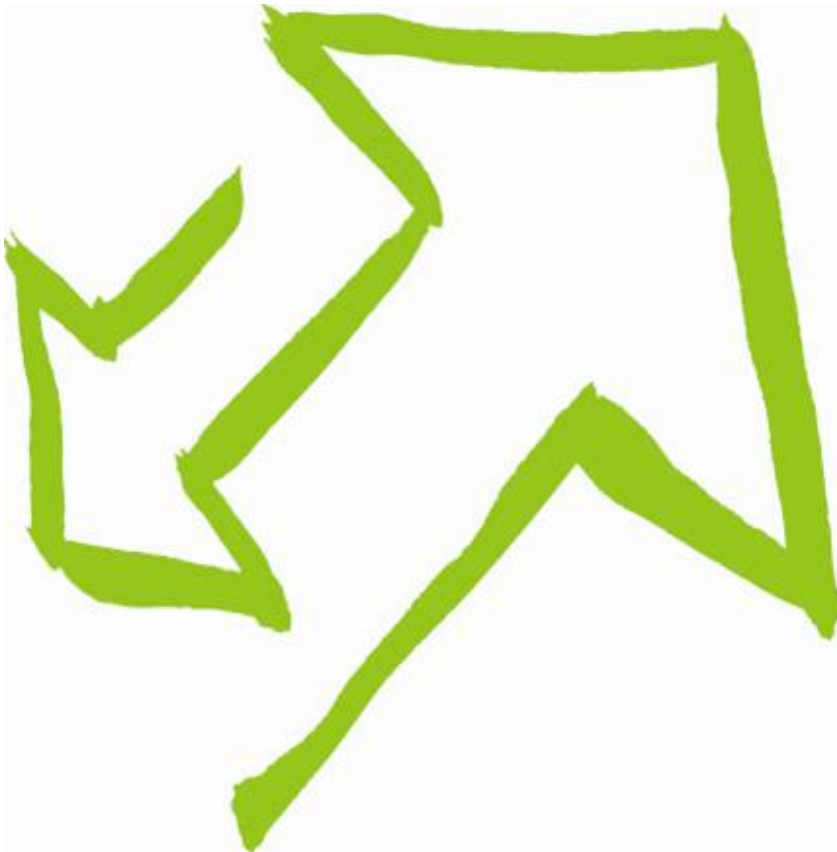


# Housing Management Services

Daventry and District Housing Association  
March 2010



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# Housing Association Inspections

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

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

For housing associations our current inspection role and remit is set out in sections 41A and 41B of the Audit Commission Act 1998 (as amended by section 109 of the Local Government Act 2003). Provisions contained in the Housing and Regeneration Act 2008 will amend our role and remit in due course, but are not yet in force. Our role is in line with the Audit Commission's strategic regulation principles. In broad terms, these principles look to minimise the burden of regulation while maximising its impact. To meet these principles this inspection:

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

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

The Tenant Services Authority is the statutory body which regulates housing associations to ensure that they are well governed, well managed and financially viable, as set out in its Regulatory Code. Its staff work with housing inspectors to ensure that there is adequate information provided for the inspection and that the inspected body implements recommendations in the inspection report.

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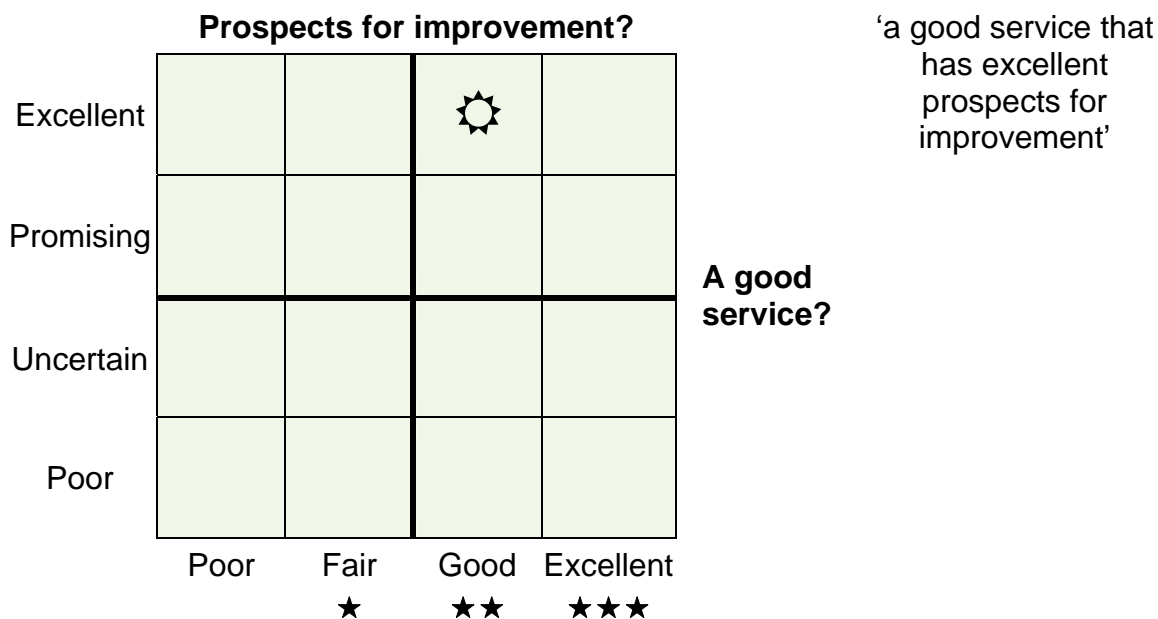
# Summary

- 1 Daventry and District Housing Association (DDH) is providing a good, two-star housing management service which has excellent prospects for improvement.
- 2 The service has a number of strengths. Services are generally accessible and tenants benefit from good quality information about services and an effective approach to tenant involvement. DDH holds good information on the condition of its homes and has made good progress in delivering a major programme which is improving its homes. Tenants have a high level of satisfaction with the repairs service. Empty homes are re-let in a good condition and there are robust gas servicing arrangements in place which ensure the safety of tenants. There is a wide range of ways to pay rent and performance on rent collection is strong. DDH deals effectively with anti-social behaviour and estates and communal areas are well maintained. Good progress has been made in driving efficiency savings and effective procurement processes are in place across the organisation.
- 3 However, there are a few areas where improvements are needed. Telephone answering targets are not challenging and along with answering complaints, targets are not being met. DDH has not engaged with its leaseholders, even though this is a small group, to understand and deal with specific leaseholder issues. There is limited information available on the aids and adaptation service and this has not adequately involved tenants in its development. Although DDH deals effectively with anti-social behaviour, it has not publicised its successes in this area which would ensure that tenants are aware that action is being taken in this area.
- 4 DDH has excellent prospects for improvement, with a number of important drivers in place. It has achieved some significant improvements against key performance indicators and delivered improvements tenants would recognise, leading to higher levels of tenant satisfaction. It has prioritised improvements through the promises it made to tenants at the time of transfer. There are effective planning and performance management arrangements in place and tenants play an active role in these. Access to group-wide specialist staff and established policies and procedures is adding to DDH's capacity. Financial capacity is sound, staff morale is high and partnership working is effective.

# Scoring the service

- 5 We have assessed Daventry and District Housing Association 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 chart<sup>1</sup>**



Source: Audit Commission

<sup>1</sup> 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.

