

Newham

Homes

London Borough of Newham

May 2010



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Arm's Length Management Organisation (ALMO) 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, arm's length management organisations (ALMOs) 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.

This inspection has been carried out by the Housing Inspectorate using powers under section 10 of the Local Government Act 1999 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 Council/ALMO;
- 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.

This service was inspected as part of the Government's arm's length housing management initiative, which encourages councils to set up ALMOs to manage, maintain and improve their housing stock. The Government decided that councils pursuing this option can secure additional capital funding if the new arm's length body has received at least a 'good' rating from the Audit Commission's Housing Inspectorate.

An ALMO is a company set up by a local authority to manage and improve all or part of its housing stock. The local authority remains the landlord and tenants remain secure tenants of the authority. An ALMO does not trade for profit, and is managed by a board of directors comprising Council nominees, elected tenants/leaseholders and independents.

The Housing Inspectorate has published additional guidance for ALMO inspections:

- 'ALMO Inspections and the delivery of excellent housing management services' (March 2003); and
- 'Learning from the first housing ALMOs' (May 2003).

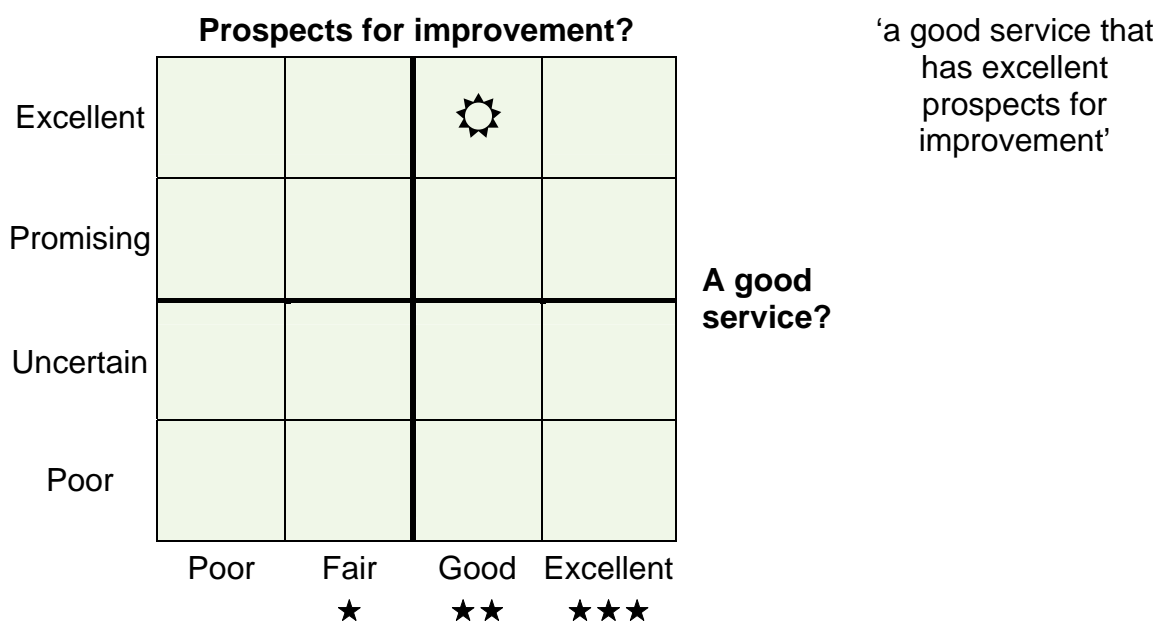
Summary

- 1 Newham Homes is providing a good, two-star service which has excellent prospects for improvement.
- 2 It is easy to access services and this is supported by a range of good quality information which has been designed with residents. Newham Homes actively seeks feedback from its customers and uses this to change and improve services. Residents are involved in planning services and allocating resources to support service developments.
- 3 The Modern Homes programme has improved residents' homes and the residents led improvement programme has brought about environmental improvements on a number of estates. The repairs service is easy to access, offers flexible appointments and repairs are done quickly. A lettable standard for empty properties has been agreed with tenants and a new decoration pack has helped to improve satisfaction when tenants move into a new home.
- 4 Services are available to support vulnerable tenants and many value the Handyvan service for minor repairs. Performance on rent collection is strong and there is support available for residents who are in arrears or experiencing problems with debt. Sound tenancy audit arrangements are in place and 87 homes have been returned to use for reletting. Estates are maintained to a high standard and the focus on the caretaking and concierge service is starting to show improvements in satisfaction levels.
- 5 Consultation with leaseholders has improved and there is a good range of information available to them. However, leaseholders remain dissatisfied with a number of their services and have not yet seen the benefits of improvements that have been put in place.
- 6 Some areas require improvement. One third of the people contacting Newham Homes find it hard to get hold of the right person to deal with their issue. The management of some aspects of antisocial behaviour is not effective and satisfaction is low. There is tension between different groups in the resident involvement structures which impacts on how effectively these work.
- 7 Newham Homes has successfully addressed weaknesses identified in the previous inspection and in the follow up support work which took place in 2008. Services have improved and new ones have been developed. There is a strong leadership for the organisation and a clear focus on performance management. Capacity is strengthened by training and ICT and partnership working is supporting service delivery with improved outcomes for service users.
- 8 However, performance in some areas is slower in showing improvement, notably in antisocial behaviour services and services for leaseholders. There are also gaps in performance monitoring.

Scoring the service

- 9 We have assessed Newham Homes as providing a 'good', two-star service that has excellent 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

- 10 We found the service to be good because it has a range of strengths including:
- services are easy to access through a range of methods;
 - a comprehensive range of good quality customer information, including an interactive website, has been developed with customers;
 - customer feedback is welcomed and is used to improve services;
 - information on residents' needs and preferences is used to tailor services to meet individual requirements;
 - good support services are available to meet the needs of more vulnerable residents;
 - residents are involved in the planning and development of services and the allocation of resources;

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.

- improvements have been made to residents' homes through the Modern Homes programme and Decent Homes Standard will be met by 2012;
- the repairs service is easy to access, offers a flexible range of appointments and repairs are done quickly;
- performance on annual gas safety checks is strong;
- estates and communal areas are maintained to a high standard and satisfaction with the caretaking and concierge service has improved;
- sheltered housing and telecare services offer a good standard of care and are highly valued by service users;
- consultation with leaseholders has improved; and
- there is a strong focus on ensuring services represent value for money and costs compare well to others.

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

- some residents find it hard to get hold of the right person when contacting Newham Homes;
- comprehensive service standards are in place but are not all reported on or used to drive improvements;
- information on the profile of residents is not complete;
- resident involvement structures are not working effectively and there is tension between different groups;
- tenants are dissatisfied with having to choose between a kitchen or a bathroom as part of the Modern Homes programme;
- emergency out-of-hours repairs are not dealt with efficiently;
- some aspects of antisocial behaviour are not managed effectively and satisfaction with this service is low; and
- there is a high level of dissatisfaction from leaseholders with their services.

12 The service has excellent prospects for improvement because:

- Newham Homes is operating from a sound financial position and resources are in place to support improvements;
- existing services have been improved and new services developed;
- Newham Homes can show a positive track record of making improvements across a range of areas;
- the aims and values are clear and supported by strong leadership, key strategies and plans;
- there is a clear focus on performance management and ensuring services are continually improving;
- staff are clear about the role they play in Newham Homes and are well managed;

Scoring the service

- Newham Homes is open to external challenge, is self-aware and looks to learn from other high performing organisations;
- training, development and ICT all support service delivery; and
- partnership working is effective and supporting service delivery with improved outcomes for service users.

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

- progress in some areas has been slower and satisfaction is low, for example, management of antisocial behaviour and services to leaseholders; and
- there are gaps in some performance monitoring information.

Recommendations

- 14 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 costs¹ 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 the ALMO Board, the local authority and customers; and takes action to address all weaknesses identified in the report. The inspection team makes the following recommendations.

Recommendation

R1 Improve services to residents by:

- engaging with residents to understand and resolve the difficulties in getting hold of the right person;
- comprehensively monitoring service standards and reporting performance against these;
- reviewing and improving the out-of-hours emergency repairs service;
- improving the communication with leaseholders to ensure they are aware of the changes that have been made to their services and publicise positive outcomes from this work;
- reviewing the resident involvement structures to ensure these are operating effectively and inclusively; and
- improving the management of antisocial behaviour casework and ensuring that complainants are kept informed and up-to-date with progress of their case.

The expected benefits of this recommendation are:

- residents will benefit from improved access to services and will know how well services are being delivered;
- residents will benefit from further improvements to the repairs service;
- leaseholders will be more aware of improvements to their services;
- residents will benefit from more effective and inclusive ways to be involved with Newham Homes; and
- residents will benefit from improved casework management of antisocial behaviour services.

The implementation of this recommendation will have high impact with low costs. This should be implemented by October 2010.

¹ 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 Improve services and performance by:

- tackling weaker areas of performance, for example, the number of repairs completed in target and the time taken to relet empty properties; and
- identifying and meeting the gaps in managing and reporting performance so that all key areas are covered.

The expected benefits of this recommendation are:

- repairs will be completed in time and empty properties will be let more quickly; and
- Newham Homes will be better able to assess its performance across all areas.

The implementation of this recommendation will have high impact with low costs. This should be implemented by October 2010.

Recommendation

R3 Take action to address all other weaknesses identified in this report and report on the findings to the Newham Homes board, Newham Council, residents and stakeholders.

- 15** We would like to thank the staff of Newham Homes and London Borough of Newham who made us welcome and who met our requests efficiently and courteously.

Dates of inspection: 8 to 19 February 2010

Report

Context

The locality

- 16** Newham is a densely populated borough in the east of London and has a population of 249,500¹. The borough includes the areas of Canning Town, East Ham, West Ham and Stratford as well as much of the revitalised docklands area to the south. It has one of the youngest and most diverse populations in the country. Four out of ten people are aged 25 or under and two-thirds of the population are from minority ethnic backgrounds. Newham has the second highest proportion of black Africans in the country. Three-quarters of school children in Newham are from ethnic minority backgrounds.
- 17** Deprivation is widespread across Newham. Unemployment is higher than average and wages are the lowest in London, reflecting the long and gradual decline of the docks and other industrial activity in the area. It has a lower than average number of people with degrees and one in five of the population have no qualifications. Recently there has been an increase in homelessness.
- 18** The health of residents is generally poor. Numbers of people with diabetes and tuberculosis are the worst in the country. Life expectancy is low and there are large health inequalities across the borough. The amount of crime has been reducing but is still above average.
- 19** Newham is the main host borough of the 2012 Olympics. Stratford is undergoing major regeneration and will be the home of the Olympic Village and main stadium. There is also significant regeneration planned for other parts of the borough including Canning Town and Custom House. Transport links with central, south and other parts of east London are very good with extensive tube, rail, DLR and bus connections. These will be further improved by the High Speed rail link and CrossRail. There are also international connections with the London City Airport, and the Eurostar service is scheduled to start running from Stratford in 2010. The Olympics and their legacy are expected to provide a considerable economic boost to the borough.

The Council

- 20** A Labour Party Mayor was re-elected in 2006 and the Labour Party holds 54 of the 60 seats on the Council. The Mayor is supported by a cabinet and a team of mayoral advisers.
- 21** In its Comprehensive Area Assessment in December 2009, the Commission said that overall Newham Council performs well. This is in terms of both managing performance and in its use of resources.

¹ ONS estimate mid-point 2008

The service

- 22** The Council established an Arm's Length Management Organisation (ALMO) called Newham Homes on 1 December 2005. Newham Homes manages 20,740 properties for the Council - 15,776 are tenanted and 4,964 are leasehold properties. This stock includes 819 properties which Newham owns outside the borough in Redbridge, Havering and Brentwood.
- 23** Newham Homes does not manage the properties of the two Tenant Management Organisations (TMOs) or the Canning Town Private Finance Initiative (PFI). A further PFI initiative is planned for the Forest Gate area in 2008. Most of the stock is flats, with only 26 per cent being houses. The stock has steadily reduced with the impact of Right to Buy sales and regeneration activities.
- 24** In 2009/10 Newham Homes received a management fee of £24.8 million, and managed delegated budgets totalling £81.4 million. It employs 660 permanent staff to deliver the service.
- 25** The ALMO board consists of five tenants, five councillors and five independent board members.
- 26** The functions delegated to the ALMO can be summarised as follows.
- Stock investment decisions, repairs ordering and repairs service.
 - Rent collection, dealing with arrears and debt counselling.
 - Consulting and informing tenants on matters which are Newham Homes' responsibility.
 - Promoting tenant participation, including involving tenants in monitoring and reviewing service standards.
 - Enforcement of tenancy conditions, caretaking and estate services.
 - Services to leaseholders.
 - Managing empty properties (voids).
 - Lettings – signing up new tenants who have been processed through the Council's choice-based lettings scheme.
 - Housing-related support services under the Supporting People programme, and the community alarm scheme (Newham Network).
 - Right to Buy administration.
- 27** The functions retained by the Council include the following.
- Overall housing strategy, including liaison with Registered Social Landlords (RSLs), housing needs assessments and cross-tenure stock condition surveys.
 - Homelessness responsibilities.
 - Lettings policy, in consultation with Newham Homes.
 - General housing advice – but not that related to an individual's tenancy.
 - Policy on tackling antisocial behaviour, in consultation with Newham Homes.

- Owner-occupation strategies; valuations and formal determination of Right to Buy applications.
 - Housing benefit administration.
 - Tenant participation in developing housing policy and strategy.
 - Overall policy on rents.
 - Programme of best value reviews, in consultation with Newham Homes.
 - Reporting progress on energy efficiency measures under the Home Energy Conservation Act 1995.
 - Determining minimum standards of services required for Newham Homes, and other housing management providers, and monitoring performance.
 - Managing the Supporting People programme, including reviews.
- 28** In 2007, the Audit Commission reported that Newham Homes was providing a good, two-star service, with promising prospects for improvement. This assessment allowed the Council to access additional supported borrowing to improve its homes to the government's Decent Homes Standard. Where relevant, we start each section of the report with a brief description of what we said in 2007.

How good is the service?

What has the service aimed to achieve?

29 Newham has identified the following priorities for the area.

- Safer Newham.
- Healthy Newham.
- Cleaner and greener Newham.
- Young Newham.
- Working Newham.
- Housing Newham.
- Active and connected Newham.

30 Newham Homes vision¹ is:

To deliver excellent services and modern homes in safe and inclusive communities and become an employer of choice.

31 To achieve this vision, the ALMO will:

- provide residents with top quality, value for money services;
- provide well-maintained, modern homes;
- maintain estates that are clean and safe;
- treat customers with respect and respond effectively;
- provide a range of accessible and inclusive opportunities to empower residents to influence services;
- be an organisation where people aspire to work; and
- work effectively in partnership with the Council to be its partner of choice in managing homes in Newham and develop future business opportunities in Newham and beyond.

