report. These can be found on page 8 of the report. We are now in the process of developing a plan to rectify each of these recommendations. The progress against these will be monitored by the Business Improvement and Development Team, with regular progress reports being reported to the Performance Executive Management Team and the Board.
- 6.2 However if we are to demonstrate our commitment to becoming a 3 star organisation we also need to focus on other aspects of the report. In addition to the 5 recommendations the report includes other weaknesses. These have been documented and progress against them will be monitored by the Business Improvement and Development Team.
- 6.3 The Executive Management Team has carefully considered the content of the report and is committed to delivering on 7 key priorities in 2009/10. In setting our sights on these 7 priorities the company is positioning itself to both act on those areas where the Inspectors felt that there was scope for improvement but also to become more innovative by considering new ventures for example. Also a key element of the next Inspection is likely to focus on the SWARM programme. This approach should place us in a good position to achieve a 3 star rating in the future.

### **The 7 key priorities identified are:**

- to deliver and maximise the impact of the decent homes programme
- a major push on equality and diversity
- modernise the repairs service
- streamline voids, allocations and lettings
- new Customer Service Centre and reinforced local delivery
- needs-led supported housing service
- winning new business

- 6.4 A Performance Management Review is being undertaken within NCH. Although performance is improving we recognise that more needs to be done to ensure Nottingham City Homes can demonstrate good performance across the board. The aim of the review will be to reassess the priorities for performance management and to ensure the arrangements for managing performance are robust and lead to improved performance in the future.

## 7 **Publicity**

- 7.1 In order to publicise the result of the Housing Inspection, the Marketing

and Communications team carried out a targeted press and media campaign. This included issuing press releases to the local, regional and trade media, as well as organising interviews and special features with key media organisations such as the Nottingham Evening Post, BBC East Midlands Today, Central News, Trent FM, BBC Radio Nottingham and industry magazine, Inside Housing.

Tenants were informed through a range of media including the Tenant and Leaseholder Conference, the February edition of *News from Nottingham City Homes* and Area Panels. Employees were all informed through a personal message from Chris Langstaff in the weekly internal newsletter, as well as the “thank you” themed Employee Conference that took place in February.

## **8 FINANCIAL AND RISK IMPLICATIONS**

8.1 This report does not in itself have any financial implications other than the success of achieving a 2 star status has resulted in Nottingham City Homes being able to access funding to undertake the SWARM programme across Nottingham.

## **9 IMPLICATIONS FOR NOTTINGHAM CITY HOMES OBJECTIVES**

9.1 Delivering on the recommendations and areas of weakness within the report shall assist NCH in delivering on its objectives

## **10 VALUE FOR MONEY AND EFFICIENCY ISSUES**

10.1 This report does not have any direct implications on value for Money.

## **11.0 EQUALITY AND DIVERSITY IMPLICATIONS**

11.1 Any significant changes to the way that services are delivered as a result the recommendations in the report shall require an Equality Impact Assessment to be undertaken.

## **12 BACKGROUND MATERIAL AND PUBLISHED DOCUMENTS REFERRED TO IN COMPILING THIS REPORT**

12.1 ALMO Re-Inspection report by the Audit Commission.

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