- 6 We found the service to be good because it has a range of strengths including:
- services are accessible for all tenants and leaseholders, good quality written information is available and the web site is well presented;
  - tenants are actively engaged and are involved in planning, shaping and monitoring services;
  - service standards are in place and are being reported on and this enables tenants to challenge performance;
  - the major improvement programme has delivered new kitchen, bathrooms, heating systems and window replacement to over 800 properties;
  - DDH has improved the responsive repairs service since transfer and tenant satisfaction with this service is now high;
  - a robust annual gas servicing programme is enhancing tenants' safety and at November 2009 there were no properties without a gas safety certificate;
  - general needs empty homes are re-let quickly and to a good standard;
  - there is currently no waiting list for adaptations and DDH has adapted around 600 properties helping to improve its tenants independence and safety;
  - support is provided to vulnerable tenants including subsidised gardening, decorating and low level maintenance services which helps them maintain their tenancies;
  - DDH provides a range of ways for tenants to pay rent and rent collection is high and arrears are low;
  - there is good advice and support available for tenants facing debt problems;
  - there is a range of approaches for dealing with anti-social behaviour and support is provided to both victims and vulnerable perpetrators; and
  - there has been good progress in driving efficiencies and savings have been re-invested to provide better services.
- 7 However, there are some areas which require improvement. These include:
- the targets for telephone answering are not challenging and performance is below target;
  - performance on responding to complaints within target times is low although customer satisfaction with this service is good;
  - although a small group at 79 leaseholders, DDH has not engaged with this group to understand particular problems this group may have and it does not offer its leaseholders any services such as gas servicing;
  - profile information on tenants is not yet complete;
  - tenants are not involved in setting standards for the aids and adaptation service; information is poor and no satisfaction surveys have been done; and
  - DDH has not yet assessed all of its services for value for money.

## Scoring the service

- 8 The service has excellent prospects for improvement because:
- DDH has delivered a number of improvements that tenants recognise; driven up performance in key areas and increased tenant satisfaction with services and the organisation overall;
  - good progress has been made on embedding sound financial processes and value for money across the organisation;
  - procurement has been used effectively to achieve effective services and deliver savings and tenants are involved in this;
  - there is clear leadership for the organisation from both the board and the executive and plans are in place to address issues and improve services further;
  - performance is well managed and tenants are actively involved in this. Information is used to address issues and drive further improvements;
  - DDH is a learning organisation and uses information it gains from a number of sources to improve services;
  - joining the Futures Housing Group has added to DDH's capacity and enabled it to access specialist staff and well developed policies and procedures;
  - staff are well managed, a committed staff group is in place and their morale is high;
  - the organisation is financially sound; and
  - partnership working is adding to DDH's capacity and delivering positive outcomes for its tenants and leaseholders.

# Recommendations

- 9 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 costs<sup>1</sup> and indicate the priority we place on each recommendation and key dates for delivering these where they are considered appropriate. In this context, the inspection team recommends that the organisation shares the findings of this report with tenants and board members; and takes action to address all weaknesses identified in the report. Associations forming part of a group structure should share the lessons and findings of the report amongst the wider group. The inspection team makes the following recommendations.

## Recommendation

### R1 Improve tenants' access to services by:

- improving the aids and adaptation service by using profile information to predict demand, advertising and promoting the service and making it more responsive to tenants and their feedback;
- implementing more challenging telephone answering targets and put systems in place to ensure these are met;
- improving the management of the complaints system to ensure that complaints are dealt with within timescales; and
- further improving the responsive repairs service by benchmarking and implementing targets for 'right first time' repairs.

The expected benefits of this recommendation are:

- aids and adaptations are delivered promptly in response to tenants' needs
- tenants are able to access improved and more responsive services; and
- complaints are dealt with more efficiently and effectively.

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

<sup>1</sup> 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 the strategic management of services by:

- ensuring that profile information on tenants is completed and used to strategically plan services;
- developing and implementing a clear strategic approach to access and customer care issues;
- engaging with leaseholders to fully understand and respond to their particular issues;
- developing and implementing a strategic framework for financial inclusion; and
- completing the value for money reviews of all services.

The expected benefits of this recommendation are:

- comprehensive profiling of tenants' needs that can be used to tailor services;
- clear leadership of all services across the organisation;
- improved financial advice and assistance for tenants and leaseholders; and
- value for money achieved and demonstrated in all parts of the organisation.

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

### Recommendation

**R3** Improve information to tenants by:

- publicising outcomes from actions taken to deal with anti-social behaviour.

The expected benefit of this recommendation is:

- tenants will more confidence in how DDH deals with anti-social behaviour.

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

### Recommendation

**R4** Address all other weaknesses identified in this report.

**10** We would like to thank the staff of Daventry and District Housing Association who made us welcome and who met our requests efficiently and courteously.

Dates of Inspection: 30 November to 4 December 2009

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# Report

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## Context

### The locality

- 11 Daventry District Housing Association (DDH) is within the Daventry District in Northamptonshire and this covers an area of 257 square miles and 89 per cent of this is agricultural land.
- 12 It has a population of approximately 73,000 with nearly a third living in the Daventry town area situated to the South West of the district. In terms of ethnicity over 98 per cent of residents are white, with approximately 1.86 per cent describing themselves as being from a black or minority ethnic which is much lower than the national average at around 13 per cent.
- 13 Daventry has a strong economy and low unemployment rate 4.8<sup>1</sup>, although this is expected to rise this year. The 2007 index of multiple deprivation shows Daventry is relatively affluent and ranks 292 out of 354 areas of England, where one is the most deprived. However, there are pockets of deprivation and Hill Ward fell into the top 20 per cent most deprived super output areas (SOAs). The Association operates in an area where the demand for social housing is high, due to its easy commuting distance to London.

### The Association

- 14 DDH was set up in November 2007 as a local housing company to receive homes transferred from Daventry District Council. The Association formed a group structure with Amber Valley Housing Limited (AVHL) and this became the Futures Housing Group (FHG). Both DDH and AVHL are registered charitable organisations.
- 15 DDH owns and manages around 3,100 properties, 2,213 of which are general needs, and the remainder are for people with support needs and older people, being bungalows, bedsits or flats. The total stock is dispersed evenly throughout the towns and rural areas, with a slightly higher presence of supported housing in the rural areas.
- 16 In January 2008, the Housing Corporation published an assessment of FHG which gave four 'green' lights, indicating it was satisfied with viability, governance, management and development arrangements within the Group.
- 17 The DDH board of management consists of 12 Directors, being four tenants, four local Councillors and four independents and co-optees are also appointed from time to time.

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<sup>1</sup> As at March 2009 ( taken from NOMIS)

## Report

### The service

- 18 The inspection work covered stock investment and asset management, housing income management, tenancy and estate management. The inspection also covered the cross-cutting themes of access and customer care, diversity and value for money as well as prospects for improvement that forms our second judgement.

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# How good is the service?

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## What has the service aimed to achieve?

- 19** FHG's vision is to be a strong, forward thinking regional housing group with its heart in the community. To achieve this vision, it has created a set of five objectives:
- top quality performance – FHG is passionate about excellence and wants to achieve the highest standards in all that it does;
  - top performing people – working together in an environment which is supportive and where individuals and teams are developed, rewarded and valued;
  - positive impact on communities – FHG is more than just about providing housing. It will make a difference by working with communities and partners to create safer, better places to live;
  - more than satisfied customers - FHG actively seeks to understand, anticipate and respond to the needs and expectations of its communities and customers; and
  - financially strong and progressive – FHG will use its combined financial strength and resources to provide a range of enhanced homes and services.
- 20** DDH's specific aims are to:
- deliver the highest level of customer service;
  - to provide warm, safe and secure homes for all of our tenants by improving and modernising homes to a high standard;
  - keep rents affordable and within the Government's rent policy;
  - give tenants a real say and maximum choice in decisions about their homes, their neighbourhoods and management and maintenance services;
  - assist in meeting the identified housing needs in Daventry district;
  - work with the council and other stakeholders to tackle anti-social behaviour and improve community safety by, among other measures, introducing estate caretaking; and
  - maintain a workplace where employees are valued.