¹ Newham Homes self-assessment December 2009

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

Access and customer care

- 32** In 2007, we found that there was a strong approach to access and customer care. The local service centres and contact centre provided good levels of service; service standards were clear and publicised; there was a broad range of information for residents including an informative website; and overall satisfaction levels were high. However, there could be delays when reporting repairs and in dealing with complaints. There were also gaps in monitoring satisfaction in some services.
- 33** In this inspection, we found that strengths outweigh weaknesses. There is a strong focus on customer care and it is easy to access services, both in person and on the telephone. However, a third of tenants find it hard to get hold of the right person. Customer information is of a good quality and Newham Homes seeks and uses customer feedback well to improve services. The management of complaints has improved and these are being dealt with more quickly although Newham Homes is still not meeting its targets in this area. Service standards are in place but these are not all reported on or used to drive improvements.
- 34** Newham Homes has a strong focus on access and customer care. This is underpinned by a comprehensive strategy which was consulted on with residents before final agreement by the board in early 2009. The strategy sets out how Newham Homes will ensure it knows what its customers' needs are and how it aims to increase choices and information for customers accessing its services. The implementation of the strategy is overseen by a specific working group and reported to the Service Improvement Committee of the board. There is also a board champion for access and customer care. This is providing focus for continued improvement in this area.
- 35** Staff show a commitment to customer care. All staff have had mandatory training in this area and this has been supported by further specific training such as on telephone answering. Repairs operatives have a customer care element to their bonus scheme and it is part of the annual staff awards, Newham Homes has a staff award for customer care which is decided by residents. This helps to ensure that Newham Homes provides a service which is responsive to its customers needs.
- 36** There is good access to services for personal callers. This is through the network of eight local services centres (LSCs) which are provided by Newham Council. Newham Homes has a service level agreement (SLA) with the Council for the provision of housing information. Staff at the LSCs receive regular training from Newham Homes so that they are able to provide up-to-date information. Opening times for the LSCs vary according to the area and local needs and have been agreed with residents. The 2009 STATUS survey showed that 87 per cent of people using the LSCs were satisfied with the response they received.

How good is the service?

- 37 There are also arrangements in place for Newham Homes' residents who live out-of-borough. Newham Homes' staff hold surgeries weekly in Redbridge, Brentwood and Havering. Home visits to discuss tenancy issues or general concerns can also be arranged for these residents. This ensures that they are able to access information and support as necessary.
- 38 Newham Homes is providing an accessible telephone service to its residents. General calls go through the call centre run by estates service staff. This call centre is currently exceeding its targets with year to date figures showing that 92.89 per cent of calls were answered in 15 seconds, against a target of 80 per cent and the average call answering time was seven seconds. Very few calls are lost with the call centre answering over 99 per cent. Information on reporting repairs by telephone is included in the 'Responsive repairs' section below. A quick response to telephone calls ensures residents are able to access services and information effectively.
- 39 Tenants do not find it easy to get hold of the right person. Despite the speed of answering phone calls, the 2009 STATUS survey showed that 34 per cent of people contacting Newham Homes found it difficult to get hold of the right person. In addition to this, 26 per cent of people indicated that the member of staff had not been able to deal with their problem. This means that tenants can find it hard to get answers or correct information.
- 40 Newham Homes provides a comprehensive range of good quality information. This includes a comprehensive range of leaflets, with easy recognition symbols, handbooks for tenants and leaseholders and regular newsletters. A readers' panel checks newsletters and other publications to ensure they are accessible and written in plain English. All leaflets have a translation box advising what the document is about in the ten most spoken languages as identified by tenant profile information. The Newham Homes website is easy to use and provides information and interactive facilities. The site is well presented, easy to navigate and includes the facility to pay rent, report repairs and make complaints. This allows tenants to interact with the service, access information and request services at any time. The availability of information ensures that tenants are aware of services and how to access these.
- 41 Service standards are not used to show how well Newham Homes is performing. Newham Homes has a comprehensive set of service standards in place which are set out on the website and in a leaflet. However, some service standards such as answering an email within ten days are not challenging. A small number of the standards are used in the balanced scorecard of key performance indicators (KPIs) and others are reported to specific service improvement groups. This means that although residents know the level of service they should be receiving, they do not know if this is what Newham Homes is delivering, or what action it is taking in areas where performance is falling short of the target.
- 42 Mystery shopping has not been used as an effective tool to test service standards. Although there were a number of mystery shopping events in 2009, Newham Homes did not consider these reflected an entirely accurate portrayal of services and the results have not been published. Newham Homes will be working through the customer care working group to ensure a programme of further training and events is put in place for 2010/11.

- 43 Newham Homes actively seeks feedback from its residents on their experience of services. This is through routine service surveys, an annual STATUS survey and the formal structures for involvement of tenant and leaseholder involvement. Newham Homes also gathers feedback through its compliments and complaints service. Feedback is well used to improve and shape services, such as extending the repairs free phone number to provide free phone numbers for other types of regular calls. Feedback through complaints has been used to improve the information provided on the decent homes programme of major improvement works. This demonstrates that residents' views are valued and acted upon.
- 44 The approach to managing complaints is effective, although this is recent. Newham Homes created a Customer Quality team in September 2009 to deal with complaints and Members' Enquiries. The creation of the team, along with a revised procedure and training for all staff, is starting to show improvements in handling of complaints. The team has introduced a number of improvements such as standardising responses to ensure that these address the complaint, are in user-friendly language and explain the next stages of the process. It has also introduced a face-to-face interview when stage two of the complaints process is initiated. This has proved successful and has helped to stop complaints from being taken further. As the complaints process is still relatively new, it is too early to see the impact that the changes have had on satisfaction levels. There is also now a clear process for learning from complaints and there are examples of where practices have been changed in response to complaints. Overall, customer complaints are leading to improvements.
- 45 Complaints are not consistently responded to within target times. With the introduction of the new team, complaints are being monitored on a daily, weekly and monthly basis and there has been month on month improvement. For example, only 50 per cent of Members' Enquiries were dealt with in the seven day target in July 2009 but this had risen to 100 per cent in January 2010. Stage one complaints dealt with in ten days was at 39 per cent in July 2009 and had risen to 93 per cent by January 2010. Although response times have improved considerably, Newham Homes is not yet consistently responding to all complainants in agreed timescales.
- 46 Compensation is paid for service failures. There is a comprehensive compensation policy in place. This details all the service failures for which Newham Homes will make a compensation payment for, such as a payment for each day a lift is out of service or a missed repairs appointment. It also allows for ex-gratia payments to be made. A clear compensation policy means that tenants can access recompense for service failures they may experience.

Diversity

- 47 In 2007, we found that strengths outweighed weaknesses in this area. There was a clear understanding of diversity issues from the board, managers and staff, and a good understanding of the profile of tenants, although not of leaseholders. The ALMO had taken a number of practical steps to ensure that services met the diverse needs of residents and that opportunities for involvement were maximised. Public offices were fully accessible and there was good access to translation and interpreting services. However, the profile of the workforce did not reflect that of the local community and overall satisfaction among BAME (black, Asian and minority ethnic) residents was below that of other residents.
- 48 In this inspection, we found that strengths outweigh weaknesses. Newham Homes has a strong corporate commitment to, and leadership of, equality and diversity. Staff, the board and involved tenants have all been trained in equality and diversity and there is a range of support mechanisms for vulnerable tenants. Newham Homes is using profile information to tailor services but this information is not yet complete. Domestic violence and harassment are well managed. Satisfaction of BAME residents has improved. Newham Homes is broadly representative of the local community but it is taking steps to ensure this is further improved. However, it does not yet fully comply with legislative requirements and partnership working has not been used to full effect to strengthen the approach to equality and diversity.
- 49 The focus on equality and diversity is strong. Newham Homes has a good understanding of how its communities are made up and in particular the high percentage of the population from Black, Asian, Mixed or other minority groups and of younger people. The Equality and Diversity Strategy 2009-2011 considers the impact of all six diversity strands and includes a particular reference to community cohesion. The strategy is comprehensive, reflects values and incorporates a detailed and SMART action plan with clear expected outcomes. The strategic approach is supported by effective structures including a board champion and an equality and diversity working group. This is providing an effective strategic framework to help Newham Homes meet the diverse needs of its residents.
- 50 Newham Homes is positive about raising the awareness of diversity issues. Equality and diversity training is mandatory for all staff and board members and a number of involved residents have also received training. Additional specialist training is also available, for example on dealing with mental health issues. Effective training ensures that staff are able to deliver sensitive services that respond to diverse needs.
- 51 Newham Homes does not yet fully meet the requirements of the Statutory Code of Practice on Racial Equality in Housing. It has worked with the Council to assess itself against the Code finding that the requirements of the code are broadly met, and actions have been prioritised for full compliance by mid-2010. Outstanding actions include supporting contractors and sub-contractors to collect diversity information and reviewing training for tenant and resident groups. However, until these actions are completed, Newham Homes cannot provide assurance to its tenants that it is meeting these formal requirements.

- 52** An assurance framework for equality and diversity is in place. A comprehensive programme of equality impact assessments (EIAs) is in place and although the target for completion of these has slipped, eleven have been completed, six are in progress and three are planned. Additional training and support has been provided to ensure that these are all complete by October 2010. The EIAs are robust and are leading to barriers to accessing services being identified and addressed.
- 53** Profile information is not yet complete. Newham Homes has a high level of information on the age, gender and ethnicity of its tenants. The Council had, until early 2010, not agreed to the collection of information on the remaining two diversity strands - faith and sexuality. Newham Homes has now started to collect this information but is starting from a very low base. Targets have been set for the collection of data which will ensure that Newham Homes meets the same level of information as top performing ALMOs. Until it has information on all of its tenants, it cannot ensure that services are tailored to meet all needs.
- 54** Profile information has been used to target and tailor services. For example, Somali and Bengali speakers were identified for a specific survey of their needs and this has resulted in a number expressing an interest to be further involved with services. Use of the age profile has resulted in home visits to all tenants over 75 years of age to ensure they are accessing services and are aware of the support available to them. Information on languages spoken has resulted in changes to the top ten languages used in the translation box on leaflets and information. Profile information identified that Swahili has moved into the top ten languages. Information is also used to ensure that information is sent to tenants in their choice of language and format.
- 55** Overall satisfaction of BAME residents is higher than that of other residents. The 2009 STATUS survey showed that 68 per cent of BAME residents were satisfied with Newham Homes as a landlord against 67 per cent of non-BAME residents. This is an improvement from 2006 when BAME satisfaction was four points lower than other residents.
- 56** Newham Homes is continually taking action to ensure it is representative of the community it serves. While staff, the board and involved residents are broadly representative of the wider community, Newham Homes recognises the need to keep this under review. For example, an Asian outreach worker will be joining the resident involvement team to work with, and encourage, more Asian, and younger Asian people to be involved at all levels of the organisation. This approach allows a better understanding and response to the needs of all tenants.
- 57** Written information is available in alternative formats and Newham Homes offers interpretation and translation services. There are statements in ten community languages on written information to inform tenants about its availability in other languages as well as in other formats. Staff have access to interpreters and language cards to help them with any language difficulties. Translated information is available through the website so that is easily accessible for other residents. For example, the tenants' handbook is available in nine other languages. The website offers a variable coloured background for residents with a visual impairment, as well as conforming to the AA web content accessibility guidelines. The new tenants' DVD was introduced to address both language and literacy issues including British Sign Language. This helps to reduce the barriers for customer access.

How good is the service?

- 58** Newham Homes identifies and supports vulnerable tenants. Vulnerability assessments are carried out at a number of points of contact with customers. This includes pre-tenancy contact as well as other contact points through a tenancy. A support plan is drawn up for vulnerable tenants and referrals made to other support agencies as appropriate. For example, a vulnerable tenant with support needs was identified through a tenancy audit and additional services were put in place to provide the support needed. Services such as decorating and gardening are also available for vulnerable tenants. This is reducing the risk of tenancies failing for vulnerable people.
- 59** Newham Homes is engaging with harder to reach groups. For example, it has worked with partners to improve services to the Gypsy and Traveller community relocated from the Olympic site. It has levered in additional funding to improve services on the new replacement site and is in the process of recruiting a specialist officer to work with this group. This enables a better understanding of the needs of the whole community.
- 60** Newham Homes is actively contributing to the worklessness agenda. Newham Homes has been successful in working with a voluntary organisation to promote and improve opportunities for tenants to access work and training. The number of Newham Homes' tenants registered through this initiative since April 2009 was 1147, of which 278 had achieved a successful job outcome. This is helping to develop and promote sustainable communities.
- 61** The benefits of partnership working have not been maximised to strengthen the approach to equality and diversity. Partnerships with community groups are underdeveloped to assist the delivery of the diversity agenda. For example, an opportunity to engage with the lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) group to help collect diversity information on sexuality was not successful. Other partnerships that could enhance the expertise of the ALMO have not been pursued.
- 62** Domestic violence and harassment issues are well managed. The approach to dealing with harassment is integrated into the antisocial behaviour (ASB) policies. The ALMO has heightened its commitment to domestic violence with a new and comprehensive policy and procedure which was adopted in June 2009 following consultation with tenants and partners. Newham Homes is a member of the domestic violence forum and has raised awareness of 'honour based' violence through funding a play for staff and local practitioners. The new approach provides a good balance between prevention, support and legal remedies and is complemented by a tenancy support pack which incorporates a risk assessment and support information.

Stock investment and asset management

Capital improvement, planned and cyclical maintenance, major repair works

- 63** In 2007, we found that strengths outweighed weaknesses in this area. Newham Homes had the necessary building blocks to deliver the Decent Homes programme. The stock condition survey had been updated and the stock options appraisal completed. There was a robust asset management strategy and appropriate staff resources were either in place or were planned. A 'Decent Homes plus' standard known in Newham as Modern Homes had been agreed with residents. Capital programmes had been delivered on budget and there was an appropriate planned maintenance programme. However, there were weaknesses in the management of asbestos and the stock condition database did not take full account of responsive repairs or the Housing, Health and Safety Rating System.
- 64** In this inspection, we found that strengths considerably outweigh weaknesses. Newham Homes has a strong approach to asset management based on comprehensive stock condition information. There is a clear and robust investment plan to modernise the housing stock and improve estates, with progress made in reducing the number of homes that do not meet the Decent Homes Standard. Residents are influencing the work to their homes and the investment programme is effectively delivered through a strong partnership framework. Projects are delivered on time and in budget and customer satisfaction with the work to their homes is high. However, there have been delays on the environmental programme and some tenants remain dissatisfied about the range of work their homes receive.
- 65** Newham Homes has a strong approach to asset management. The asset management strategy has recently been reviewed and revised and continues to provide a clear framework for the improvement and maintenance of the stock. Stock condition information has been used to develop a six year investment plan, with updated annual plans, to bring homes up to the Decent Homes Standard (DHS). Longer term investment needs for the stock, over the next 30 years, have also been identified. This is resulting in effective asset management of the stock.
- 66** Stock condition information is accurate and comprehensive. The stock condition information is based on 100 per cent external surveys and 86 per cent internal. This provides accurate information which has informed the investment plan from 2008/09 onwards. The surveys have collected comprehensive information including energy rating information and how well standards are met under the HHSRS¹ system. As surveys identified category 1 hazards under the HHSRS such as serious trip hazards these were referred to the repairs service to deal with and any heating issues are incorporated into the decent homes work. The surveys have also allowed for the energy rating certificates to be easily produced for new tenants. This level of stock information is allowing programmes of work to be effectively targeted.

¹ Housing Health and Safety Rating System

How good is the service?

