

Housing

Summary

Housing after transfer

The local authority role

The Audit Commission is an independent body responsible for ensuring that public money is spent economically, efficiently and effectively, to achieve high-quality local and national services for the public. Our work covers local government, housing, health and criminal justice services.

As an independent watchdog, we provide important information on the quality of public services. As a driving force for improvement in those services, through inspection, audit, research and other methods, we provide practical recommendations and spread best practice. As an independent auditor, we monitor spending to ensure public services are good value for money.

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One-quarter of local housing authorities are no longer landlords, and their former council houses are now owned and managed by housing associations. But in these areas...

- the council is still the strategic housing authority and the need for clear leadership on local housing issues is still important
- councils must monitor and co-ordinate services delivered by many different organisations so that they are seamless to tenants and other service users

The more successful authorities have used stock transfer as part of a long-term strategy to build and maintain sustainable communities, balancing housing markets and improving housing services...

- understanding the new roles for councillors as cabinet members leading on housing, in scrutiny, or as members of housing association boards
- building the capacity and expertise of retained housing services through better internal organisation and collaboration with external bodies
- managing the complexities of working in partnership by clearly identifying areas of responsibility and fostering constructive working relationships that are underpinned by formal agreements
- improving the quality of information by using formal consultation and surveys and by making better use of knowledge held by operational staff in the council and in other local agencies

But the pattern of service delivery and performance of transfer authorities is variable. Local authority housing services do not always improve after transfer. The Audit Commission recommends that...

- before granting permission to transfer, the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister (ODPM) should seek evidence that explains how transfer will improve performance, particularly in authorities where housing performance is poor
- when transferring stock to existing housing associations, local authorities should rigorously assess past performance as part of the selection process; ODPM and the Housing Corporation should consider producing guidance on criteria which could be used by local authorities
- decisions to outsource statutory services, such as homelessness, should be considered more carefully and only taken in light of a formal review conducted according to best value principles
- the Government should consider standardising systems such as housing benefit and funding adaptations for disabled people for all social landlords, in line with other convergence between council and housing association landlords

Local councils as community leaders must take the lead in housing and drive local improvements – to ensure that stock transfer provides not only decent homes, but more quality and choice for all local people.