## How good is the service?

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

#### Access and customer care

- 21** This is an area where strengths and weaknesses are in balance. Services are generally accessible and there is a range of good quality information in hard copy and through the web site. There is a sound complaints management system and tenants are satisfied with the way their complaints are handled. Tenants are effectively engaged with DDH and it uses feedback to influence and improve services. Service standards are in place but monitoring of these has only just started and performance against these is only just being reported. Although staff have a positive approach to customer care, this is not supported by a clear strategic approach. Telephone contact is the most popular way for tenants to make contact but targets for call answering times are not challenging and are not always met. Nor are targets for responding to complaints always met and DDH does not have an effective approach to compensation for service failure. DDH has not yet engaged with its small group of leaseholders
- 22** Staff at DDH demonstrate a positive approach to customer care but this is not supported by a clear strategic approach. Although there has been a Customer Access Strategy in place since 2007, this is not comprehensive, it does not present a clear vision for the future, and it does not consider telephone access, which is the most popular form of contact for tenants. There is no action plan within the strategy, just bullet point actions. The action plan that has been developed since does not address all the actions within the strategy and is not SMART. For example, DDH does not have an on-going customer care training programme for staff. This has resulted in a lack of clear direction and coordination in some areas of access and customer care.
- 23** Services are generally accessible to tenants. There is a range of ways for tenants to access services and contact DDH including in person, by telephone, emails, and through the website. Telephone contact is the most popular method for tenants to contact the association. Opening hours are standard day time hours Monday to Friday with no late night or Saturday opening. However, tenants have been consulted on this and are satisfied with these arrangements. DDH has responded to the rural nature of the district and has developed additional access arrangements. For example, it has established a Neighbourhood Support Team that visits villages on a fortnightly basis and home visits are made to tenants if requested. This is important as 52.7 per cent of tenants do not live in Daventry. Services can be accessed in person at the main office on the outskirts of Daventry which is DDA<sup>1</sup> compliant. While this is accessible by public transport, it is not well used with on average only 250 tenants visiting each month. Easy ways to access services mean that tenants are more likely to make use of these.

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<sup>1</sup> Disability Discrimination Act

- 24 Tenants' do not receive a fast response when contacting DDH by phone. DDH's target of answering all calls within 30 seconds is not challenging and does not compare well against others. Even though the target is not challenging, DDH is still only answering 96.1 per cent of calls within this time. There is a free phone number for reporting repairs and a local number for general enquiries. The target for answering out of hours calls is 90 seconds which again is not challenging or consistent with day time calls. Out of hours calls performance is 95.7 per cent answered within target. This is important as an access survey revealed 93 per cent of respondents preferred to contact the association by telephone.
- 25 Information provided by DDH is of a good quality and accessible to tenants. This applies to general information, leaflets, newsletters, the handbook and other documents. DDH has a Communications Group to ensure all new written material going out to tenants is written in plain English and is easy to read. Written information now contains contact information, an equality statement and an explanation of its availability in alternative formats. Information is available in the main office and downloadable from the website. The DDH 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.
- 26 Comprehensive service standards are in place. These have recently been revised and agreed with tenants and other stakeholders. They are all included within a single document that is publicised to tenants and is widely available. However, because this work is new, performance against these standards has only just started to be collated. Information on performance is now on the web site, in the quarterly newsletter, and on television screens in the reception area. This helps ensure tenants are clear about the standard of service they should receive and how well DDH is performing against these.
- 27 A sound complaints management process is in place. There is an up to date complaints procedure which was developed with tenants, and incorporates both formal and informal complaints. There are complaints champions in each team, trained in the new procedure and a customer information guide has also been produced. There is a range of ways to make a complaint, such as through the website, on the telephone, and in person. Complaints are regularly reported to the board and learning from complaints is developing. Learning and improvement points from formal and informal complaints are currently being identified, with some improvements being made, such as grass cutting times are now advertised to tenants. This means that complaints are dealt with consistently and improvements made to services where necessary.

## How good is the service?

- 28** However, not all aspects of the complaints process are working satisfactorily. Complaints are not being resolved within timelines. The new procedure states that there is a five day target for a full response to be sent to a complainant. Since monitoring commenced in February 2009 performance on this timescale has been erratic and at November 2009 was extremely low at only 31 per cent being sent in time. Not all complaints are being fully captured. Complaints received by the contractor carrying out major improvement work are only reported back in summary at liaison meetings, so these complaints are not integrated into the statistics. This means opportunities are lost to resolve some complaints quickly and fully.
- 29** However, tenant satisfaction with the complaints process is high following resolution. In November 2009, 91 per cent of the 55 complainants since February 2009 were satisfied with the overall approach to handling their satisfaction. This means that DDH is meeting tenants' expectations in dealing with situations that have caused concern to them.
- 30** DDH does not have an effective approach to compensation for service failure. Although the association has paid out compensation to 10 tenants in the current year to date totalling £1,925, it does not advertise that compensation is available to tenants. Levels of compensation are not clearly set out to ensure clarity and consistency, although delegations are set out in the financial regulations of the association. The approach is also not effectively integrated into the management of risk. Without transparency on levels of compensation, DDH cannot demonstrate that there is a consistent and equitable approach to compensation payments.
- 31** Tenants are actively involved in shaping services. DDH offers its tenants a range of opportunities for involvement, from locally focused tenants' groups to service improvement panels that develop key service areas such as ways for tenants to access to services. Tenant involvement has made a significant contribution to improving and shaping services. Examples of this includes: specifying the role of Handy Persons who provide a general minor repair and maintenance service to vulnerable people; scrutinising rent levels; deciding how the £100,000 community environmental budget is spent; involvement in the staff recruitment process; and mystery shopping the services provided by DDH. This means that tenants can see the impact they are making on the service through their involvement.
- 32** DDH has not been successful in engaging with leaseholders. Although there are just 79 leaseholders, the association has not provided opportunities for a specific leaseholder forum to discuss the unique issues affecting them, such as service charge bills, communal repairs, and opportunities to buy into services provided by DDH such as gas servicing and major improvement work. This means that DDH is missing the opportunity to consider issues which only affect leaseholders.

- 33** Feedback is used effectively to improve services. DDH actively seeks tenants' feedback on their experience of services through a wide variety of methods and these are used to improve services. This includes: formal structures for tenant involvement including a range of service forums; comments, compliments and complaints process; satisfaction surveys for all services; and STATUS survey feedback every three years. DDH uses a consistent approach to service specific customer satisfaction surveys. Feedback is used to improve and shape services and regular 'you said, we did' up-dates in the newsletter show tenants how their views have had an impact. The approach to surveying satisfaction is assisting performance management and service improvement.