- 67** Progress is being made to reduce the numbers of homes that are not decent. The number of homes failing to meet the DHS is reducing as predicted this year. The programmes to achieve decency were agreed with residents and were broadly divided into internal and external works. It is only since 2009/10 that properties have received both of these programmes to bring them to the decency standard. At the end of December 2009, 37 per cent failed the standard compared to 62 per cent at March 2009. This is projected to fall to 27 per cent by March 2010 with all properties meeting the standard by 2012, as agreed with the government.
- 68** Sufficient resources are in place to bring all homes up to the decency standard. The investment plan is funded through the ALMO funding, the Major Repairs Allowance and capital money provided by the Council. In total this amounts to £392 million for 2006 and 2012, and is currently projected to be sufficient to ensure delivery of the investment plan and to meet the DHS.
- 69** There is a clear strategic approach to improving the stock. The investment programme to meet the DHS and provide environmental and security work is divided into six main programmes, which reflect the make up of the stock. This means that high rise, low rise and street properties all have programmes tailored to meet the specific technical needs of this type of dwelling to achieve decency. However, the approach to asset management also includes regeneration work by the Council in some areas, with just over 1,000 homes being demolished, and about 700 homes being refurbished as part of the overall regeneration scheme. Sheltered housing has also been reviewed over the years which has led to the re-provision of some schemes by housing associations to meet modern day standards. Of the schemes remaining under Newham Homes one is under discussion with the Council about its future, as it requires major conversion work to meet modern day standards, and the others are included in the investment programme. This is ensuring that resources are targeted appropriately.
- 70** The energy efficiency of the stock is slightly below the average for all local authorities. Progress has been made with improving the energy efficiency of the stock and the SAP¹ rating has increased from 65 in 2007 to 69 in February 2010. Although this shows improvement, it is still slightly below the average figure of 70 for all authorities. High SAP ratings show that tenants can heat their homes efficiently and reduce fuel bills.
- 71** Residents are able to influence the decisions in relation to asset management. Consultation on the investment plan takes place through the Borough-wide Tenants and Leaseholders Committee (BTLC), and tenants more generally have been involved in agreeing the standards for their homes to meet. There is a Modern Homes Group made up of tenants which considers a whole range of issues such as information for residents and the quality and choice of materials, and representatives from this group were also involved with the selection of the contracting partners to deliver the programmes of work. This is allowing tenants to influence decisions in relation to the improvement and maintenance of their homes.

¹ Standard Assessment Procedure to assess the energy efficiency of homes

- 72** Insufficient funding to improve homes to the standard that tenants want has led to Newham Homes, in consultation with the BTLC, taking difficult decisions. There is not enough money to replace both kitchens and bathrooms when both these amenities fail the DHS. Tenants are therefore asked to choose which they want replacing. Although this approach meets the DHS a number of tenants are dissatisfied. Some homes, because of technical¹ or other reasons, do receive new kitchens and bathrooms which adds to tenants perceptions that the modern homes work is not consistent. Newham Homes has worked proactively to address this producing clear information that points out that the choice is either a kitchen or a bathroom, and ensures that the message is clearly given at consultation exercises. However, some tenants remain dissatisfied about the range of work their homes receive.
- 73** The investment programme is effectively delivered through well developed partnering arrangements. There are positive working relationships between the partner contractors and Newham Homes. Regular meetings take place at strategic and operational levels to manage the programme, and expenditure and performance is closely monitored. Key performance indicators have recently been reviewed and improved and cover a range of areas, and are reported through the performance management framework. Systems are in place using IT software to interrogate performance at a detailed level and this is resulting in a good understanding of performance and leading to improvements. The programme is being delivered on time and within budget through this strong partnering framework.
- 74** There are effective arrangements to manage schemes and projects at an operational level. The investment programme is broken down into the individual projects and allocated project managers to deliver the schemes through the partnering framework. Contractors are required to sign up to the 'Considerate Constructors Scheme' and assessments against this are monitored, with all of the partners achieving well under the scheme. Monthly site meetings take place to monitor progress, the budget and any operational issues. In addition, there are monthly meetings with the contractors to look at performance in more detail and to develop action plans to address any concerns. These then feed up into the framework described above. This is ensuring that projects run smoothly on the ground and any issues are identified early.
- 75** Effective consultation is carried out with residents. All residents receive a letter explaining the project and inviting them to a meeting. Residents are able to give their views which inform the development of the project. Throughout the project, coffee mornings are held and newsletters sent out so that residents can be kept up-to-date with what is happening. Residents are given a range of choice for the improvement to their homes such as kitchen cupboards and tiling, and are also involved in the design of their kitchen. They receive a good quality information pack giving details about the work. Residents are also asked to volunteer to act as a representative for the project and are invited to the site meetings and the final contract evaluation meeting. This gives residents the opportunity to influence the improvement works to their homes and the area.

¹ Ex Port of London Authority homes have had new bathrooms and kitchens because of the layout and design of the accommodation.

How good is the service?

- 76** Newham Homes has responded to customer feedback that an increased presence and better communication is needed on sites where Modern Homes work is taking place. Resident Liaison Coordinators are now working alongside the contractors' Resident Liaison Officers so that tenants have an easier route to staff for information and support.
- 77** The needs of vulnerable tenants are taken account in delivering the improvement schemes. At the survey visit profile information is collected and any particular needs are identified. This is used to identify any special arrangements needed such as moving furniture, storing belongings or setting up respite care. Any aids and adaptations work is also identified and dovetailed into the improvement programme. Newham Homes funds an occupational therapist so that when adaptation needs are identified an assessment can be made quickly and the work incorporated into the programme. This helps ensure that tenants receive the works in a way which is tailored to their needs.
- 78** There are appropriate arrangements for cyclical and planned maintenance programmes. There are planned maintenance programmes for services such as electrical testing and lift maintenance. Cyclical work is effectively incorporated into the Modern Homes investment programme. Painting work and other maintenance such as cleaning and repairing gutters is carried out alongside the Modern Homes programme giving better value for money and minimising disruption to tenants. When the current investment programme ends in 2012 a seven-year cyclical programme will be introduced to ensure that there is effective ongoing maintenance.
- 79** The effectiveness of the approach to delivering environmental improvements is mixed. Environmental and estate improvements are tenant led through the Resident Led Improvement Programme (ReLIP) scheme. There is a budget of £2 million for these works and tenants can put forward bids to the area tenant liaison committees. These committees prioritise the bids and submit them to the ReLIP group which looks at all the schemes and agree which ones will go ahead. Schemes to date include fencing, security work and landscaping. This is resulting in improvements that tenants want giving them influence over how the money is spent.
- 80** However, the ReLIP schemes have not been delivered in a clear way and on time. Although it is clear that information about the ReLIP schemes is made available to residents who are involved in prioritising and agreeing the schemes this is not getting down to all residents on estates, leaving people unclear about what has been approved and when work is expected. This is compounded by delays with these schemes which has resulted in underspends against the budget. The process has been reviewed and streamlined, and work is now being agreed and carried out more quickly. Nevertheless the budget will still underspend by £600,000 this year and this will not be resolved until the end of 2010/11. This means that tenants are waiting longer than necessary for improvement work on their estates and are unclear about when this will happen.

- 81** Satisfaction with major works schemes is generally high. It is currently running at over 93 per cent for each of the different work areas, with a response rate of over 70 per cent. Satisfaction is captured by surveys at the end of each project and also by a sample of telephone interviews carried out by an external company. Any issues or dissatisfaction is followed up and any learning is fed into the 'lessons learnt' log. The works viewed as part of the inspection were of high quality with tenants very satisfied with their new kitchens.
- 82** Newham Homes is taking action to address wider sustainability issues. Recycling targets have been agreed with partners who have shared learning on how to achieve these. This has resulted in high levels of recycling at over 90 per cent currently, which exceed the targets set. Newham Homes is also exploring alternative sources of energy and trying to reduce energy consumption. A solar panel project has been tried on a row of ten houses. Although this costs considerably more to install than a traditional installation, it is resulting in reduced energy bills for residents. Newham Homes is also looking at whether micro combined heating power boilers are a viable alternative in homes. Free energy efficient light bulbs are also given out to tenants. This is helping to contribute towards the wider sustainability agenda.
- 83** There is a sound approach to dealing with asbestos. There is an asbestos policy and procedure in place to deal with the removal and management of asbestos. Seventy-three per cent (13,600) of properties have been surveyed and all are due to be completed by September 2010. About two thirds of properties have asbestos in them. The information is held on the system and downloaded on to operatives' work sheets. When asbestos is identified through the survey a drawing is made of where it is in the property and this is placed in the meter cupboard for any tradesperson or the tenant to check. New tenants are also given this along with information about asbestos and any risks. This is helping to minimise the risks posed by asbestos in the home.
- 84** There is a sound approach to managing fire risks in the stock. Health and Safety staff have been trained by the Institute of Fire Engineers and have carried out assessments on all tower blocks. Action plans for each block have been developed and actions prioritised. A fire policy has been developed and an inspection timetable agreed with the fire service for tower blocks and sheltered schemes to be inspected annually, low rise blocks every two years and divided street properties every three years. Newham Homes is about to write to tenants and leaseholders who have replaced their front doors with ones that do not meet the fire requirements to ask them to replace them with appropriate doors, and is investigating ways of how this can be enforced. This is demonstrating a proactive response to the dangers of fire.

How good is the service?

Responsive repairs

- 85** In 2007, we found that weaknesses outweighed strengths. The service was using outdated procedures and needed modernising. The repairs call centre was not operating efficiently and performance in completing urgent repairs had declined. Performance in completing routine repairs had not been monitored correctly, there was poor information on levels of variations and post-inspections of repairs were not being used to improve the service. There was a high level of emergency and urgent repairs. However, there was high customer satisfaction and good information on how to report repairs was available for residents. Appointments were generally made and kept and the number of legal disrepair claims had fallen sharply.
- 86** In this inspection, we found that strengths outweigh weaknesses. It is easy for tenants to report repairs, flexible appointments are offered and repairs are generally completed quickly. There are effective arrangements to deliver the repairs service with a high percentage of repairs completed on the first visit. Customer satisfaction with the service is high. However, the level of emergency repairs out-of-hours is high and Newham Homes has not assessed how effectively this aspect of the service is being delivered. Some repairs are not completed in target times.
- 87** Tenants can report repairs easily through the Repairs Operation Centre (ROC). Telephone calls are answered quickly taking an average of 20 seconds. Seventy-nine per cent of calls are answered in 15 seconds and less than 3 per cent are abandoned. Performance against the service standard of answering 85 per cent of calls in 15 seconds has not been met year to date but it has steadily risen and achieved 88 per cent in January 2010. Tenants report prompt call answering, friendly and polite staff and helpfulness and accuracy in diagnosing repairs.
- 88** Customer satisfaction with the service is generally high. The STATUS survey showed that 70.5 per cent of tenants were satisfied with the overall service. Ongoing satisfaction surveys captured through telephone surveys of a 10 per cent random sample of completed repairs and postal surveys show just under 90 per cent satisfaction.
- 89** The appointment system is customer focused. Appointment slots are offered across the day from early morning onwards, until 8.00 pm on two evenings, and on Saturday mornings. Performance in keeping appointments is 95.7 per cent, excluding appointments that are not kept by the customer. The reasons for missed appointments are being investigated to identify what improvements can be made, and action has also been taken to minimise tenants not keeping appointments by sending text messages 24 hours before the appointment. Compensation of £20 is paid for a missed appointment. This is offering a good level of service for customers.
- 90** Repairs are accurately categorised into three priority times. ROC staff are trained and have 'repairs finder' to help them diagnose repairs and to allocate the correct priority and code for the work. This has resulted in the number of repairs classified as emergencies reducing.

- 91** The management of the out-of-hours service for emergency repairs is not fully effective. The level of out-of-hours emergencies is high at 9 per cent and there has been little investigation into why this is, or whether these repairs can be carried out in a more cost effective and efficient way. Some tenants also expressed dissatisfaction with the reporting arrangements. The reporting element of the service is provided by the Council as part of a Service Level Agreement. This has been assessed as a cheaper option than bringing it in house but has not included a quality assessment. Newham Homes cannot be sure whether it is delivering out-of-hours repairs in the best way or how well it is meeting customers' requirements.
- 92** Repairs are tailored to meet the needs of vulnerable customers, although policy and procedure in this area is not sufficiently formalised. Vulnerability flags on the system show where additional help or support is needed and this is made known to the repair operatives. Repairs priorities are also changed for tenants in sheltered housing schemes, or where the vulnerability suggests this is appropriate. However, although ROC staff have received training around vulnerability and making services flexible, repairs are not covered by the vulnerability policy, and there are no formal guidelines to help staff. This means that Newham Homes cannot be sure it is delivering a consistent service to customers.
- 93** Not all repairs are being completed in target times. Overall completion within the priority times was 93 per cent to the end of December. For each of the priority categories 96 per cent of emergency repairs were completed, 92 per cent of urgent, and 93 per cent of routine completed on time. This performance falls into the bottom 25 per cent of performance when compared with others even though repairs are generally carried out quickly taking an average of 7.94 days. This means that although the majority of customers receive a quick and efficient service some repairs are not within the required timescales.
- 94** The approach to communal repairs has improved. These are now carried out in priority timescales, with performance in completing these comparable to all other repairs. This contributes to the overall appearance of estates and improving the appearance in areas around tenants' homes.
- 95** Newham Homes has strong performance in completing repairs on the first visit. Currently 88 per cent of jobs are completed on the first visit and operatives are encouraged to be multi-skilled which assists in positive performance. About 65 per cent of operatives are multi-skilled so far. They are able to vary the work within agreed cost limits, and vans are well stocked to prevent any delays due to a lack of materials. Less than 1 per cent of repairs are recalls either because of tenant dissatisfaction or because of issues identified through post-inspection of the repair which again minimises the need for return visits. This is offering tenants a convenient service which limits disruption to them.
- 96** The repairs service is effectively delivered. Operatives have an incentive scheme which links their performance to delivering a good quality service. Operatives have five indicators to achieve to earn incentive payments. These are customer satisfaction above 90 per cent, 80 per cent jobs in one visit, no recalls to repairs, repairs completed in time and the number of appointments kept. This has resulted in increased productivity, improved performance and increased efficiency. This means that tenants are now benefiting from an efficient repairs service.

How good is the service?

- 97** Mobile technology is supporting efficient delivery of the service. Work is allocated to operatives by work schedulers with operatives working in six zones across two areas to increase efficiency and minimise travel time. Mobile hand-held technology is supporting this, allowing work to be managed more efficiently. Further mobile working technology is planned to improve this further. As a result three members of staff have been redeployed, two into the ReLIP programme and one into the planned maintenance team.
- 98** There are appropriate arrangements for the pre-inspection of repair work. Although at 10 per cent this seems high in comparison to a number of other organisations, this may however reflect that a large proportion of the stock requires major work. There are guidelines to pre-inspect where repairs are likely to cost over £1,000 or where the work cannot be diagnosed over the phone. There is a target to complete pre-inspection in five days, which is being achieved and this time is included into the average repair time of 7.94 days above.
- 99** There are effective arrangements to quality assure repair work through the post inspection process. About 300 repairs are post-inspected a month by RMS which is intended to capture about 10 per cent of jobs. Post-inspections are targeted at all jobs over £1,000, any recalls, any significant variations and on a random sample across areas, repair costs and operatives. This shows that the repairs carried out are to a good standard.
- 100** Disrepair cases are managed well and have reduced significantly. Weekly meetings are held to go through all disrepair cases and ensure the correct procedures are being followed. From about 200 cases a few years ago there are now only 27 current cases, with two in the last year having gone to court. This is reducing disrepair and legal costs and ensuring staff time is not diverted away from other services.
- 101** Newham Homes is developing a proactive approach in offering a rechargeable repairs service to tenants and leaseholders. Where a repair is a tenant's responsibility or where a leaseholder needs a repair, Newham Homes offers to do this based on the Schedule of Rates cost. The customer is given a quotation and if they accept this the work is arranged. These arrangements have only recently been introduced and it is too early to see how successful take up is. Repairs needed as a result of damage caused by the tenant or members of, or visitors to, the household are carried out and recharged. This year £53,000 has been raised as recharges, with about £15,000 collected so far.

Empty (void) property repairs

- 102** In 2007, we found that strengths outweighed weaknesses in this area. Void turnaround time had improved substantially. There was a reasonable lettable standard which was generally applied. However, the overall relet time was not good and the lettable standard had not always been sent out with offers.

