

March 2009

Dear Resident,

Re - The results of the short notice inspection at Circle 33 Housing Trust Housing

A team from the Audit Commission has recently conducted an inspection of a number of the housing services provided by your landlord. This letter advises you of the outcome of our inspection.

We did not inspect all of the services provided by the Association, but we did focus on those where we believe there is room for improvement. We looked at how Circle 33 Housing Trust maintains tenants' homes with a specific focus on the following three areas:

- responding to repairs reported by tenants;
- the collection of rent; and
- the servicing of gas appliances.

We also looked at the following issues in relation to these three areas:

- how easy it is for tenants to access these services;
- what tenants think of Circle 33 Housing Trust's customer care;
- how Circle 33 Housing Trust caters for different peoples' needs; and
- whether it provides you with value for money.

The results of our inspection are set out below. Overall we found that the Association did most things well, with strengths outweighing weaknesses in three of the six areas inspected. (See note on page 2 for an explanation of our judgements).

1. Maintaining tenants' homes

We found that the repairs service provided to tenants was an area where strengths and weaknesses were in balance. Repair appointments are available at times to suit tenants and good quality information is available. Emergency repairs are completed within target and to a good standard but performance dealing with other types of repairs is not as strong. More complex repairs not always being recorded properly sometimes leading to inconvenient return visits from the contractor. Gas servicing is not meeting current requirements and is worse than other similar housing organisations. However there are good levels of resident satisfaction and the service represents value for money.

2. Collecting tenants' rent

We found rent collection was an area where strengths outweigh weaknesses. There is a wide range of ways to pay rent with good debt and welfare advice to help support tenants. This has led to an efficient rent collection service.

To help your landlord improve its service to all residents, we have made a number of recommendations:

- Improve performance on gas servicing to ensure all homes are serviced annually and meet legal requirements.
- Improve the repairs service so that repairs are done on time.
- Review the out-of-hours repairs reporting system to improve the service for tenants.
- Work with tenants to develop service standards so that tenants know what to expect.
- Improve the telephone service to make it more responsive to tenants.

- Review the style and content of letters to tenants, including the responses to complaints, to ensure that they are customer focussed.
- Develop a formal compensation policy for service failures.
- Improve the organisation's knowledge of customers' needs to ensure that the service can meet diverse needs.

The report is available on our website at www.audit-commission.gov.uk/housing. You can also find further information about housing inspections there. If you require further copies of this report, or a copy in large print, in Braille, on tape, or in a language other than English, please call 0844 798 7070.

3. Next steps

We have asked Circle 33 Housing Trust to work with its residents to develop an action plan showing how it intends to implement our recommendations by 14 May 2009 and to send this to us. Following on from their report back to us we will consider the likelihood of Circle 33 Housing Trust improving the inspected services, and publish our judgements together with the Association's action plan as part of our final report. It is our intention to publish these documents in June 2009. Our website will record any changes to this date.

The Association's regulator, the Tenant Services Authority, will work with the Association to make sure that the recommendations in the inspection report are acted upon and improvements to your service are delivered.

A copy of this letter is also being sent for information to each member of the board of Circle 33 Housing Trust.

I hope this letter has been of interest to you.

Yours faithfully

Norman Ewins
Principal Inspector
Housing Inspectorate
Audit Commission

CC Tenant Services Authority regulator
Circle 33 Housing Trust Board Members

The Audit Commission uses a four point scale for judging the quality of services, as follows:

- Strengths considerably outweigh weaknesses;
- Strengths outweigh weaknesses;
- A balance of strengths and weaknesses; and
- Weaknesses outweigh strengths.