### Diversity

- 34** This is an area with a number of strengths but a key weakness in the low level of profile information held on tenants. There is a strong corporate commitment to, and leadership for, equality and diversity. DDH complies with legislative and good practice requirements and the assurance framework is in place. Staff, the board and involved tenants have all been trained in equality and diversity and there is a range of support mechanisms in place for vulnerable tenants. DDH is using profile information at service user level as well as for strategic decision making but this information is not yet complete. Domestic violence and harassment are well managed. Not all parts of the association are representative of the local community but DDH is taking steps to address this.
- 35** There is a strong corporate commitment to diversity. DDH have adopted FHG's equality and diversity policy, supplemented with a specific action plan for the association that is reviewed by the Board. Equality and diversity KPIs are part of the regular performance report to the Board, such as BME lettings and repairs satisfaction of disabled tenants. As part of the approach to procurement, DDH require contractors to adhere to their equality and diversity policy or have their own. The Vice-Chair is the equality and diversity champion on the Board and he is supported by the Executive Director and Head of Housing Services. There is a cross-organisational equality and diversity champions working group to progress and deliver the action plan and cascade these throughout the association. This ensures DDH is focusing on meeting the diverse needs of all its tenants.
- 36** DDH has assessed itself as complying with legislative duties and guidance in respect of equality and diversity. DDH currently has disability, race, and gender equalities schemes in place. It has undertaken a full self assessment against the Housing Corporation's Good Practice Note 8 and the (then) Commission for Racial Equality's statutory Code of Practice for Racial Equality in Housing. It has had an independent DDA assessment of its public office, communal areas in blocks of flats and sheltered housing schemes to ensure they comply with the DDA. This provides assurance to tenants that DDH is meeting these formal requirements.

## How good is the service?

- 37** The assurance framework for equality and diversity is in place. DDH has used external expertise to establish the approach it wants to take to equality impact assessments (EIAs) and to train staff. Five EIAs have so far been completed, with a programme in place for EIAs to be carried out on all current and future policies and procedures. Action plans have been developed for the EIAs which will be monitored through the performance management framework. As a result of the EIAs, barriers to accessing services are identified and removed.
- 38** DDH has been positive about raising awareness of diversity issues. DDH provides diversity awareness training for staff and Board members. This has included disability awareness training and theatre-based workshops, which received a positive response from staff. Staff from contractors working with DDH are also required to receive their own diversity training which is monitored through the regular contract monitoring arrangements. In addition, involved tenants have received diversity awareness training from the local Race Equality Council. This helps to ensure a commitment and culture of respecting diverse needs.
- 39** DDH does not yet have comprehensive profiling information on all of its tenants. It currently has customer profile data on 63 per cent of its tenants, and this just covers four of the six diversity strands. DDH is currently collecting the remaining information through a census and staff are pro-actively seeking this information on contact with tenants. DDH has also produced a 'Just Ask' guide for staff on how they can use profile information to gain a greater understanding and target services to meet identified needs. It is using the information it has, such as to reveal under-occupied homes. It is also starting to exploit the information to support strategic decision-making and targeting services, such as the home insulation programme and tackling hard to let bed sits. Comprehensive profile information can help DDH ensure its services are tailored to meet the specific needs of all of its tenants.
- 40** DDH is using profile information to tailor its services to meet need. Where available, profiling information is being used to support vulnerability flagging alerts on the IT system, which helps staff and contractors to respond to the individual needs of tenants. DDH is also using this information to ensure tenants receive letters and information in accessible ways such as on audio tape or in large print.
- 41** There is support available and provided to vulnerable tenants. Individual support needs are addressed through an externally provided floating support service. DDH uses this service to support vulnerable tenants to maintain their tenancy, such as those in serious arrears and vulnerable victims and perpetrators of anti-social behaviour (ASB). The association also provides subsidised gardening, decorating, and low-level maintenance to vulnerable tenants. This assists vulnerable tenants to live independently in their home and sustain their tenancy.
- 42** Written information is available in alternative formats and the association offers interpretation and translation services. There are clear equality statements in four community languages on written information to inform tenants about its availability in other formats. Staff have access to interpreters through 'Languageline'. The website offers a Browsealoud facility and variable coloured backgrounds for tenants with a visual impairment, as well as conforming to the AA web content accessibility guidelines. There are also translation functions available on the website into 40 different languages. This helps to reduce the barriers for customer access.

- 43 DDH is working to ensure that it is representative of the local community. Staff are generally representative of the known tenants and communities served but the board is aware that it is not. It is actively working to encourage more participation from all groups as it has a vacancy for a tenant director and will be positively encouraging tenants from under represented groups, such as members of minority ethnic groups, to apply for this. DDH is working with a variety of groups to increase the diversity of involved tenants to ensure that all sections of the community are represented amongst engaged tenants. A more representative organisation allows a better understanding and response to the needs of all tenants.
- 44 Partnership working has strengthened DDH's approach to equality and diversity. The association is a member of a number of community partnerships and networks to share good practice, access support, and receive guidance to meet its duties and responsibilities around diversity. For example, Northants Race Equality Council reviews the race action plan and supports the work of the Community Development Team. This ensures that tenants benefit through support and advice available from local organisations.
- 45 Domestic violence and harassment issues are well managed. The approach to dealing with domestic violence and harassment is integrated into the anti social behaviour (ASB) policies. Cases involving domestic violence or harassment are dealt with as a 'red' case and are given the highest priority for response. DDH works in partnership with a range of agencies to support victims, such as the local race equality council, the local domestic violence forum and the multi-agency risk assessment conferences (MARAC). In addition, DDH has a sanctuary scheme in place to provide additional security measures to support victims remaining in their own homes.

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### Stock investment and asset management

#### Asset management and major, planned and cyclical repairs

- 46 This is an area where strengths outweigh weaknesses. DDH has good information on its stock and has used this to inform a robust asset management strategy. A major improvement programme is in place which tenants are heavily involved with. Tenants have good information on improvements that will be done to their homes and are supported through the process. New bathrooms and kitchens are individually designed and take account of tenants needs. Sound arrangements are in place for planned maintenance and cyclical testing and arrangements for managing the risk from asbestos are effective. However, DDH has not considered how leaseholders could be included in the improvement programme and currently tenants do not have specific information about asbestos in their home.
- 47 DDH has effective plans in place to manage investment in its homes. There is a robust asset management strategy in place which was written in consultation with tenants and agreed by the Board. The strategy, which provides strategic direction for maintenance and improvements, development, stock rationalisation, sustainability and energy efficiency, is supported by a sound action plan. The strategy is informed by stock condition data that is used to identify priorities and this means that there is a clear framework for making investment decisions.

## How good is the service?

- 48 DDH is effectively using up-to-date stock condition data to inform investment decisions. A 15 per cent stock condition survey was carried out by the Council prior to transfer. Since transfer, a five-year rolling programme of full stock surveys has been undertaken. Stock condition data is also regularly updated as part of the survey on homes during the preparation of the major improvement programme (MIP). DDH is on track to have completed a full survey by 2012. Information on stock condition has been used to direct DDH's 30 business year plan. Accurate stock condition data ensures that funding is put to the most effective use.
- 49 Improvements are being made to tenants' homes. DDH initiated a major improvement programme (MIP) immediately post transfer. The MIP was designed to cover all homes and to benefit all tenants. Information on the programme is readily available and is given to all new tenants as part of the sign up procedure. At the time of the inspection, only 9 per cent of DDH's properties did not meet the decent homes standard (DHS), plans are in place and all properties will be compliant by the government's deadline of 2010.
- 50 DDH is working effectively with tenants in delivering the MIP. Tenants have been involved in procurement and programming decisions and receive clear information about the programme. The WITH group (working in tenants homes) is made up of actively involved tenants and plays a key role in the MIP. Members of the WITH group have been involved in interviewing contractors, preparing tender briefs, scoring tenders and selecting the choice of fittings and materials to be offered to tenants. This ensures that tenants know what is being planned and are able to influence and direct the programme.
- 51 There is a strong customer focus in delivering the MIP and the needs of tenants are being addressed. Individual mobility, communication and other preferences are accommodated. For example, tenants with mobility needs are offered level access showers and lever taps are fitted as standard in new kitchens. Kitchens are individually designed with the tenant and although tenants can purchase additional improvements, such as additional cupboards, this is generally not needed as DDH provides a full replacement kitchen. Each improvement is done as an individual project so tenants have a wide choice over what is installed and where. The kitchens and bathrooms are completed as a 'whole room' so the refurbishment includes decorating and wall and floor covering. This was one of the Transfer Promises and has ensured that tenants have improved facilities that meet their needs and that they are able to start to use on completion without having to do further work themselves.
- 52 Support to tenants on the MIP is comprehensive. Tenants are given 28, 14 then two days notice of works commencing. They receive assistance with packing, a daily visit from the named Tenant Liaison Officer (TLO), the TLO's mobile phone number and a 24 hour contact number. Respite facilities are available for vulnerable tenants. So far, the refusal rate for having improvements carried out has been minimal, with some tenants changing their minds and agreeing to the work when they see what has been done to neighbouring properties. This ensures that tenants are receiving a responsive and supportive service.