- 103** In this inspection, we found a balance of strengths and weaknesses in this area. The time taken to let empty properties does not compare favourably with others and there are some aspects of the voids process which are not effective. A lack of alignment between the lettable standard and the Modern Homes Standard is resulting in properties being improved to different standards. However, empty properties are repaired quickly, the lettable standard has been reviewed and agreed with tenants and properties are being let in accordance with this.
- 104** Overall performance for reletting empty properties at 29 days to the end of January 2010 is short of best performance and Newham Homes own target of 27 days. This is mainly due to delays in lettings caused by a high level of refusals, despite the Council operating a choice-based lettings scheme. Newham Homes and the Council are working together to try and improve this, but in the meantime rental loss and the time people wait for a property are not being minimised.
- 105** Close monitoring of voids is allowing issues and delays in the system to be identified, with individual voids tracked through the system. However, a lack of clear targets for each stage of the process is hindering progress, and an analysis of refusals, which is a significant factor in delaying the letting process, has not yet been completed. This is limiting improvement in relet times.
- 106** Some aspects of the void process are not effective. Notice to vacate is only given for about 40 per cent of voids with the remainder either abandoned or having the keys handed in with no notice. Properties are often left in poor condition and need clearing of rubbish and effects. There has been limited action to try and tackle this. Pre-termination visits were introduced as a pilot but did not prove successful, although these are to be tried again. Even where notice is given, it is only recently that properties are being passed quickly to the Council for advertising. This is not maximising the time that the Council has to let properties.
- 107** Other aspects of the void process are effective, with sound arrangements to make empty properties ready for letting. Repair work to bring empty properties up to the lettable standard is carried out quickly, with the target to complete repairs in ten working days being met. Multiple viewings take place for some properties and accompanied viewings are carried out for all lettings, if possible while the repair work is in progress.
- 108** Major work voids are identified through a scoring matrix. The number of major work voids is high at 43 per cent but reflects the level of work needed to meet the lettable standard, often needing new kitchens and bathrooms. There is a target to complete work in major voids in 30 days which is being achieved. Where an empty property is due for Modern Homes work it is effectively incorporated into the programme. Any aids and adaptations are identified and dealt with under the 'accessible housing project' described later in the report. This is resulting in effective repair work to empty homes.
- 109** There is a lettable standard which has been revised and agreed with tenants and properties are being let in accordance with this. Properties ready for letting visited during the inspection were clean and in a good state of repair and met the agreed standard.

How good is the service?

- 110** A lack of alignment between the lettable standard and the Modern Homes standard is resulting in properties that are repaired and modernised to different standards. In particular, if the kitchens and bathrooms fail the DHS both are replaced under the lettable standard, when only one would be replaced under Modern Homes work. Also the specification for the kitchen and bathroom work under the lettable standard does not include, for example, the replacement of floor tiles, which would be done under the Modern Homes standard. If Modern Homes work has previously been refused by the former tenant, the property is brought up to the lettable standard and would be different to other neighbouring properties. This is not a consistent approach and is confusing for existing tenants, potentially adding to the dissatisfaction of having to choose between a kitchen and bathroom under the Modern Homes programme.
- 111** The void focus group is allowing tenants to influence how empty properties are let. They have been involved in reviewing the lettable standard, which introduced additional items such as hard-wired smoke alarms and security locks for front doors, and agreeing its format, and for it to be sent out at the offer stage. The group also developed and agreed the new decoration scheme, and the contents of the Welcome Pack. However, tenants are not involved in operational aspects of the void process such as helping with post-inspections to check whether the lettable standard has been met. This misses the opportunity to view the property from a tenant's perspective.
- 112** There are effective arrangements for the decoration of empty properties. Empty properties in sheltered schemes, or where lettings identify that the new tenant is vulnerable and in need of help, are decorated by Newham Homes. Other new tenants are offered the revised decoration scheme which is proving successful. The decoration pack provides a range of materials, colour charts are given at the viewing and new tenants bring their choice of paint to the sign up visit. The pack is then ordered for delivery the next day. To enhance the scheme further guidance is being developed on the best colours for visually impaired people so that advice can be given to this client group. The scheme has resulted in savings of £84,000 and increased tenant satisfaction.
- 113** New tenant satisfaction is low. Satisfaction with the overall lettings process was 83 per cent in the last survey. Dissatisfaction is followed up and broadly falls into four areas – dissatisfaction with the decoration, with cleanliness, the state of repairs and the overall condition of the block. The new lettable standard and the new decoration scheme is starting to address three of these areas.

Gas servicing

- 114** In 2007, we found that strengths outweighed weaknesses. There was generally good performance on servicing gas appliances within the statutory timescale and firm action was taken when access was denied. There was good information and access to servicing appointments for tenants. There were appropriate quality assurance measures, and new initiatives were being taken to further improve performance.

- 115** In this inspection, we found strengths outweigh weaknesses. Performance in ensuring that all properties receive an annual gas service is strong at 99.56 per cent. There are effective arrangements for gaining access, with a new approach to enforcement action recently implemented. Appropriate quality assurance arrangements are in place, and customer satisfaction, although based on a small response rate, is high. However, the new approach to enforcement not yet embedded. The arrangements in relation to carbon monoxide detectors are not sufficiently robust and the programme of replacing smoke detectors is in its early stages..
- 116** Performance in carrying out annual gas servicing is now strong, although this has only been achieved since March 2009. Performance has improved from 97 per cent in March 2009 to 99.56 per cent at 15 February 2010. There are currently 67 cases where the gas service is overdue and most of these are for less than one month. The oldest overdue case is five months overdue and is in a TMO area. All are in various stages of the no access procedure with court dates for ten cases.
- 117** The ALMO promotes the importance of gas safety to encourage tenants to give access. Leaflets and other literature are available at various outlets, and gas safety is promoted at events. There are articles in the tenants' newsletter and information on the importance of gas safety is shortly to be included with the appointment letters sent out. The envelopes used for gas servicing correspondence clearly state on the outside in different languages that a gas service is due and different colours of envelope have been used to make them stand out.
- 118** The database holding the numbers of properties for gas servicing is updated through the void process and through any modern homes work for heating. This ensures that all properties requiring a gas service are captured.
- 119** There are appropriate procedures to gain access to tenants' homes to carry out gas servicing. Flexible appointments are offered including evening and Saturday mornings and arrangements can also be made outside of these hours. A series of letters with appointments are sent and at the third visit a sticky label is placed over the door and a final letter notice delivered. Further visits are made outside of working hours to try and get access and all engineers have a list of overdue cases which they try if they are in the area. Phone calls are made and any knowledge about the tenant is gathered from other sections in Newham Homes. If any repair requests are received these are coordinated so that a gas service is carried out before or at the same time. The servicing arrangements are based on a ten month cycle so that the no access procedures described can start early in the process. In these ways Newham Homes is maximising the opportunities to gain access.
- 120** Legal action to gain access to tenants' homes has recently been strengthened. The previous process included applying for an injunction which relied on committal proceedings in the event of the tenant not complying. Newham Homes has explored alternatives and has worked with the court to introduce proceedings under the Environmental Protection Act to force entry. This new process now starts when the no access procedure has been exhausted with the intention of applying for a court date as soon as the service becomes overdue. So far there have been 15 forced entries under this process and publicity is planned to encourage others to give access in future to avoid forced entries. This approach is minimising the time that properties are overdue their service.

How good is the service?

- 121** However, the new process for legal proceedings under the Environmental Protection Act is not yet embedded. This means that the older cases are currently being referred for court action and the process has not yet caught up so that those cases just falling out of time are being referred at that point. This will correct itself in due course so that court applications can be made as soon as the service becomes overdue, but in the meantime this means that some cases have not been dealt with at the appropriate point in the procedure.
- 122** Newham Homes is trying to increase access to properties by using a landlord access device on boilers. These devices are put in as part of any new installations through the modern homes work or as a replacement and are also used when access has previously been a problem. They do not allow the temperature to fall below 15 degrees so as not to risk vulnerable households being left without adequate heating.
- 123** There are sound quality assurance arrangements in place. The contractor and Newham Homes each post-inspect 5 per cent of services, based on a random sample to get a mix of properties and engineers. As part of this, checks are also made on a sample of gas safety certificates to ensure they are completed correctly. Gas policies and procedures have been audited by an external consultancy in the last two years and generally found to be sound. This helps ensure that tenants are receiving good quality work.
- 124** Satisfaction with gas servicing is high often reaching 100 per cent. However this is based on a very small response rate of less than 5 per cent. Some might be picked up through the telephone surveys by ROC but these are not separately identified. Any dissatisfaction is followed up by a visit.
- 125** The approach to improving safety through the use of smoke and carbon monoxide detectors is not sufficiently robust. Although all properties have smoke alarms fitted these rely on batteries, and a programme has only recently been introduced to fit hard wired detectors as part of modern homes work. Newham Homes has not had an agreed course of action on its approach to fitting carbon monoxide detectors in properties. However, the gas service includes a visual check of any tenant owned appliances, and where a person is sleeping in a room with an open-flued appliance a carbon monoxide detector is fitted. There are also plans to fit carbon monoxide detectors as part of the gas contract where there are open flued appliances. Although these arrangements help, the lack of a consistent approach over time means that risks have not been proactively and consistently minimised.

Aids and adaptations

- 126** In 2007, we found that Newham Homes was working effectively with the Council's Home Improvement Agency (HIA) to ensure that its residents received an efficient service and that their needs were met.

- 127** In this inspection, we found that this is an area with a balance of strengths and weaknesses. Adequate resources are made available to meet the needs of the service. Tenants are benefiting from the Handyvan service for minor repairs to their homes, and Newham Homes and the HIA work well together to deliver the service. However, promotion of the service is mixed, there has been little assessment of how well the service overall is meeting the needs of tenants, and some key performance information is not formally reported.
- 128** Promotion of the aids and adaptations service is mixed. The service for major adaptations is provided to Newham Homes tenants by the HIA. The HIA has good promotion with a range of leaflets held at different outlets across the borough and attendance at events, including specific BAME events, to encourage take up of the service. Newham Homes promotes the service for major adaptations through the Modern Homes work which has made over 500 referrals for an OT assessment since April 2008. However, there is less promotion and information on aids and minor adaptations by Newham Homes.
- 129** There is a clear system for tenants to access the service. Tenants are referred to Adult Social Care who carry out an initial assessment. If the adaptation is likely to cost under £2,000 it is classified as a minor adaptation and Adult Social Care arrange for this to be done through their own contractors. Where it is a major adaptation it is referred to the HIA. Take up of the service is monitored by age, gender and ethnicity and shows that this broadly reflects the tenant profile, suggesting that there is fair and equal access.
- 130** The budget of £1.2 million a year is meeting the needs of the service. This year the budget has been reduced to £1 million because of the effective arrangements to carry out and fund adaptations through the Modern Homes programme, so meeting demand in this way. Since April 2008, 289 tenants have benefited from major adaptations to their homes, with a further 249 carried out as part of the Modern Homes work. In addition there were 56 minor adaptations carried out in 2008/09. Overall spend in 2008/09 was £1.247 million of which £14,000 was spent on minor adaptations.
- 131** Newham Homes closely monitors the time that its residents wait for aids and adaptations to their homes. Minor adaptation work is currently being completed in 2.6 weeks. For major adaptations on average this year it has taken 42 weeks from the customer's initial enquiry to the Council's Social Care Service to completion of the work. The various stages of the process are monitored and a target set for the HIA of 20 weeks to complete the work with current performance at 23 weeks. However, there is no clear prioritisation system to ensure that urgent cases are dealt with more quickly.
- 132** Tenants are benefiting from the Handyvan scheme offered through the HIA. This provides minor repairs cross tenure for older people and people with disabilities. So far 180 tenants have benefited from the service and customer satisfaction is at 100 per cent. This offers a highly valued service to some of Newham Homes' most vulnerable residents.

How good is the service?

- 133** Satisfaction with the service runs at about 88 per cent which is not high when compared with some other organisations. This is based on telephone surveys carried out externally to the HIA. Surveys are also left with customers following the work but it is not clear if these are incorporated or how many are returned. Any dissatisfaction is followed up but there has been no analysis overall to identify where improvements can be made.
- 134** There are good working relationships between the HIA and Newham Homes. Regular meetings take place to discuss operational issues, and any budgetary issues are dealt with through the Capital Programme Group made up of Council and Newham Homes officers. This is helping ensure that customers receive an effective service.
- 135** Newham Homes has not assessed how effectively the aids and adaptations service meets the needs of its tenants. While it is clear that a number of tenants are benefiting from the services provided by HIA, this has not been challenged to ensure that the service is meeting needs in terms of customer care and quality, and that it represents good value for money for Newham Homes. Similarly the service for minor adaptations through the Council's Social Adult Care Service has not been challenged. Such an assessment would offer Newham Homes, and its customers, assurance that it is obtaining the service in the best way.
- 136** Formal performance reporting against delivery of the service misses a key indicator. Although the number of grants and satisfaction is reported, the length of time customers wait for aids and adaptations is not reported, though this is a key measure to reflect the customer experience. Also there is no longer-term monitoring of outcomes for customers to show the impact that the aids and adaptations to their home has made in terms of improved quality of life and independent living. This is missing the opportunity to assess how well these broader objectives are being met and to demonstrate how the investment made is securing longer term value.
- 137** Newham Homes actively seeks to make best use of existing adapted stock to meet needs. Newham Homes are part of a government funded 'Accessible Housing' project aimed at making better use of adapted properties to meet the needs of households needing these. Properties with adaptations are identified through surveys or at the void stage and are matched to suitable households who need these. So far 60 households have been helped through this project.
- 138** The recycling of aids and adaptations is in its early days. The HIA has joined a scheme to recycle stair lifts with three recycled so far. Adaptations that could be recycled are also identified when properties become empty.

Housing income management

- 139** In 2007, we found that performance on income management was strong. There were comprehensive procedures for rent account management and arrears recovery and the percentage of rent received had steadily increased over the past three years. There was a good range of information and payment options for residents and appropriate welfare advice was generally available. However, there had been weak recovery of recharges for disrepair, and arrangements for referring tenants to money services were not fully effective.

- 140** In this inspection, we found that strengths significantly outweigh weaknesses. The service is customer focused and rent collection is strong. There is a good range of information and ways to pay rent. Support is available to tenants in arrears or experiencing problems with debt.
- 141** The service is customer focused and influenced by service users. The Rent Focus Group (RFG), which has successfully attracted young tenants as members, has informed a number of areas such as changes to direct debit payments and rent week breaks. There is a good range of clear information on rent and related issues, including leaflets, articles in the general newsletter and the six-monthly 'Rent Matters' newsletter is distributed to all tenants. Tenants are able to call the rent service on a free phone number which was introduced in response to feedback. Satisfaction with the rent service is at 75 per cent in the 2009 STATUS survey.
- 142** It is easy for tenants to make rent payments. A range of payment options are offered by Newham Homes including standing order, direct debit, Allpay, payment through the website and telephone and cash payments at the local service centres. Tenants have been offered the opportunity to pay over a 50-week rent year in response to feedback and plans are underway to assess if this option could be offered to monthly payers through collection over fewer months per year, again as a result of tenant consultation. Newham Homes offers incentives including a prize draw for tenants with clear accounts or payment by direct debit and a further prize draw for tenants participating in feedback on the rent survey. Easy access and incentives to pay rent enable effective rent collection.
- 143** Performance in collecting rent is strong. Newham Homes has ranked as the top performer of London ALMOs since 2007/08. In 2008/09 performance of rent collected as a percentage of rent owed was 98.9 per cent. The proportion of rent collected excluding rent brought forward was 101 per cent to the end of September 2009. Prompt collection of rents ensures that the organisation has access to the resources it needs to provide services to tenants and to promote improvements.
- 144** The service has comprehensive policies and procedures for the collection of rent and recovery of arrears. Success is mirrored through strong performance in recovery of court costs and rechargeable repairs and garage arrears. The approach is based on an appropriate balance of support and enforcement action. Newham Homes uses pre-emption panels to assist in the reduction in rent-related evictions. Figures for 2009/10 (to end September 2009) show that 0.2 per cent of tenants were evicted. This low number of evictions is in the best 25 per cent of performance compared with other ALMOs.
- 145** Tenants are able to easily access financial and debt advice. Newham Homes works with a range of other agencies to ensure tenants receive appropriate debt advice and maximise income for tenants. For example, it has an agreement for debt advisors from Community Links to provide services for its tenants and it promotes the Credit Union as an alternative to high cost loans for tenants. Support provided includes holistic benefits advice, debt advice and actions relating to bankruptcy. Newham Homes' welfare advisors worked with 85 tenants from April to October 2009 and helped them claim an additional £17,693 worth of benefits. Working in partnership with other agencies helps Newham Homes to address need and increase income for tenants in an effective manner.