- 53** Major works programmes are delivering positive outcomes for tenants and satisfaction is high. Since transfer, the MIP has delivered 842 separate major improvements to tenants' homes. This includes 560 kitchens and 381 bathrooms. The MIP work we saw was of a high standard, and this is reflected in tenants' feedback. Tenants spoke highly of the MIP workforce, and the TLO who visits daily during the course of the work. Tenants commented on the willingness to allow a certain amount of flexibility regarding choice of style and finishes, for example, using tenants own choice of wallpaper where requested provided it was of adequate quality. The MIP is improving living conditions for tenants and meeting their needs and aspirations.
- 54** The MIP has not been offered to leaseholders and so far work has not been carried out in any areas where there are leaseholders. However, DDH has not agreed how it will work with leaseholders and has no clear plans for allowing them to buy into the major improvement work.
- 55** DDH is working to improve the thermal efficiency of its homes. The SAP rating of properties in 2008/09 is 61 which is low. Work is currently being carried out on improving the insulation and energy efficiency of sheltered housing schemes and the insulation and affordable warmth programme on general needs properties will be completed by December 2009. Completion of both of these projects will have an impact on the SAP rating and mean that tenants are living in properties that are more heat efficient.
- 56** There is a programme of planned maintenance which is largely being completed within the MIP programme. The current five year programme started in 2006/07 and the Council did a full external paint in 2006 before the transfer. DDH has painted a further 129 properties this financial year as well as identifying and completing any painting jobs that are needed at sheltered housing schemes. All windows are in the process of being replaced with UPVC components so by the end of MIP none of these will need further painting. A new programme will be developed in 2010/11 as there will still be various components such as shed doors and oil storage tankers which will need painting. Regular maintenance ensures that properties are kept in a good condition and improves the physical environment of areas.
- 57** The approach to health and safety testing is effective. There are contracts in place for electrical safety testing, lift maintenance, maintenance of equipment at sheltered schemes, fire safety work and portable appliance (PAT) testing. Legionella tests are carried out weekly by wardens in sheltered schemes. This means that DDH can be confident that both residents and their homes are kept in a safe condition.
- 58** DDH has an effective approach to managing asbestos for its staff and contractors. Staff and contractors receive asbestos training. Specialist contractors are used to remove asbestos and a web based register indicates whether asbestos is, or presumed to be, present based on actual or cloned survey data. Asbestos is automatically indicated on works orders and staff and contractors can access the register to find further details. A useful leaflet is available for tenants which gives general advice on the safe disposal of asbestos materials. However, when further IT work has taken place in early 2010, the housing management system will be able to generate letters to all tenants who have asbestos in their homes so that they have specific information about the risks and how these will be handled. Effective management means that risks from asbestos are being minimised.

## How good is the service?

**59** Environmental sustainability is being actively addressed. This is through FHG's sustainability strategy and through DDH's contracts. For example, the new windows contractor is able to dismantle all the UPVC windows it replaces and recycle all the components. The MIP contractor has sound recycling procedures for all the materials it removes as part of the programme. Through measures such as these, DDH is contributing to local environmental priorities.

## Responsive repairs

**60** This is an area where strengths outweigh weaknesses. Repairs are easy to report and tenants report a high level of satisfaction with the service. This is a big improvement as dissatisfaction at the time of transfer was high. It is using pre and post inspections effectively and is addressing the cost of the service which is currently average when compared to other LSVTs. However, there is no target for the number of jobs completed right first time and the appointments for repairs are not completely customer focussed.

**61** Repairs are easy to report. This can be done via a free phone number to the customer call centre and via the web site and e-mail. Repairs can also be reported in person to the main office or via any surgeries or any member of staff including wardens at sheltered housing schemes. There is a helpful and easy to use diagnostic tool on the web site which is also replicated in the tenants' handbook. There is also clear information about the categories of repairs – emergency, urgent and routine – and the target times for completing these. Easy ways of diagnosing and reporting repairs means that the correct works orders can be raised promptly.

**62** Satisfaction with the service is high. This was not always the case and at the time of transfer 29 per cent of tenants were dissatisfied with the repairs service. However, improving the service was one of the Tenant Promises made at the time of transfer and DDH has worked hard to do this. Between October 2008 and October 2009, satisfaction has risen to over 90 per cent and was at 92.7 per cent for October 2009. This means that tenants are increasingly satisfied with the service they are receiving from DDH.

**63** Performance on repairs is improving. DDH inherited little information on transfer about performance or costs in relation to responsive repairs and has built this up over the last two years. It is now in a position to use this information to manage the service and drive further improvement. For example, there was no historical data on the number of repairs completed in each categories or the number which were completed right first time. DDH is now collecting comprehensive data and is able to benchmark this with other LSVTs. In October 2009, 99.5 per cent of all repairs were completed within the target timescales for emergency, urgent and routine repairs. This has improved from 76 per cent at November 2007 (transfer), to 97 per cent at December 2008 and shows continual improvement since then. Benchmarking data shows that DDH is achieving a fast average responsive repair time. This is currently at four days and means that DDH is third out of 45 organisations within its benchmarking club. Monitoring performance ensures that DDH, and its tenants can see how well it is performing.

- 64 The number of repairs that are completed right first time compares well with other similar organisations. Repairs completed right first time are averaging approximately 84 per cent per month since April 2009. DDH did not inherit a culture of right first time at the time of transfer and there was no performance data kept on this. It has not set a target as yet other than to continually improve performance in this area. Multiple visits are costly and inconvenient for tenants.
- 65 The appointments system for repairs is not fully customer focussed. Although appointments are made at the time of reporting, these are either morning or afternoon slots or mid-day slots that avoid the school run at the start and end of the day. DDH is aware that this is an issue for its tenants and especially that younger people have a higher level of dissatisfaction with this service because of not providing tighter timeslots for repairs. DDH is installing a number of new IT systems and should be able to improve the time slots it can offer in 2010/11.
- 66 There are appropriate arrangements in place to ensure the quality of repairs is maintained. Pre and post inspections are operating effectively. DDH pre-inspects an average of 3 per cent of repairs. These are mainly where an accurate diagnosis has not been possible, or there is a need for re-plastering and external works which are hard to quantify. Ten per cent of repairs are post inspected and these are chosen on a random basis to assess the quality of the work. Inspections allow DDH to check on the size and quality of the repair.

### Void repairs

- 67 This is an area where strengths outweigh weaknesses. Performance in re-letting general needs properties is strong, action has been taken to deal with hard to let sheltered housing bed-sit accommodation and homes are re-let in a good condition. Tenants are involved in the service and are being trained to inspect empty properties. The average cost of void repairs is low. However, the decoration allowance is not meeting tenants' expectations and DDH has lost income by not recharging out going tenants for work it has completed on their behalf.
- 68 Performance in re-letting homes is average. In 2008/09, the general needs re-let time was 13 days. However, the time for all managed stock, including some hard to let sheltered housing bed-sit accommodation, is 33.4 days. Although action has been taken on the hard to let bed-sits, such as remodelling and targeted advertising, and seven of these have been let in October it is too early for this to have an impact on DDH's overall performance. Quick re-letting of empty homes means that people in need of accommodation do not have to wait longer than necessary and DDH does not lose rental income through properties remaining empty.
- 69 Empty homes are re-let to a good standard. Tenants have been involved in revising the voids, allocations and letting procedures and setting the lettable standard. The lettable standard is clear and easy to understand and is widely available. Where empty homes need to be brought up to the Decent Homes standard, this work is carried out before the new tenant moves in, using the same major works components. Tenants are being trained to inspect void properties and will be used in 2010 to check the condition of empty properties that are ready to let. This ensures that tenants are offered homes that meet a good standard of accommodation.

## How good is the service?

- 70** The decoration allowance is not meeting tenants' expectations. DDH is currently reviewing the decoration allowance for empty properties. The level of allowance is determined by the housing officer according to the condition of the property. DDH has benchmarked the amount it pays and although this is average, it is a contribution to, not the full cost of decorating a room. The allowance is in the form of vouchers for a DIY store which means that vulnerable tenants may need additional support to use these. This is being reviewed by the Repairs Panel as DDH has identified from feedback that tenants who are unhappy with their new properties have concerns about the standard of decoration.
- 71** Support in decorating homes is available to vulnerable tenants. For example, sheltered housing accommodation is decorated before the new tenant moves in and the general handyman service is used to help tenants decorate their homes. This helps to maintain a suitable environment for tenants.
- 72** The average cost of voids is low. Average costs for void repairs, excluding major improvement works, are approximately £800 per property. Currently, DDH is 13th out of 49 in terms of void costs in its benchmarking club for 2008/09 performance.
- 73** DDH has not been recharging tenants for work it has undertaken on their behalf. Properties are inspected pre-termination and generally DDH does not have a problem with the condition that properties are left in. This means that it is easy for it to move its contractors in to bring the property up to the lettable standard. However, where it has undertaken remedial work that was the responsibility of the outgoing tenant, it has not raised charges for this or collected the debt. Although this is now being addressed and a new process for re-charging is in place, it does mean that DDH has lost income on this work.

## Gas servicing

- 74** This is an area of strength. Performance is strong and there were no properties without a valid gas certificate. The approach to this area is tenant focussed and checks are in place to ensure the safety and quality of the work. The importance of gas safety is well publicised and satisfaction with the service is high. However, this service is not currently offered to leaseholders.
- 75** The approach to managing gas servicing is robust. Gas servicing, which includes other safety checks including water tanks and hard wired fire alarms, is carried out over a 46 week cycle. DDH has utilised the gas servicing procedures developed by AVHL and has worked hard to implement these. Further improvements will be made in January 2010 when servicing will be done on a street-by-street basis. This will make the process clearer and easier to manage and will enable DDH to publicise the schedule. Well managed, comprehensive procedures ensure that tenants are living in a safe environment.

- 76** Performance in gas servicing is currently strong. At the time of the inspection, 100 per cent of properties had a valid gas certificate and performance is regularly reported to the Board. There were no properties where access had not been gained to complete the servicing. DDH is proactive in arranging access for gas servicing. It has identified tenants where alternative methods of gaining access are needed. This may be because of issues with the tenant or the property, for example in one case where the tenant is not able to read, a visit is made to arrange the servicing rather than rely on sending a letter which will not be understood. This ensures that servicing takes place on schedule and time and effort is not wasted on following a procedure where DDH knows there will be problems.
- 77** Quality checks are in place for gas servicing. The contractor carries out a 10 per cent audit of its work and DDH employs a separate contractor to carry out a 10 per cent independent audit on gas servicing. In addition to this, FHG has its own in-house gas surveyor who will also carry out random checks. The gas surveyor also spends time with the contractor's workforce monitoring work processes. These checks further protect tenants' health and safety by ensuring that work is carried out to the specification and no major issues have been found through these checks.
- 78** Gas servicing is tenant focussed. Tenants are involved in all stages of the gas servicing work. The procedure has been agreed by tenants through the Repairs Panel and all the correspondence and documents used have been checked by tenants. This ensures that the procedure operates for the benefit of tenants and they are able to make changes to ensure this is so.
- 79** DDH provides a good level of information about gas safety. Gas safety is regularly publicised and information is available in leaflet form and on the web site. There is a prize draw every quarter for tenants where access to carry out the service has been achieved. Two tenants each win £50 of vouchers. The draw is picked by members of the Repairs Panel and winners are often photographed and appear in the tenants' newsletter. This helps to publicise the programme positively.
- 80** Satisfaction with gas servicing is high. The gas contractor leaves a satisfaction survey with all tenants who have had either heating repairs or a service. These are showing a 91 per cent satisfaction rate. Any surveys where tenants are dissatisfied are followed up through the complaints procedure. This ensures that the work is up to tenants' expectations and issues are identified and addressed.
- 81** DDH does not currently offer gas servicing to its leaseholders. Although there are only a small number of leaseholders, this is a missed opportunity to ensure the safety of all its residents.

### Aids and adaptations

- 82** This is an area where weaknesses outweigh strengths. There is no waiting list for aids and adaptations funded by DDH but publicity and information is limited and the service is not customer focussed. No satisfaction surveys have been undertaken so these have not been able to drive improvements in the service. DDH ensures adapted properties are re-let to new tenants requiring these but the recycling of aids is not effective. However, DDH has delivered adaptations to homes through the MIP which have assisted its tenants to retain or improve their independence.

## How good is the service?

- 83** The aids and adaptations service is not customer focussed. The service is provided by the District Council under a service level agreement (SLA) and DDH has not used this to improve the service. Although the SLA contains service standards and these are measured as part of the monitoring arrangements, these were not set with tenants and are not reported to them. This means that tenants do not have information about the level of service to expect and how well the Council is performing against these standards nor are they able to influence these.
- 84** Information on the aids and adaptation service is inadequate and the service is not widely promoted. There is a leaflet as well as information on the web site but these do not provide a full explanation of the service and merely signpost potential service users to other sources of information or help. DDH has not used its profile information to identify tenants who might benefit from this service and targeted these tenants. As profile information is not yet complete, DDH has not been able to use this to predict future needs for this service. The service has not been promoted through advertising campaigns in the tenant's newsletter although there have been articles about the installation of level access showers as part of the MIP. The lack of information may make it harder for tenants to access the service and may mean that more people could benefit from the service.
- 85** Tenants do not have to wait for the provision of minor aids and adaptations and many tenants have benefited from this service. At the time of transfer there was a considerable backlog of tenants waiting for this service and DDH provided an additional £174,000 to help clear this. The annual budget is £275,000 which has not been overspent and DDH does not have a waiting list for this service. Minor adaptations are carried out in an average of 7.8 days in 2009/10. Since transfer, DDH has carried out alterations to approximately 600 properties which is a fifth of its stock. This is improving the quality of life and independence of some vulnerable tenants.
- 86** Major adaptations are carried out within the government target of 12 months which is not challenging. Tenants who require major adaptations are waiting an average of nine months for these against the target of completing major works within 12 months. In addition to major adaptations which are funded through the council's disabled facilities grant, DDH has undertaken 50 adaptations, such as the installation of level access showers, through the major improvement programme. This means that DDH tenants are able to access adaptations to improve their independence.
- 87** The Council has not carried out any satisfaction surveys on behalf of DDH so is not able to quantify what tenants think of the service and it has no information about it could be improved. This is a missed opportunity to drive improvement in the service.
- 88** The recycling of aids and adaptations is mixed. DDH ensures, as far as possible, that properties that have been adapted are re-let to new tenants who require this accommodation. Although stair lifts are currently being recycled by the county-wide Care and Repair service, these are not necessarily re-used for DDH tenants. This means that DDH tenants are not benefiting from equipment that has already been purchased and is still serviceable.