How good is the service?

- 146** The relationship with the Council's Housing Benefit (HB) team is positive. The HB team and court officers are based in the rent service team and receive joint training with rent officers. New tenants get an accurate calculation of HB at sign up, along with rent payment advice and help to complete HB claims. There is a clear focus on reducing rent arrears and maximising income from efficient and smooth operation of the HB system. Joint working is ensuring that delays in processing tenants' HB claims are minimised and that HB is maximised for tenants.
- 147** Tenant profile information is used to target resources and help to prevent rent arrears. For example, in 2009 Newham Homes targeted young people and African Caribbean tenants in arrears. Staff contacted these tenants to ensure that they were claiming all the benefits they were entitled to. Officers were able to advise a number of tenants that they should be entitled to additional benefits which would enable them to pay towards their rent arrears. Rent arrears for these groups has reduced, however this campaign was not evaluated so Newham Homes is not able to demonstrate a reduction in arrears with this targeted approach.
- 148** Vulnerable tenants are supported to ensure any rent arrears action is sensitive and proportionate. New tenants who are vulnerable are referred to a welfare benefits advisor from the rent team at sign up. Newham Homes has strong links to other agencies who can offer debt support to vulnerable people, for example the Substance Abuse team. Maximising income and supporting tenants helps prevent them from falling into debt and to clear arrears in a structured way without unnecessary hardship.
- 149** There is an improved focus on former tenant arrears (FTAs). There are clear procedures and arrangements to use debt collection agencies to recover monies owing. Performance on collection of FTAs is improving. Between April 2005 and March 2009, FTA cases reduced from 5231 to 2537. Total FTAs reduced from £4.3 million to £2.8 million for the same period and arrears collected increased. Write offs reduced from 27.4 per cent to 22.4 per cent annually. However, Newham Homes has not resourced this service in 2009. Target collection of FTAs of £190,000 is unlikely to be met, with a shortfall of approximately £40,000 on this target. Early and efficient collection of former tenancy debts enables the ALMO to increase its income to improve other services.

Resident involvement

- 150** In 2007, we found that this was an area of significant strength. There was a strong approach to resident involvement supported by a staff team that was highly regarded by residents. There was an effective and well-attended resident involvement structure and work to involve leaseholders had been strengthened over the previous 18 months. There had been a focus on involving and consulting those outside the traditional participation structures and there was a comprehensive training programme to build capacity among residents. Residents had also taken the lead in prioritising an annual programme of estate improvements.

- 151** In this inspection, we found that strengths outweigh weakness. Residents can be involved in a wide range of different ways and there are examples of outcomes from involvement. Resident involvement structures are representative of the resident profile and Newham Homes is encouraging a more diverse range of people to become involved with the organisation. However, different groups have not been effectively integrated into the formal consultation mechanism and tenants' satisfaction with opportunities for involvement is low.
- 152** There is a wide range of ways in which residents can be involved in shaping and improving services. Opportunities include:
- joining the 'Have Your Say' register which allows residents to identify what type of events they would like to be involved in, including the frequency and timing of these;
 - taking part in one-off activities such as focus groups, surveys or task groups;
 - checking the quality of estates through the 'Estate Watchers' scheme;
 - shaping and monitoring services through a number of dedicated forums such as the Rent Focus Group, the ReLIP group and the Modern Homes Group;
 - membership of the Residents Communication Panel;
 - taking part in activities such as the Resident Involvement Month and the Black History Month events;
 - taking part in the Residents Empowerment Training programme of courses;
 - the leaseholders' forum;
 - membership of the Black and Minority Ethnic Group (BMEG);
 - membership of the Sheltered Housing Tenant Liaison Committee (STLC);
 - membership of a network of tenant and resident associations (TRAs) across the borough;
 - membership of one of the six Area Tenant Liaison Committees (ATLC) which feeds into the Borough-wide Tenants Liaison Committee (BTLC);
 - participation at the Annual Tenant and Leaseholder Conference; and
 - membership of the Newham Homes board.
- 153** Opportunities for involvement are promoted through the resident involvement strategy. This was developed in collaboration with residents and clearly shows the way in which Newham Homes wants residents to be able to be involved in services and the organisation over the coming years. This will continue to be through the formal mechanism but will also be through a wider range of one-off and less structured events. The strategy is supported by the compact which is an agreement between Newham Homes, Newham Council and Newham's Tenants' and Leaseholders', to share decision making in relation to housing services provided by Newham Homes and the Council. The Compact enables residents to make proposals for service improvements, to discuss them with service managers and to see them included in the compact's two year action plans. These structures ensure that residents are at the heart of the organisation.

How good is the service?

- 154** Formal consultation structures are not operating effectively. Formal consultation between residents and Newham Homes is through the Borough-wide Tenant Liaison Committee (BTLC). This group has been expanded to include members from the Black and Minority Ethnic Group (BMEG) and the Sheltered Housing Tenant Liaison Committee (STLC) and on average has in the region of 40 people attending its meetings. However these meetings are not operating effectively, and there are tensions and a lack of integration between the different groups which prevents the group overall from focusing on strategic issues. This is limiting the contribution that this potentially key decision-making group makes in determining and improving services for all tenants.
- 155** Newham Homes has continued to run a residents involvement event which was highlighted in the previous inspection report as positive practice. This has developed from a week long event to a month long event but still targets specific areas of the borough and goes out to residents. Outcomes from the last event, held in June 2009 include the establishment of two new TRAs and help to set up a homework club following feedback from parents on one estate. Events are timed during 2.00 - 7.00 which enables parents, school children, and workers and people who are at home during the day to participate. The team is always considering how to make the event more effective and is, for example, looking at holding the next event during school holidays to maximise participation. This event regularly reaches residents who would not normally take part in more formal occasions.
- 156** Resident involvement has a clear focus on empowering residents. Newham Homes runs a programme of 19 training events for residents which range from understanding the role of Newham Homes' board (and thereby encouraging residents to consider standing for election to the board) to looking for work and money management. Residents can choose to go on as many courses as they want. A formal graduation event, attended by the Mayor, concludes the course. At the end of the programme, a survey of participants finds out what forums and voluntary organisations they have gone on to use their skills in and if they have been successful in finding a job. This is an innovative way of encouraging participation and developing resident skills.
- 157** Resident involvement is well resourced. There is a dedicated resident involvement team to support the range of participation and consultation activities which take place across the organisation. In addition, resident involvement has been successfully main-streamed across the organisation. Although the resident involvement team act as facilitators, all events, including local TRAs are managed and driven by service staff. Through this, residents have direct access to the managers and staff who are responsible for those particular services. This means that there is an immediate exchange about problems and issues and staff are there with direct knowledge of the service and are able to respond as well as ensuring that all staff have an active role in resident involvement.

- 158** Resident involvement structures are now more representative of the resident profile. Newham Homes supported the setting up of the Black and Minority Ethnic Group (BMEG) in 2006 as a way of involving more residents from diverse backgrounds in involvement activities. The BMEG has been able to support and encourage further involvement of BME residents, many of whom have gone on to join other groups within the formal structures. The BMEG has been recognised by the Borough-wide Tenant Liaison Committee and representatives are now members of this group. This is helping to ensure that decision making groups are representative of all residents and are able to capture the whole range of their needs.
- 159** Newham Homes is working to attract involvement from a wider range of residents. This is through a variety of different approaches, including a new blog spot to attract people who regularly use other IT applications. The blog will feature certain topics, have an article on these and encourage comments and feedback. The current topic is on decent homes and will change to Telecare in March and the disability strategy the following month. There is a forward plan for topics and the blog will be advertised in the next newsletter. There is also a link to the blog from the front page of the website. Different ways of interacting with the organisation enables a wide range of people to get more involved.
- 160** There is a wide range of outcomes from resident involvement. These include the creation of the BMEG, the change in management of the caretakers and concierge service, more specific time slots for repairs appointments and the establishment of a separate phone number for repairs. These are all things which residents have fed back on and where they have been clear about changes they want to see to make the services more accessible and customer focused.
- 161** Resident involvement activities are regularly reviewed to ensure these are offering value for money. The team has costed its participation in events and assessed this against the outcomes it has from increased involvement or promotion of Newham Homes. Through this it has made decisions about what events to target as providing good all-round value and what events not to attend in the future. Since moving offices, a number of events will be held in the conference rooms at Bridge House rather than paying for venues in Stratford. This will save over £5,000 a year in room booking costs. As well as using the offices, Newham Homes is looking to use venues that are free or low cost. These include using community centres for TRA meetings and rooms at sheltered housing schemes for STLC meetings. These measures have resulted in savings which can be reinvested in services.
- 162** Although there is a wide range of opportunities to participate and influence services, the recent STATUS survey showed only 59 per cent are satisfied that their views will be taken into account. Although this has increased from 56 per cent in the previous survey, it means that a significant proportion of residents do not feel their views are taken into account. Just over half of general needs tenants, 52 per cent, are satisfied that Newham Homes is providing them with opportunities to participate in management and decision making. This means that again, a substantial proportion wish to have more opportunities or are unaware of the opportunities that already exist. Newham Homes recognises this and is planning to review communications in 2010/11 to understand and resolve these issues.

Tenancy and estate management

Tenancy management

- 163** In 2007, we found that strengths outweighed weaknesses in this service area. The sign-up process for new tenants was comprehensive and tenancy audit arrangements were robust. A review of the voids reletting process had improved turnaround and there had been a substantial decline in refusal rates. There were effective processes to support the ALMO's work on antisocial behaviour, including partnership working and preventative work. However, pre-termination visits were not carried out and there was limited evidence of the outcomes or impact of activity on antisocial behaviour (ASB).
- 164** In this inspection, we found that strengths outweigh weaknesses. The sign-up process for new tenants and tenancy audit arrangements remain robust. There is a clear focus on tenancy sustainment and support is available for vulnerable tenants. There are sound arrangements for dealing with antisocial behaviour with an appropriate balance between prevention and enforcement and support for victims and perpetrators. Newham Homes works well with partners in the prevention and management of antisocial behaviour. However, complainants are not kept informed of progress with their case and satisfaction with this service is low.
- 165** The tenancy sign up process is comprehensive. New tenants receive detailed advice and a tenancy sign up pack, which includes leaflets on being a good neighbour and a tenant handbook. This is supported by an informative DVD which can be viewed later to ensure tenants are aware of their responsibilities. The tenancy audit team also carries out checks on all prospective tenants prior to sign up to ensure their eligibility for the property. Householder ID is examined and their photographs are taken for future identification purposes. Profile information is also collected and any specific needs identified so that services can be tailored to the individual such as disability or language requirements. Introductory tenancies are used to ensure new tenants are aware of the need to adhere to the tenancy agreement. These arrangements enable new tenants to know their responsibilities and the services that are available to them.
- 166** There is a clear focus on tenancy sustainment. All tenants receive a follow up visit within 30 days of taking up their tenancy. This is an opportunity to remind tenants of their responsibilities and to ensure they are aware of the services that are available. It also helps ensure that tenants are referred to other agencies if there are debt or support issues. Newham Homes also offers services to vulnerable tenants such as decorating and gardening. It also has a special support package for young people leaving care which includes help with decorating and furniture assembly as well as practical aspects of home management such as the location of stop cocks. These support systems are enabling tenants to sustain their tenancies.

- 167** Tenancies audits are well managed. Newham Homes employs a specialist team to undertake tenancy audits. This is done through a mix of a rolling programme of visits, ad hoc visits, follow ups to other issues such as non access for gas servicing or referrals to Newham Homes' 'stop squat' hotline. The job replacement projects in blocks is resulting in a number of positive outcomes such as the identification of vulnerable tenants in need of support through to tenants no longer living in the properties and illegal sub lettings. Since Newham Homes came into existence in December 2005, 102 properties have been returned to the Council and have been re let to genuine tenants.
- 168** It is easy to report incidents of antisocial behaviour (ASB). There is a 24 hour, seven days a week hotline specifically for ASB. Incidents can also be reported to any member of Newham Homes' staff such as caretakers and concierges, over the phone, through the website and in person at the local service centres. Easy reporting encourages people to act quickly on incidents of nuisance and ASB.
- 169** Newham Homes has a clear focus on preventing ASB. Responsibilities towards neighbours and the approach to ASB are explained at the sign up and reinforced at the tenancy visit. Newham Homes is engaged with other agencies in providing diversionary activities for young people. The Resident Led Improvement Programme (ReLIP) scheme makes a contribution to the control of youth-led ASB. For example, tenants can choose to spend money on the fencing of parking areas and grounds to remove the opportunity for local youths to congregate in open spaces and create a nuisance. This approach helps to reduce incidents of ASB.
- 170** There is an appropriate balance between prevention and enforcement. A range of remedies are used to help resolve ASB. This includes joint working with other agencies such as the police, mediation, family intervention projects and ultimately enforcement action. Newham Homes has used a range of enforcement actions including acceptable behaviour contracts, antisocial behaviour orders, injunctions and evictions. Newham Homes also works with the police to obtain closure orders. The use of the full range of remedies gives residents the confidence that incidents will be taken seriously and acted upon.
- 171** There are comprehensive policies and procedures for ASB which incorporate the Respect Standard. Newham Homes has signed up to the standard which is evident in its policies and procedures and in its partnership approach with the police and the Council. This enables Newham Homes to contribute towards delivering the standard.
- 172** Newham Homes works effectively with partners to deal with ASB. The Council's Community Safety Division (CSD) is responsible for ASB under a service level agreement with Newham Homes. Staff from the CSD are based with Newham Homes' staff in the neighbourhood offices and provide training for Newham Homes staff in dealing with ASB. There is clear guidance for staff on preventative measures, enforcement action and witness support. Partners have contributed to the working of ASB procedures within Newham Homes. For example, the Police and CSD have contributed to working arrangements and procedures for closure orders to ensure a streamlined and consistent approach. Gaps identified by partners have been designed out of procedures. This helps to ensure that there is a consistent service offered to residents.

How good is the service?

- 173** Newham Homes provides support to victims and witnesses of ASB. Referrals to other agencies ensure additional support is provided where necessary, for example through floating support providers or family support projects. A witness support charter and witness support pack is offered to residents who are prepared to give evidence in court. Twelve tenants received awards for acting as witnesses in ASB cases at the annual tenant and leaseholder conference in 2009 and former witnesses are trained by the Council to offer support to those who come forward to give evidence through a witness peer support group. Newham Homes also operates a victim referral scheme, where additional security can be provided following incidents of ASB. Clear support can encourage witnesses of ASB to come forward so that perpetrators can be dealt with and their actions addressed.
- 174** Some aspects of performance in relation to ASB are not well managed. The number of cases at different stages of the procedure and the range of enforcement actions taken are not monitored. However, there is better monitoring of cases referred to other agencies or services such as mediation, and Newham Homes receives regular reports on the progress of these. A newly introduced IT programme aims to assist in the management of ASB. Until this is operational, Newham Homes is not able to quantify the level of ASB or the effectiveness of the whole range of remedies it puts in place.
- 175** Tenants are dissatisfied with how ASB is dealt with. Communication on case management and case closure is infrequent and complainants remain unclear about what is happening with their case. Satisfaction levels with ASB services are low. The 2008 survey found that satisfaction with ASB was 36 per cent which increased to 41 per cent in 2009. Conversely, satisfaction for keeping tenants informed reduced from 67 per cent in 2008 to 64 per cent in 2009. Overall satisfaction with outcomes of ASB case management reduced from 36 per cent in 2008 to 35 per cent in 2009. Newham Homes accepts that increased communication is necessary with tenants who have complained of ASB to understand the reasons for these high levels of dissatisfaction. High levels of dissatisfaction mean that services are not meeting customers' expectations.

Estate management

- 176** In 2007, we found a balance of strengths and weaknesses in estate management. Many estates and blocks were maintained to a high standard and there was a clear framework for monitoring estate management services. However, the ALMO's approach to monitoring estate management standards was not comprehensive and the quality of estate management and grounds maintenance services inconsistent.
- 177** In this inspection, we found that strengths significantly outweighed weaknesses. Estates and blocks have continued to be maintained to a high standard. The ALMO has taken the caretaking and concierge service in-house and has invested heavily in this service. Satisfaction levels are increasing and reflect the focus that has been paid in this area.
- 178** To provide context, Newham Homes ended the SLA with the Council in April 2008 and brought the caretaking and cleaning service in-house. Services are provided through a dedicated system of patch caretakers and a comprehensive service of 30 concierge schemes. All tower blocks are provided with a seven-day a week caretaking service. The grounds maintenance service is still operated by the Council under a SLA.

- 179** Newham Homes has a clear focus on improving estate services as a key priority. It has introduced a series of measures to increase tenant satisfaction which are monitored by the board through an estate improvement plan. Since bringing the services in-house, there has been additional investment of £437,000 into this service in 2009/10. This was funded from savings in other services. Part of this investment has included four deep cleaning machines and three additional bulk refuse removal vehicles. In addition to new equipment, the service has been restructured, caretakers work plans have been published and a caretakers training programme has been devised, along with the creation of a post of Quality and Training manager. Two monitoring officers are employed to spot check blocks and visit 180 blocks each month and mark them for general upkeep and cleanliness. Results are reported to management teams, the board and to tenants through the newsletter.
- 180** Residents are kept informed about estate services. Communal areas have notice boards with dates of local TRA meetings and events, laminated posters give the names of the Neighbourhood Services Manager and Estate Officer, estate walkabout dates and service standards. New posters to all blocks now include the working hours of on-site staff and their pattern of working. Cleaning standards are publicised in communal areas and there are records of when the floors were last cleaned. Block cleaning sheets which enable staff to sign off when work is completed are being introduced. The provision of information enables residents to know is happening with their services.
- 181** Estates are generally well maintained with good standards of cleanliness and grounds maintenance services. The stairwells are clean, tidy and well decorated. When communal areas require upgrading, this is first achieved by using the deep cleaning team which can achieve a higher level of cleanliness than the general cleaning staff. Specialist staff are also available to deal with graffiti or other damage. This enables Newham Homes to target investment through the capital programme for blocks where cleaning is not an appropriate or sufficient remedy. A well maintained environment adds to resident satisfaction.
- 182** Residents are actively involved in monitoring estate standards. Residents undertake estate inspections through an Estate Watchers group of volunteers who spot check blocks and estates. Estate Watchers meet on a monthly basis and areas to be checked are picked at random. The areas visited are scored for cleanliness and these results are then compared with the scores of the Estate Monitoring officers. Scores are improving and are reflecting the improving standards that Newham Homes has introduced. Additionally, Flagship Estate Walkabouts, which include other stakeholders such as the police, local councillors and staff from other agencies, are advertised in the newsletter and on the website. The findings of inspections and walkabouts are fed back to residents and issues are acted on. The involvement of residents helps to ensure that services are meeting their expectations.

How good is the service?

- 183** Satisfaction with this service has improved. Satisfaction with caretaking services has improved from 57 per cent in 2008 to 75 per cent in 2009. Satisfaction with concierge services increased from 62 per cent in 2008 to 77 per cent in 2009. Along with satisfaction, there has also been an increase in tenant views of the value for money that the caretaking service provides. This has risen from 50 per cent thinking the service offered value for money in 2008 to 61 per cent in 2009. Improved satisfaction levels shows that services are meeting customer expectations.
- 184** Residents are actively involved in deciding on capital improvements to estates. Tenants contribute by suggesting environmental and security improvements which are then considered by the Resident Led Improvement Panel. The panel priorities bids and then oversees the delivery of these. Improvements include new car parking areas, new communal gardens and security fencing.
- 185** Grounds maintenance services are effective. A resident focus group influenced the specification of the Grounds Maintenance SLA in January 2009. The contractor liaises with tenants' groups and provides monthly performance information as a result of the new SLA. Performance reaches levels of 90 to 100 per cent compliance. Service standards have recently been published through the quarterly newsletter though these are not yet reported on. Residents have asked for tree surgery to be included in the SLA. Newham Homes has responded to this and £50,000 has been set aside for tree surveys which were completed in December 2009. A plan for ongoing tree maintenance has been adopted in accordance with the recommendations of this survey. This ensures the service is responsive to residents' requirements for their environment.
- 186** Performance reporting on ground maintenance is to be further enhanced at the request of tenants. Information on frequency of visits to undertake different parts of that contract will be publicised on communal notice boards. This will ensure that residents know that the standards are being met.

Leasehold management and Right to Buy

- 187** In 2007, we found a balance of strengths and weaknesses. There was good information available for leaseholders and generally good access to services, although extended opening had not been trialled. There were robust procedures for calculating and billing service charges and consulting leaseholders ahead of major works. Specialist welfare advice was available. There had been a number of improvements in leaseholder consultation and there was a low level of complaints and disputes. Applications for the Right to Buy were handled efficiently and timescales were met. However, Newham Homes did not have a clear understanding of the profile of its leaseholders and there had not been comprehensive monitoring of satisfaction. The poor recovery of service charge and income by the Council was not maximising resources for the ALMO.

- 188** In this inspection, we found that there continues to be a balance of strengths and weaknesses. There is a range of information available and communication and consultation with leaseholders has improved. The arrangements for assessing service charges are sound and there is a range of ways to pay and support available. Newham Homes has improved its knowledge of the profile of leaseholders and has encouraged a more representative group to be involved in consultation. Right to Buy applications continue to be handled efficiently. However, dissatisfaction with the service overall is high despite improvements to the services. Leaseholders have significant concerns about a number of areas which have not yet been adequately addressed.
- 189** There has been work over the last year to address some of the weaknesses in leaseholder services and put the arrangements in to support delivery of the service. The service charge IT module is currently being implemented and will be fully implemented by April 2010. This is allowing more efficient issuing of estimates, actuals and invoices for service charges, charges for modern homes work and for collection of the charges. There has also been work to breakdown the debt transferred from the Council so that recovery arrangements can be pursued and charges accurately identified. The leaseholder team has been reorganised with staff trained on leaseholder and income management and a greater emphasis has been placed on customer facing services. This is ensuring that leaseholders have a high profile within the ALMO.
- 190** Leaseholders have a good range of information available to them. The leaseholders' handbook has been revised and updated, a welcome pack is offered and a specific leaflet developed on 'Your Service Charge Explained 2009/10'. Leaseholders have been involved in agreeing the content and design of the publications and have also considered the service standards that are offered. The information is also available on the website. This is allowing leaseholders to be better informed in a way that suits them.
- 191** Communication with leaseholders has improved. There are leasehold officers responsible for specific geographical areas and responsible for dealing with or coordinating all leaseholder enquiries. A surgery is held before the meetings of the Leaseholders Group (LHG) for any individual issues to be brought up and surgeries based on an appointment system have also been introduced on a Wednesday evening at a local service centre, with two held so far. Following discussions with leaseholders a dedicated page for leaseholders is being introduced to the tenants' newsletter with an editorial board of leaseholders deciding the information to be included.

How good is the service?

- 192** Consultation and involvement of leaseholders has been strengthened. The LHG has operated for some time as a formal consultation group but this has recently been supplemented by seven focus groups covering the key areas of importance for leaseholders. Leaseholders were asked to volunteer at various events or sign up at the local library and invites were sent out. The focus groups were run over the last few months and although attendance was mixed some clear outcomes came out of these. This includes, for example, a suggestion which is being followed up to offer an interview to any new leaseholders or to tenants when properties are sublet. The group looking at the management fee led to changes in the charges for resident involvement activities and information about the caretaking and concierge services has been made clearer and more available. This is helping to improve the relationship between Newham Homes and leaseholders.
- 193** Performance against the service standards and other performance indicators is not yet captured and reported to leaseholders. This is planned from April 2010 but in the meantime it is difficult for leaseholders to judge how well the service is doing and whether the required standards are being met.
- 194** Newham Homes is developing its knowledge of leaseholders' needs. Customer profile information for leaseholders has increased. Contact has been made with 88 per cent of leaseholders to collect information on some of the diversity strands and has resulted in a 50 per cent response for ethnicity. The profile of any sub-letters is not collected other than through local knowledge but this is recognised as a gap by Newham Homes as this group occupies 20 per cent of leasehold properties. The information gathered has not been comprehensively used for example, in relation to monitoring use of the debt advice service but the make up of the LHG was assessed against the profile and this led to more members being encouraged to join from BME communities. However, a lack of profile information means that Newham Homes is not able to tailor its services to meet needs.
- 195** There are appropriate arrangements for dealing with service charges. Service charges for leaseholders are based on detailed management accounts which ensures these accurately reflect what services are costing to provide. These are then apportioned across tenants and leaseholders by block and down to individuals. Estimates are sent out within the statutory timescales for annual service charges, followed by the actual charges once these are known. The statements and letters sent to leaseholders have been revised based on best practice from elsewhere and in consultation with leaseholders. There is now one payment reference and the statement shows carried forward debt and the total balance owed. Leaseholders can be clear about the services they are charging for and judge whether these are providing value for money.

- 196** The weak approach to collecting service charges in the past is continuing to impact on current performance. A debt of £7 million, some of this going back to 1984, was inherited from the previous arrangements where the Council's income system was used to invoice and collect debt. Responsibility for collection passed to Newham Homes in October 2008. Newham Homes took on responsibility for issuing invoices in January 2010 to provide an integrated service addressing both service and payment queries. However, the current debt is £8 million and some of these debts are very old. Although there is a bad debt provision of £1.3 million it is not known if this will be sufficient. This is limiting the resources that could be available for investment in services.
- 197** Appropriate consultation takes place for major works to leaseholder homes. Leaseholders are given a list of the works planned at the beginning of the financial year and consultation on the works starts about four months before it is due to start. The type of consultation depends on the nature of the work but leaseholders receive an estimate of the likely cost and Newham Homes guarantees that it will not charge above this level. Leaseholders are invited to the meetings about the work and are able to put their views forward, which has resulted in them influencing some aspects of the work and what should be included.
- 198** Prospective leaseholders receive accurate information on the likely costs they will incur over the next five years due to major works. The six year modern homes investment plan has allowed this information to be projected and is minimising any loss of income as a result of not providing accurate information in advance.
- 199** Leaseholders are offered a range of ways to pay. These include standing orders, through the website, by telephone and in the local service centres. Direct debit is due to start from April 2010, and a target to have 50 per cent of leaseholders paying by direct debit over the next two years has been set. Leaseholders are able to pay by instalments over ten months and can enter into repayment arrangements where they owe service charges. Leaseholders in financial difficulties benefit from a dedicated debt welfare officer who helps them claim benefits, pay their service charges, and offers advice and assistance on how to access financial help to pay for major works. This helps maximise service charge collection.
- 200** Leaseholder satisfaction is low despite all the improvements which have been put in place. A survey of leaseholders in 2009 showed that overall satisfaction with the services provided by Newham Homes is very low at 26 per cent. This has reduced from 2008 when satisfaction was at 37 per cent. In 2009, 45 per cent of leaseholders were dissatisfied with the services provided by Newham Homes. Thirty-five per cent of leaseholders also thought that services had got worse in the past 12 months with only 12 per cent saying these has improved. Nearly half of leaseholders contacting Newham Homes, 49 per cent, said it was difficult to get hold of the right person to talk to and a third, 31 per cent, reported that staff were not helpful. The survey also showed 71 per cent describing services charges as offering poor value for money.

How good is the service?

- 201** Leaseholders met during the inspection expressed high levels of dissatisfaction. There were mixed views on a range of issues and although many could see some improvements, they were concerned that information had not filtered down to all leaseholders and a number of concerns had not been addressed. Despite strengthened procedures, a number were concerned about the level and accuracy of service charges and whether these, and the costs of modern homes works, provide value for money. This level of dissatisfaction means that Newham Homes and the Council have some way to go before they can demonstrate to leaseholders that they are providing services of an acceptable standard.
- 202** Both Newham Homes and the Council are committed to improving services to leaseholders. Concern about the low levels of satisfaction is leading to both organisations working together to contact leaseholders directly to gain a better understanding of the issues behind the survey results. The Council and Newham Homes want to address outstanding issues as well as improving communications with leaseholders so that there is a good understanding of the actions being taken.
- 203** The mechanism for dealing with leaseholders' disputes has not been successful. Limited use has been made of the dispute resolution panel to sort out leaseholders' issues without recourse to more formal methods. The intention is for this to support the complaints process and can be used before stage two of the complaints procedure. However, it has only been used in one case and leaseholders are continuing to rely on the more traditional methods often involving their local councillor or MP. Newham Homes recognises that the panel needs to be better promoted to encourage use.
- 204** There are effective arrangements for dealing with Right to Buy (RTB) applications. There have been 165 enquiries with three having proceeded to completion so far this year. Statutory timescales are met with all RTB applications responded to within 28 days and s125 valuation notices issued within the required three months. Customers are offered a consultation interview to go through a range of issues about service and major works charges and the responsibilities of being a homeowner. Not all prospective purchasers wish to attend this consultation so it is planned to send a DVD covering this information to those who do not attend. This is providing an efficient level of service and offering prospective homeowners a good understanding of the costs of home ownership.

Supported housing

- 205** In 2007, we found that this was an area with significant strengths. There had been good progress in delivering the strategy to provide modern sheltered housing and the standard of refurbished accommodation was high. The ALMO had contributed to improved turnaround of empty sheltered properties. Provision had been made to meet specific cultural demands. Newham Network was providing an effective community alarm service which met targets and generated a surplus.

- 206** In this inspection, we found that strengths outweigh weaknesses. There is an effective community alarm and telecare service which has achieved accreditation and has high levels of service user satisfaction. Supported housing services provide good customer care and are valued highly by service users. However, the delivery of the sheltered housing service does not reflect modern practices and one scheme does not meet current standards.
- 207** Newham Homes provides an effective community alarm and telecare service. Newham Network was accredited with the TSA (Telecare Services Association) in January 2010 and was one of the first ALMOs to go through this. The accreditation means that its policies, procedures, performance and systems comply with the standards set by the TSA for this service area. The performance of Newham Network is exceeding good practice targets. The Telecare Services Association sets its performance targets that 80 per cent of calls should be answered in 30 seconds and 98 per cent in 60 seconds. For the past three years, Newham Network answered 96, 97 and 95 per cent of calls within 30 seconds and consistently answered 99 per cent of all calls within 60 seconds. Telecare clients can be assured that their calls will be dealt with quickly.
- 208** Satisfaction with Newham Network is high. Newham Network carries out a bi-annual satisfaction survey with its service users. The last one was completed in 2008 and showed that 98 per cent were satisfied that their call was answered promptly, 98 per cent that the call was dealt with to their satisfaction and 99 per cent that staff were friendly and helpful.
- 209** Developments in telecare are actively promoted. Newham Network is one of the three sites taking part in the Whole System Demonstrator (WSD) trial which is a Government funded two year research project to find out how technology can help people manage their health and their independence. So far, this trial has 316 service users and a further 300 installations will be added in the next year.
- 210** Supported housing services are well promoted. Both the sheltered housing and the telecare services take every opportunity to market their services. This includes having stalls at a range of local events, advertising success stories in the newsletter and local media and targeted mail shots to potential client groups.
- 211** Sheltered housing services are being effectively delivered. Newham Homes manages 340 units of sheltered housing across seven schemes. This equates to 1.64 per cent of the total stock it manages. Scheme wardens show a good level of customer care in delivering their services. Support planning is effective and needs are formally reviewed every six months to ensure the plan is up-to-date. Daily visits are made to residents unless they have requested otherwise. Wardens hold regular meetings and arrange for speakers to come to talk about issues or projects such as a local school looking at the history of the area. Schemes are well maintained and are providing a supportive environment which is promoting independence.
- 212** Not all the sheltered housing schemes have been refurbished. One scheme does not meet modern day standards as it provides bedsit accommodation with shared bathrooms. This scheme requires major conversion work to meet current standards. However, the scheme is currently full and there are no empty units. Newham Homes is in discussion with the Council about this scheme but there are no clear plans in place at the moment for its future.