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### Income management

- 89** This is an area of strength. There is a positive approach to income management and this is supported by an effective team and IT system. DDH offers its tenants a range of ways to pay and these are taken up as collection rates are high and arrears are low. There are sound processes in place to deal with arrears and provide advice and support to tenants who are in debt. Tenant involvement is strong and this has helped shape these services. Although DDH is working to address financial inclusion, this is not supported by a clear strategic framework and not all of the income due, such as from rechargeable repairs, is being collected.
- 90** There is a positive strategic approach to income management. DDH has recently reviewed its policy and procedures to ensure that these are in line with the new IT system, the pre-court protocol, are supportive, and that a preventative approach is backed by appropriate recovery and escalation procedures with the use of legal remedies. It is positive that tenants have been involved in developing this approach. Recommendations from a recent internal audit of the process have been addressed to ensure the policy and procedure is more comprehensive and aligned to practice. Delivery is supported by a specialist rents team, which drives service improvement in becoming more focussed on a more preventative and early intervention approach to debt recovery rather than reliance on enforcement.
- 91** Good use is being made of IT systems. A new integrated housing IT system, which includes an income management module, has recently been introduced. This is benefiting tenants, for example it produces more comprehensive rent statements, accurate and up to date rent information and more direct debit dates. It is also benefiting the Rent Team as the system is more user-friendly, quicker, with additional functionality. It automatically prompts actions to monitor and manage arrears, allows staff to tailor services to individual cases, and produces standard and bespoke performance data. It disaggregates rent from other charges, such as housing benefit. Vulnerability issues are flagged and enable staff to respond appropriately, for example providing more support to tenants in sheltered schemes or providing information in different formats. This improves the efficiency of the service while maintaining a focus on tenants and performance.
- 92** DDH offers its tenants a range of ways to pay their rent. These include payment in person at the office which is still a popular method with tenants. Direct debit is the next most popular and DDH are seeking to expand its use through active promotion. Other methods include PayPoint at various retail outlets, Post Offices, and online through the Council's website. A third of tenants have direct and full Housing Benefit payments. This makes it easy for tenants to pay rents and charges due and encourages regular payment.

## How good is the service?

- 93** Performance on collecting rent is strong. A high proportion of rent due is collected and arrears collection performance is also strong. In 2007/8, 2.19 per cent of the rent was not collected and at the year ending 2008/9 the performance remained high at 1.66 per cent. This is top quartile performance nationally and fifth out of fifty registered social landlords in the Midlands. Performance on arrears as a proportion of annual debt was 1.63 per cent (£192,376) in October 2009, and below the target range of 1.8 - 2.1 per cent. Arrears are also reducing, with a 31 per cent reduction since October 2008. Prompt collection of rents ensures that the organisation has access to the resources it needs to provide services to tenants and to promote improvements.
- 94** A range of useful information is available to tenants. Good quality written information is provided to tenants on how to pay and the approach to arrears management, and this mirrors what is included within the handbooks for tenants, the service standards and on the website. Tenants receive quarterly rent statements and these have been reviewed on the basis of customer feedback. Tenants in arrears also receive written information that signposts them to additional help from external agencies. This ensures tenants understand what they are paying for and what assistance is available to them if they cannot pay. Publicity and service standards also help inform tenants of their responsibilities and the level of service to expect.
- 95** There is a focus on the prevention of arrears. The need to pay the rent promptly is reinforced at sign-up to new tenants. The approach to arrears recovery is early contact and preventative support from staff and external agencies, including benefits and debt advice. DDH has targeted prevention work on three estates with a disproportionate amount of arrears in co-ordination with external advice and floating support. A campaign to ensure those in arrears continued to pay during the rent free weeks was undertaken during the Christmas period in 2008. It is positive that the number of cases currently seeking possession is 16 compared to 25 in the same period in 2008. Externally provided floating supporting was used in 31 cases of arrears in 2008/09 and all avoided potential evictions. This has resulted in less preventative casework - currently 15 cases in the year to date compared with 35 at the same time last year.
- 96** There is an effective escalation approach to arrears recovery, with serious arrears (more than £250) being dealt with by a dedicated Rents Officer. The IT system prompts help staff manage arrears while allowing them adequate flexibility to take an individual approach to case management if required, such as adapting their communication in response to the needs of vulnerable tenants. Personal visits and telephone calls are the main method of contact if letters have not elicited a response. Floating support and financial advice is offered in cases of serious arrears and legal recourse is a key element of the escalation process. Eviction is seen as the last resort. This ensures a consistent, flexible and supportive approach to arrears management.
- 97** Debt advice signposting and information is strong. An effective booklet is available to tenants that signposts them to help and support. Income team staff are trained in providing welfare and benefits advice. Arrears letters also include appropriate signposting. This helps ensure residents receive appropriate advice to deal with debt and maximise income through benefit entitlement.

- 98** DDH has a positive relationship with the local authority housing benefit team. Quarterly meetings are used to facilitate more effective working. This is supported by a service level agreement with the council and a verification contract to support customer applications. Although housing benefit payments are currently made four weeks in arrears, DDH ensure they build this into their approach. Currently the council is processing new housing benefit claims in 14 days. This helps to minimise delays in payments for 55 per cent of tenants who receive housing benefit, as well as bringing in income and ensuring arrears are not inflated by delays in housing benefit payments.
- 99** The level of former tenant arrears is low at 0.28 per cent of annual debt in October 2009 and the amount has remained stable since transfer. Former tenant arrears are dealt with through a debt collection agency for all amounts exceeding £100 where either there is no contact with the former tenant or where former tenants that are found have not paid. Collection rates are positive for FTAs with robust processes in place. Write-offs are also at reasonable levels with £14,600 being written-off as bad debt in 2008/09. This helps to ensure the association has the resources to provide services to tenants and to reduce the level of debt.
- 100** Customer feedback is helping to shape the service. Residents help develop the service through the Rent Scrutiny Group and service improvement group, such as changing the rent free weeks to better coincide with holiday periods. Tenants were also involved in establishing the service standards. Learning from complaints has resulted in improvements being made to the content of rent statements. Customer satisfaction on the external welfare and benefits advice service has provided additional reassurance to DDH on the quality and usefulness of this service. Therefore, the approach to income management reflects customer expectations.
- 101** The approach to financial inclusion is mixed. It is a weakness that DDH does not yet have a financial inclusion strategy in place to coordinate and focus activity in this area although there is one planned for 2010/11. However, there are examples of working in partnership to develop the financial inclusion agenda such as DDH providing fast-tracked debt advice through a funded external service with an estimated £455,000 of additional benefits claimed as a result. DDH have actively promoted benefit take-up to tenants in sheltered housing schemes. Access to low cost finance through a credit union is not currently available but is being explored. This represents a missed opportunity for the association to have a resource in place to provide a local savings facility and low cost lending for qualifying tenants.
- 102** DDH is not maximising all the income due to it. Rechargeable repairs are not being fully recovered. They are not currently integrated into the rent accounting system, so rely on these being raised by the Assets Team and dealt with by FHG finance staff to co-ordinate recovery. There are plans in place to collect more but this currently means that DDH is missing out on maximising this income.