How good is the service?

- 213** Residents' satisfaction with sheltered housing is high. A survey is carried out every two years, the last one in 2008. This showed that 92 per cent of residents were satisfied with their home and 96 per cent were satisfied with the warden service.
- 214** Residents are involved in developing services. In 2008 the Sheltered Housing Tenant Liaison Committee (STLC) was established. This has resulted in more sharing of information across all schemes and formal meetings of the STLC are reported back at quarterly house meetings. The STLC sends representatives to the Borough-wide Tenant Liaison Committee and residents report that they now feel they are now part of Newham Homes and are involved in decisions which affect the sheltered housing service as well as the whole organisation. Residents have been involved in making decisions about funding allocation at schemes. Representative from the STLC went out to look at proposals for capital spend at three schemes and decided on priorities which meant only two of the three schemes were approved. Residents were happy with this as it had been a democratic process. This helps to ensure that services are providing what residents want.
- 215** Residents are involved in the determining the services they receive. This is at an individual level through the support plans which all residents have to decisions taken at scheme levels such as on new furniture and fittings for communal areas. As part of the bi-annual satisfaction survey in 2008 residents highlighted a number of areas of concern. For example, 51 per cent were dissatisfied with the level of grounds maintenance and 61 per cent felt that Newham Homes did not keep them informed of future plans for the sheltered housing service. Procedures have been put in place to deal with these issues. Structured feedback at scheme meetings is used to ensure residents know about what is being planned and what influence their feedback has had on these plans, and additional work from the grounds maintenance team has improved garden areas and gardening groups are encouraged at all schemes. This ensures that residents' views are welcomed and acted on.
- 216** Sheltered housing schemes are DDA compliant. The common areas of sheltered housing schemes have been assessed as being accessible to residents and visitors and meeting the requirements of the DDA. This provides residents with the confidence that all areas where they live are accessible.
- 217** The sheltered housing service, while valued by residents does not reflect modern practices. The majority of wardens work standard office hours and are responsible for providing housing related support to residents as part of the Supporting People contract and for managing the scheme building. While sheltered housing schemes only provide support to residents, wider community support across tenure is provided through the Newham Network Telecare Service which has visiting staff as well as an alarm service.

Is the service delivering value for money?

- 218** In 2007, we found that this was an area of mixed strengths and weaknesses. There was a clear commitment from the Newham Homes Board and senior managers to achieve value for money in the future, but Newham Homes could not demonstrate that this was achieved in some service areas, in particular in the delivery of responsive repairs. There was an effective procedure for monitoring and reviewing service level agreements. There had been a number of benchmarking exercises but there was not a clear understanding of the costs of some services and there had been limited market-testing.
- 219** In this inspection, we found that strengths considerably outweigh weaknesses. Newham Homes' costs generally compare favourably and it actively compares its services to assess value for money and uses the findings to challenge costs. There is a strong focus on value for money and it is being increasingly embedded across the organisation. Partnership working and procurement is used effectively, service level agreements (SLAs) with the Council have been reviewed and significant savings have been achieved. Resources are invested in service priorities and improvements which have been agreed with tenants. However, some aspects of service cannot show value for money and residents' involvement in some aspects of procurement is not fully developed.

How do costs compare?

- 220** Newham Homes' costs generally compare favourably to others. It uses benchmarking extensively to compare its costs, performance and customer satisfaction levels to inform its value for money assessments, and identify areas for further investigation and improvement. Newham Homes compares its main services with other London ALMOs and through a national benchmarking club. Costs in most areas of activity are low in comparison to similar organisations with, for example, the cost of overheads and the costs of managing rent income management among the best and with ICT costs the lowest in the London benchmarking club for 2007/08 and 2008/09.
- 221** Benchmarking information is used effectively to challenge costs. Where costs appear high these are investigated so that the reasons are understood. Estate services costs are high, although these have reduced since Newham Homes took on responsibility for the service from the Council. These have been examined but the focus on improving performance and satisfaction has led to additional investment and it is not until the service is performing as expected that it will be assessed for value for money. For major works the costs have been examined and found to relate to the size of the programme being delivered, with the costs of managing the programme comparing favourably with others. Newham Homes can show that through benchmarking and understanding of costs it has a robust approach towards assessing value for money.

How good is the service?

How is value for money managed?

- 222** Newham Homes has a robust approach to delivering value for money. There is a strong strategic framework and the value for money and procurement strategies are regularly reviewed. An income maximisation strategy focuses on collecting income due and on encouraging ways of generating additional income. A board champion for value for money with expertise in this area is helping raise the profile of value for money and provide effective challenge. A group of senior managers meet regularly to support the approach to value for money. Managers are expected to ensure their services contribute towards efficiency savings and to be able to show that services are providing value for money. These structures are helping to ensure that value for money is being embedded in the organisational culture.
- 223** The partnering arrangements have delivered value for money in delivering the programmes for decent homes. About £30 million is being saved over the life of the investment plan on the internal modernisation programme when compared to what this work would have cost if contracted out under traditional methods. The partners have worked together to agree rates for particular works simplifying the approval and payment process. Procurement of supplies has led to savings as well as better product guarantee arrangements, and savings of £3.1 million are being made on the street properties programme as a result of one of the partners developing an improved design layout for major modernisation work.
- 224** Procurement is used effectively to deliver value for money. In addition to the significant savings delivered through the Modern Homes partnering arrangements other procurement exercises are delivering savings. The new lift contract has saved £125,000, and the new contract for gas servicing is delivering savings of £250,000. Newham Homes is also using procurement arrangements through the Council for a number of areas. The Council has procurement consortia arrangements in place which Newham Homes used to secure value for money on supplies and office equipment, with savings of 30 per cent.
- 225** Resident involvement in procurement is not fully developed. Residents are involved in procurement exercises to select contractors and have made site visits to other organisations to inform this process. However, there is no formal training to help residents with procurement exercises although pre meetings are held to discuss issues and prepare questions. Residents are not consistently involved in developing specifications to ensure that the content and the service standard is what they want. This limits residents influence in determining the type of service they are prepared to pay for.

- 226** Service level agreements (SLAs) with the Council are delivering value for money. Newham Homes has reviewed all of its SLAs with the Council which has resulted in a number being terminated. This is delivering significant savings. For example the estate services and vehicle leasing SLAs have ended. The ICT and legal SLAs have been reviewed and found to demonstrate value for money and so are continuing, and the SLA for local service centres is being renegotiated to deliver savings of about £200,000. Smaller SLAs have also been reviewed leading to some being terminated such as media services and the courier service. The review of SLAs has led to Newham Homes achieving better value for customers through reduced costs of services and improved standards of service.
- 227** Newham Homes has been successful in delivering significant savings. £4.4 million of savings have been delivered over the last three years through renegotiating SLAs with the Council, by restructuring across a number of service areas and through rationalising office accommodation. This money has been returned to the Council and used to balance the HRA. In addition a further £1.4 million of savings have been made in a range of ways including closer budget monitoring to identify more efficient ways of working. These savings have been re-invested to improve services, for example through better equipment for estate services.
- 228** Resources are effectively aligned to service priorities. Service priorities and budgets are informed by tenants' views through surveys and workshops at the tenants' conference. The top five priorities for service improvements are identified and are then fed into the budget setting process. A Star Chamber made up of senior officers considers the resources available and budgets along with any service improvements needed and any savings identified to fund these. As a result of this approach extra resources have been made available to fund priority areas, for example an outreach worker for resident involvement. This ensures that Newham Homes is able to deliver on areas which have been identified as priorities.
- 229** The repairs service can generally show value for money. The responsive repairs service is now operating more effectively and efficiently with savings of £527,000 and improved performance and satisfaction. It now operates as a viable business and this year will make a small surplus of £25,000. The level of emergency and urgent repairs has reduced and the number of repairs completed on the first visit increased. Although room for improvement remains this represents significant progress.
- 230** Newham Homes is proactively seeking to increase the resources it has available. For example, it has managed an asbestos contract for another organisation generating income of £35,000 and is also tendering to provide telecare services in a neighbouring borough. Newham Homes has also obtained some external funding with £1.4 million for energy efficiency work for 2009/10.
- 231** There are a few areas where Newham Homes cannot clearly demonstrate value for money. Although programmed as the final stage of the repairs modernisation service, the provision of stores has not yet been market tested to ensure that it is delivering optimum value for money. Estate services cannot demonstrate that they are yet delivering value for money as the focus is currently on investing in these services to improve them to meet residents' requirements. Until these areas are addressed Newham Homes cannot show that all of its services fully represent value for money.

What are the prospects for improvement to the service?

What is the service track record in delivering improvement?

- 232** In 2007, we found that Newham Homes could demonstrate a generally good recent track record in delivering improvements in services for residents. Improvements had been made since the ALMO was set up particularly in the last year, although performance in the previous year was more varied. Service users had noticed improvements and this was reflected in satisfaction ratings. However, ensuring that value for money was achieved in the responsive repairs service had only recently begun to be addressed and was not embedded.
- 233** In this inspection, we found that strengths outweigh weaknesses. Substantial changes and improvements have been made. Good progress against previous inspection recommendations has been made along with improvements across a range of services. Tenants' homes have been improved and satisfaction with Newham Homes has increased across most areas. Satisfaction has particularly improved in areas that it has been focussing on such as repairs and caretaking. Performance Indicators show overall improvement but there are still a few areas where progress has been slower.
- 234** Newham Homes has made good progress in delivering recommendations from previous Audit Commission's reports. Of the 17 recommendations made in the 2006 inspection report, 14 have been entirely completed and three are in the process of being finalised. Two of these relate to leaseholder services and one to asbestos. Full details of the progress made can be seen in Appendix 2. Following work to provide advice and assistance to Newham Homes in 2008 the Audit Commission made 19 recommendations and 17 of these have been completed. Two are still being developed and related to customer profile information and leaseholder services. This shows the ability and commitment of Newham Homes to deliver improvements.
- 235** Newham Homes has delivered a range of customer facing improvements. This includes both improvements to existing services and the development of new ones. Examples include:
- improved ways of accessing services;
 - better information for customers with revised handbooks for tenants, leaseholders and sheltered housing residents;
 - an extended range of appointment slots for responsive repairs that includes evening and Saturday appointments;
 - an effective complaints process with improving response times;
 - an improved caretaking and concierge service;
 - an improved grounds maintenance service;

What are the prospects for improvement to the service?

- notice boards and more information available on estates;
- improvements to the Estate Watchers scheme and outcomes from this; and
- a new decorations pack for tenants moving into new homes.

236 Newham Homes has made good progress in making improvements in tenants' homes. Since the last inspection tenants have benefited from a range of improvements to their homes and to the environment in which they live. The number of homes meeting the decent homes standard had risen to 63 per cent at the end of December 2009, representing significant progress.

237 Customer satisfaction has risen in most areas. The 2009 STATUS survey shows increased satisfaction with the speed and quality of repairs, the caretaking and concierge service and an increasing number of tenants who think their rent is value for money. Overall satisfaction with Newham Homes as a landlord has however declined from 69 per cent in 2008 to 67 per cent in 2009. Further work will be carried out to understand why overall satisfaction has declined while many of the individual elements of services have improved.

238 Overall, the direction of travel is positive on a number of indicators or has been sustained at a high level. The speed in which telephone calls are answered, the number of repairs completed within target times, the number of repairs completed on the first visit and the average time it takes to let an empty property have all improved. Performance in collecting the rent has been maintained as among the best performers. This means that service users are benefiting from services which are more responsive to their needs.

239 Improvements have been made in the approach to value for money and overall financial management. Newham Homes can demonstrate that its costs are reducing or being maintained year on year while performance and satisfaction in a number of areas is improving. The responsive repairs service is now operating as a viable business and efficiency savings are being delivered year on year which are helping to both balance the HRA and to invest in service improvements.

240 However, some areas have been slower to improve. While there have been a number of improvements in the area of equality and diversity, Newham Homes still has a low level of information on customers' faith and sexuality. It is difficult for Newham Homes to show the progress made in relation to ASB and satisfaction has fallen in this area. Progress to address the management of empty properties and leaseholder issues are recent.

What are the prospects for improvement to the service?

How well does the service manage performance?

- 241** In 2007, we found a clear direction and leadership from the Newham Homes Board and a commitment to service improvement. There was a strong strategic relationship with the Council and there were arrangements for monitoring and reviewing SLAs. There had been effective performance management and monitoring, with the notable exception of the responsive repairs service. The new leadership of the ALMO was strong and had identified the main areas for improvement and was addressing these through a robust service planning framework. The ALMO had been open to learning from other organisations.
- 242** In this inspection, we found that strengths significantly outweigh weaknesses. The mission, aims and values of Newham Homes are clear and are supported by strong leadership, strategies and plans. There is a clear focus on performance management and effective arrangements to support continuous improvement. Residents are involved in the service planning processes. Staff are clear about the contribution they make to the organisation and there are effective staff management arrangements in place. Newham Homes is open to external challenge, values and acts on customer feedback and looks to learn from other high performing authorities. However, there are some gaps in performance management in the ASB service.
- 243** Newham Homes has a clear mission, aims and values. These were developed in consultation with stakeholders and their delivery is supported by a range of service improvement plans which reflect SMART (specific, measurable, agreed, realistic and time-based) principles. These are well publicised across the organisation and staff are clear about the contribution they make to delivering these.
- 244** Newham Homes benefits from strong leadership. This is both from the board and the executive team. There are open and frank discussions between the board and the executive that enable sound decisions to be made. Leadership has been shown and difficult decisions have been made about service areas. An example of this is the decision to take the failing caretaking and concierge service in-house and to invest in the service to bring about improved services for customers. Strong leadership provides a clear focus for continuous improvement and delivering better services for residents.
- 245** Key strategies are in place and are of good quality. These are supported by comprehensive service improvement plans which are in place for all service areas. These address the weaknesses found in this inspection. For example, plans are identifying improvements that are needed in services for leaseholders. All service plans have SMART action plans. Strategies and plans provide the direction to bring about further service improvements.
- 246** There are effective arrangements to support continuous improvement. The Aiming for Excellence programme brings together all the actions that Newham Homes is working on, for example from previous inspection reports, from service improvement plans and from new strategies and developments. There is high level oversight of this programme which means that there is a clear focus on completing actions. Progress against plans is also regularly reported to the Service Improvement Committee of the board. This is providing focus for ongoing improvement activity.

What are the prospects for improvement to the service?

- 247** An effective and well developed service planning framework is in place. Annual service plans are developed in conjunction with residents. Newham Homes uses the information from its annual STATUS survey to start to inform this process. This is added to by feedback from the annual residents' conference and the formal involvement structures. As plans are developed, these are then discussed in draft through the formal involvement structures as well as with other stakeholders. This ensures that service improvements are shaped by residents and are responsive to changes they want to see made in the service.
- 248** There is a strong focus on performance management. Targets are generally challenging and aiming for performance among the best 25 per cent of organisations. Newham Homes uses a balanced scorecard approach to performance reporting. The scorecard contains a range of PIs agreed nationally with benchmarking organisations and other ALMOs. This means that it is easy to compare performance both internally and externally. Newham Homes has agreed with residents the key areas that monthly reporting will cover and this goes out to a wide audience. Sound performance management means that the organisation can focus on what is important and ensure that these services are improving.
- 249** While the focus on performance management is strong, there are some gaps in performance monitoring activity. These are particularly around performance management of the ASB service, the aids and adaptations service and emergency and out-of-hours repairs. Newham Homes is aware of the need to improve reporting and is addressing this.
- 250** Newham Homes is using its staff appraisal system to actively manage performance. All staff have annual appraisals based on meeting agreed targets which cascade down from corporate objectives and team plans. Staff meet with their manager on a regular basis to review progress and ensure they are on track to meet their targets. This is an opportunity for staff to talk about their progress against targets and to ensure that they are achieving what is required and have the support they need. Annual appraisals with clear targets help to ensure that staff know how their performance contributes to overall organisational performance.
- 251** An effective staff motivation scheme is in place with staff awards given annually. Internal awards for best apprentices and customer care are voted upon by peers. External awards, voted on by residents are given to caretakers, concierges, repair operatives and customer care staff. The management team award team and employee of the year and long service are recognised at an awards ceremony. Staff have responded positively to the ceremony which recognises the work of customer facing and back office staff and residents welcome the opportunity to recognise outstanding services.

What are the prospects for improvement to the service?

- 252** The relationship between the Council and the ALMO is strong. There is evidence of effective joint working and a clear understanding by both parties of key issues. The Chief Executive of the ALMO is a member of the management board of the Council. This ensures that Newham Homes is part of the strategic thinking and planning of the Council and can play a role in major areas the council is working on such as dealing with crime and worklessness. Equally, the Council is aware of issues with leaseholders' satisfaction and is working with the ALMO on what contribution it can make to improve services. A clear structure for regular liaison and performance monitoring at both strategic and operational levels is in place. This ensures that the right balance is achieved between ensuring good performance and allowing Newham Homes to manage the service.
- 253** There is a sound approach to financial management. Detailed budgetary information is given monthly to budget holders who are expected to examine these, with help from the financial team, and provide the projected spend to the end of year. Any over or under spends are examined and explanations and any action needed for these provided. The budget information is then presented and discussed at operational and strategic meetings with the Council and is considered by the executive team and the board. This is enabling financial resources to be effectively managed.
- 254** Newham Homes is seeking improved value for money through membership of a consortium for supply chain management with two other ALMOs. Funding from the National Change Agent has been obtained and a cost analysis is now underway. The aim is to develop joint supply chains to get economies of scale and a good level of control over the supplies.
- 255** The approach to risk management is sound and has been strengthened. A fundamental review of risk management has resulted in a more inclusive risk assessment framework and a new risk management strategy. Risks are regularly reviewed by the executive team and the board. The risk maps are reviewed and updated as new risks are identified. This process means that risks are being managed and minimised.
- 256** Newham Homes is open to external challenge and is self aware. This includes Advice and Assistance work from the Audit Commission in 2008, undergoing an Investors in People assessment, Telecare Service Association code of practice accreditation, assessment by Stonewall for its employment practices and the involvement of partners and residents in the development of the pre-inspection self assessment. Newham Homes also responded positively to on-site inspection feedback. This self awareness is reflected in the quality of the service improvement plans and bodes well for future improvements.
- 257** Newham Homes has shown that it welcomes and responds positively to customer feedback. This includes the improvements to the decoration pack for new homes, the extension of the free phone numbers to contact the organisation, the improvements to the repairs service, the improvements to information about the modern homes programme and improvements to the estate services. This ensures that services meet customer expectations and aspirations.

What are the prospects for improvement to the service?

258 Newham Homes shows a strong commitment to learning from its peers. As part of the London-wide ALMO group it regularly looks to other organisations for ways to improve performance. One example of this is the 'Have your Say' register for resident involvement which was being successfully used by another London ALMO. Other examples include the introduction of face to face meetings at stage two of the complaints process and of translation panels on the reverse of envelopes containing important tenancy information.

Does the service have the capacity to improve?

259 In 2007, we found a strong Board in place and operating effectively. The new management team also had significant strengths and had made good progress in identifying areas of weakness and addressing these. There was a good working relationship with the Mayor and Council, with a clear understanding of the arm's length nature of the ALMO. There had been investment in training and apprenticeships and the ALMO had taken steps to ensure that it had the capacity to deliver a substantially increased capital programme. However, the ineffective use of IT systems continued to be a barrier to maximising service delivery in some areas.

260 In this inspection, we found that strengths significantly outweigh weaknesses. Newham Homes is in a sound financial position and has the resources for investing in improvements. The board, senior managers and staff are all operating effectively. Training and development and ICT are supporting service delivery. Partnership working is effective and is contributing to effective service delivery in a number of areas. However, Newham Homes is not yet maximising the capacity of its involved residents.

261 A robust financial plan is in place which ensures that resources are following agreed priorities. Newham Homes is in a sound financial position with clear future projections. It has generated a surplus and now has a buffer against risk as well as resources to invest in improving and developing services. Resources are in place to deliver improvements in the service plans.

262 Staff capacity is strong. Staff are generally positive about working for Newham Homes. They are well informed about the organisation and its objectives, knowledgeable about the services provided, demonstrate a commitment to providing a customer-focused service, are aware of performance issues and motivated. Staff are positive about the way in which they are managed, are kept informed about what is happening within the organisation and clear about performance expectations. This contributes to the capacity to deliver and improve services.

263 Newham Homes has an experienced management team in place. Although the team has undergone a number of changes, key appointments have been made and the management team brings a range of skills and expertise along with experience of delivering high quality services in changing environments.

What are the prospects for improvement to the service?

- 264** The board is operating effectively. Board members contribute a range of experience and skills, work well together and show enthusiasm for the role and a commitment to improving outcomes for service users. All board members are regularly appraised by the board chair and any training needs identified and met through a training programme tailored to individual needs. This is equipping the board to operate effectively.
- 265** Newham Homes is investing in its staff. Training needs are identified through the annual appraisal system and are then built into the annual training plan. Training budgets are well resourced and staff receive between five and ten days training per year. Staff benefit from a range of training including mandatory training such as on customer care and equality and diversity, professional training for qualifications in housing or surveying and training for future needs such as IT developments. All managers are involved in the Leadership Group which is a forum for information and development. Training and development helps ensure that staff are able to deliver the organisation's objectives as well as develop their own skills and careers.
- 266** Newham Homes is actively managing sickness absence. There are effective HR policies and systems in place which have all been reviewed and are now supporting the capacity of the ALMO. For example, the policy on sickness absence has been reviewed and all managers trained on this. Sickness levels have reduced from 15.6 days in 2007/08 to 12 days for the year to date which is just short of the target of less than 12 days set for this year. High levels of sickness absence impacts on the capacity of the organisation to provide services.
- 267** Staff surveys are effectively used to assess progress in meeting objectives and identifying areas for future improvement. The most recent survey, in December 2009, showed that 75 per cent of staff were satisfied overall with working at Newham Homes. This was an eight per cent improvement on 2008 results. Results had improved, although only marginally, for the percentage of staff who felt that senior management provided effective leadership. This had been an issue in the previous survey and Newham Homes had put arrangements in place to ensure that directors attended team meetings and put on road shows to ensure that staff had the opportunity to meet and question them. Other results showed a more mixed performance, for example a reduction in the number of staff who think that Newham Homes is focussed on resident satisfaction. Where the survey identifies issues, these will be fed into the 2010/11 service plans.
- 268** An effective ICT strategy is supporting service delivery. This sets out a clear direction for the organisation and demonstrates how ICT supports the business and adds capacity. Recent developments include the implementation of the leasehold module which will support improvements to this group of service users. The introduction of trackers to the fleet of repair vehicles has improved efficiency and contributed to an increase in customer satisfaction with the service. A programme is in place to roll out PDAs to RMS operatives to implement more effective ways of working and reduce non-productive time. Future developments will enable tenants and leaseholders to access their finance information directly through the website. Effective use of ICT enables staff to spend more time on customer facing activities.

What are the prospects for improvement to the service?

- 269** Effective partnership working is increasing capacity to deliver services and adding value. This includes strategic partnering to deliver the modern homes investment programme, work with partners to deliver money advice, the multi-agency approach to ASB and provision of support to vulnerable tenants. Wider benefits have also been gained through the use of local labour and apprenticeship schemes. Modern Homes' construction partners have provided 74 apprentice places and 1,000 construction workers, 250 of whom are from Newham and 350 from neighbouring boroughs. This is all ensuring better outcomes for service users and local people.
- 270** Procurement is helping to increase the resources available to Newham Homes. The use of modern procurement methods and the development of effective partnering contracts are delivering significant cash savings as well as more efficient and efficient ways of working. This is releasing resources to invest back into service improvements.
- 271** The capacity of involved residents has not been maximised. Formal consultation meetings are not operating effectively, and there are tensions and a lack of integration between the different groups which prevents the group overall from focusing on strategic issues. This is limiting the contribution that this potentially key decision-making group makes in determining and improving services for all tenants.

Appendix 1 – Performance indicators

Table 1 Newham performance 2006/07 to 2008/09

| Performance indicator (Former BVPI reference) | 2006/07 | 2007/08 | 2008/09 | England top 25 per cent 2008/09 |
|---|---------|---------|---------|---------------------------------|
| 63 Average SAP rating | 64 | 66 | 63 | 73 |
| 66a Percentage rent collected | 98.82 | 99.08 | 98.99 | 98.64 |
| 66b Percentage tenants with > seven wks arrears (gross) | 8.31 | 6.40 | n/a | n/a |
| 66c Percentage tenants in arrears with NoSP served | 18.59 | 17.04 | n/a | n/a |
| 66d Percentage LA tenants evicted for rent arrears | 0.40 | 0.43 | n/a | n/a |
| 74a Percentage tenants satisfied with overall service | 66 | 68.45 | 69 | |
| 75a Percentage tenants satisfied with TP | | 66 | 56 | - |
| 184a LA homes which were non-decent at start of year | 52* | 50 | 48 | 6 |
| 184b Change in proportion of non-decent homes | 6.1 | -3.4 | n/a | n/a |
| 212 Average relet time (days) | 39 | 32 | 27.48 | 24.1 |

Appendix 2 – Previous recommendations

Table 2 Recommendations of inspection in 2007

| Recommendation | Progress |
|--|---|
| <p>R1 Ensure that the responsive repairs service is delivering value for money by:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • ensuring that robust systems are in place for carrying out an appropriate number of post-inspections and that information from these is analysed and used to improve service delivery and value for money; • systematically collecting and reviewing information on variations between initial estimates and final costs of repairs; • ensuring that performance information is validated and that the completion of repairs is reported and benchmarked using consistent definitions that are understood by all staff; • reducing the number of repair priorities to more manageable levels that can be readily understood by staff and residents; • analysing the reasons for the high number of emergency and urgent repairs and taking steps to reduce this; • reviewing the schedule of rates and introducing composite items where appropriate; and • Achieving a position whereby the service can be meaningfully benchmarked against other providers. | <p>Complete</p> <p>Complete</p> <p>Complete</p> <p>Complete</p> <p>Complete</p> <p>Complete</p> <p>Complete</p> |
| <p>R2 Strengthen the approach to the management of stock information by:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • enhancing the stock investment data to reflect the Housing, Health and Safety Rating System and to incorporate responsive repairs data; and • ensuring that residents are aware of the presence and risks of asbestos in their homes and that there is an effective system for notifying contractors of the presence and location of asbestos. | <p>Complete</p> <p>Partially completed - to be finalised in 2010/11</p> |

Appendix 2 – Previous recommendations

| Recommendation | Progress |
|---|---|
| <p>R3 Strengthen access to services, consultation and customer care by:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • ensuring that call answering targets for the repairs call centre are met and that the need for repeat enquiries is minimised; • measuring customer satisfaction systematically across all service areas (including complaints and ASB). Analysing results and providing feedback for residents; and • ensuring that services are appropriately provided by collecting and using profiling information for leaseholders, as well as for tenants. | <p>Complete</p> <p>Complete</p> <p>Partially completed</p> |
| <p>R4 Strengthen the approach to income recovery by:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • developing an overarching income management strategy which includes rechargeable repairs; • ensuring that arrangements for referrals for welfare advice are effective, including advice for out-of-borough residents; and • working with the Council to review the collection of leaseholder service charges and major works charges to ensure that income is maximised in these areas. | <p>Completed</p> <p>Complete</p> <p>Partially completed</p> |
| <p>R5 Strengthen the approach to estate management by:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • ensuring that there are regular and systematic inspections of all estates, publicised to residents and with resident involvement, and a clear procedure for following up issues that are identified for action; and • reviewing the grounds maintenance contract to ensure that it is able to meet reasonable levels of residents' expectations. | <p>Complete</p> <p>Complete</p> |

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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:
 - a review of key documents including Newham Homes' self-assessment and performance reports;
 - mystery shopping of local service centres and phone calls to Newham Homes;
 - a review of Newham Homes' website;
 - a review of complaints;
 - a review of casework including antisocial behaviour and rent arrears files and gas safety certificates;
 - a tour of key parts of the borough;
 - visits to high rise blocks and some sheltered schemes;
 - inspection of vacant, ready to let homes;
 - visits to tenants whose homes had received improvement work;
 - interviews with Council and ALMO staff, councillors, board members and other stakeholders;
 - focus groups with frontline staff, repairs and maintenance staff, tenants, leaseholders and partner agencies; and
 - observation of meetings including the ALMO board, resident involvement meetings and an 'Aiming for Excellence' meeting.

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)

Fire risk assessments

- 1 Newham Homes staff have been trained by the Institute of Fire Engineers and have carried out assessments on all tower blocks. Detailed action plans for each block have been developed and actions prioritised. A fire policy has been developed and an inspection timetable agreed with the fire service for tower blocks and sheltered schemes to be inspected annually, low rise blocks every two years and divided street properties every three years. Newham Homes is about to write to tenants and leaseholders who have replaced their front doors with ones that do not meet the fire requirements to ask them to replace them with appropriate doors, and is investigating ways of how this can be enforced. This is demonstrating a proactive response to the dangers of fire.

Decoration pack

- 2 Newham Homes has negotiated a home decoration pack with a major paint supplier. The decoration pack provides a range of materials including filler, paints, dust sheets, brushes, a pasting table and other sundry equipment. Colour charts are given at the viewing and new tenants bring their choice of paint to the sign up visit. The pack is then ordered for delivery the next day. To enhance the scheme further guidance is being developed on the best colours for visually impaired people so that advice can be given to this client group. This has proved a benefit to tenants as it offers them both the paint and the necessary equipment to decorate their home.

Tenant empowerment programme

- 3 Newham Homes runs a programme of 19 training events for tenants which range from understanding the role of Newham Homes' board (and thereby encouraging residents to consider standing for election to the board) to looking for work and money management. Tenants can choose to go on as many courses as they want. A formal graduation event, attended by the Mayor, concludes the course. At the end of the programme, a survey of participants finds out what forums and voluntary organisations they have gone on to use their skills in and if they have been successful in finding a job. This is an innovative way of encouraging participation and developing skills.

Attracting resident involvement

- 4 Newham Homes has set up a blog spot to attract people who regularly use IT applications. The blog will feature certain topics, have an article on these and encourage comments and feedback. There is a forward plan for topics and the blog will be advertised in the newsletter as well as having a link from the front page of the website. Different ways of interacting with the organisation enables a wide range of people to get more involved.

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