### Tenancy and estate management

#### Anti-social behaviour (ASB)

- 103** This is an area of strength. There is a well developed approach to dealing with ASB that focuses on prevention. DDH works well with partners in dealing with ASB and there is a range of remedies to deal with this. DDH's approach is customer focussed and it supports both victims and vulnerable perpetrators. DDH has had a number of successes in dealing with ASB but it has not publicised these and therefore missed an opportunity to increase tenants' confidence that it does take issues seriously. DDH has not considered how it could use capital improvement works to design out crime and reduce ASB which is a missed opportunity.
- 104** DDH's approach to dealing with ASB is well developed. DDH has comprehensive and recently updated ASB policy in place. These were influenced by customers and focused on preventing and tackling anti-social behaviour. They reflect the Respect Standard for housing management that DDH has signed-up to. They are linked to a range of other policies, such as the harassment policy, as well as other partnerships that help to address anti-social behaviour. This ensures a consistent service is provided to customers.
- 105** There is a clear focus on prevention of anti-social behaviour. The association explains to new customers how it expects them to behave before the tenancy is agreed and this is repeated at sign-up. If the new tenant has any history of previous ASB, help and support is provided to prevent this being repeated. This is reinforced to all customers within the tenancy agreement. Starter tenancies are used to ensure disruptive tenants can be dealt with promptly and there have been two evictions since transfer. These measures help to reinforce to new and existing tenants how seriously DDH takes this issue and helps to reduce levels of anti-social behaviour.
- 106** There is a range of ways for customers to report anti-social behaviour. These include in person at the office and by telephone. Anti-social behaviour can be reported through DDH's out of hours telephone number and such calls are responded to as requiring urgent action. Reporting is also made by partner organisations, such as the Council. However, ASB cannot be reported through the association's website. A range of ways to report ASB helps to increase the association's awareness of this problem.

- 107** DDH works successfully with a range of partners and stakeholders to prevent and tackle ASB. In areas with disproportionate numbers of ASB cases, DDH undertakes a neighbourhood audit to support targeted work with local residents, any local residents' associations and partners to tackle ASB in the area. DDH works in partnership with a range of relevant partners such as the Police, the local authority and other housing associations. Partnerships include the Daventry Crime and Disorder Reduction Partnership, the local Multi Agency Risk Assessment Conferences (MARAC) and the Joint Action Group to co-ordinate action and monitoring. A wider area-based approach to ASB is undertaken with other organisations through targeted action and ASB estate walkabouts. To support partnership working DDH has signed-up to information sharing protocols with local partners including the Police. This approach enables DDH and its partners to take appropriate action against those committing anti-social behaviour within the community.
- 108** Appropriate remedies are available to resolve anti-social behaviour. These include mediation, starter tenancies, a range of interventions and legal remedies such as acceptable behaviour contracts, injunctions and evictions. DDH is currently assessing the effectiveness of each remedy and also monitors and reports the actions it takes to resolve anti-social behaviour. Although DDH undertook three evictions for ASB between November 2007 to July 2009, and this equates to 2.5 per cent of ASB cases compared to an average of just 1.2 per cent for other organisations in their benchmarking group, this was appropriate action as two cases were starter tenancies and the other was an extremely violent incident. This demonstrates DDH is using powers available to it to tackle anti-social behaviour.
- 109** The approach to dealing with anti-social behaviour is customer-focussed. There are service standards in place and these are supported by specific ASB information leaflets. Varying targets are in place for response times based on the severity of the incident and DDH performs well against these. Appropriate support is offered to victims and vulnerable perpetrators. This involves agreeing an action plan with the victim on the regularity and type of contact and what constitutes case closure. Should victims or witnesses be required to attend court, support is provided to them in partnership with Victim Support. Satisfaction is systematically assessed on case closure and through a recent telephone survey. Examples of how the approach has been changed as a result of this feedback include a revised customer leaflet, improved co-ordination with customer services, and changes to service standards where home visits are now offered to all. This means the association can ensure the approach it has to ASB meets the needs and expectations of its tenants.
- 110** DDH responds to a variety of tenants' vulnerabilities in its approach to ASB. Details of customer vulnerabilities are recorded and used to deliver tailored ASB support, such as through floating support. There are specific policies and procedures for dealing with domestic abuse and cases of harassment, including cases that are racially motivated, which are supported by attendance at MARAC, and at case conferences. Staff have received training to handle ASB cases sensitively and to deal with safeguarding issues and are able to respond to a variety of customer needs.

## How good is the service?

- 111 DDH does not fully publicise its work to resolve anti-social behaviour. Although there is a user-friendly and comprehensive ASB customer information leaflet provided and information is provided on the website, DDH does not report cases to the local press or in the quarterly magazine to customers - although there are plans to do this. It does not currently name perpetrators or locations, inform local communities of successes in ASB cases in their area, and it does not show the true cost of anti-social behaviour to victims or the association. This could be providing further reassurance customers that action will be taken and that ASB is taken seriously.
- 112 Linkages between ASB and capital works are underdeveloped. ASB information does not systematically inform the capital works programme, so crime prevention measures are effectively built into improvement works and in particular used to address hotspot areas. This reduces the impact ASB prevention activity.

## Estate management

- 113 This is an area of strength. The general appearance of estates is good and communal areas are well maintained. There are regular estate inspections and walkabouts. Service standards are in place to deal with local issues such as graffiti removal and fly tipping and no evidence of this was seen during the inspection. Improvements have been funded and these are decided by tenants and support is offered to all new tenants as well as vulnerable tenants to maintain their properties.
- 114 The general appearance of estates is good. The overall condition of estates shows high standards of grounds maintenance and well maintained stock. There was no evidence found of abandoned vehicles, car repairs being carried out, bulky refuse being left and very little graffiti. Good maintenance and appearance means that tenants can be confident that DDH is looking after its stock and the environment.
- 115 DDH has a regular schedule of estate inspections. Villages are visited every two weeks and the three main neighbourhoods in Daventry have a weekly inspection by the Neighbourhood Services Officers (NSOs). Every six months there is a full multi agency walkabout attended by team members, tenants and stakeholders including the police and local councillors. Walkabouts are advertised locally, in the newsletter and on the website. Actions are recorded and followed through to completion. This ensures that tenants' environments are maintained and issues are identified and dealt with.
- 116 Service standards are in place for estate management. To improve the quality of the local environment through partnership working, DDH signed an environmental charter with the council and other RSLs which set out service standards to tackle graffiti, fly tipping, abandoned vehicles and litter. There are also service standards for estate inspections and consequential actions. This means that tenants can be sure how quickly issues will be dealt with.
- 117 There is a positive approach to estate improvements supported by funding. As part of the Tenants' Promises budgets have been set up to cover areas such as landscaping at sheltered housing schemes and community environmental improvements. Tenants are actively involved in making decisions about how this money is spent. Examples of expenditure include the resurfacing of a play area and the provision of parking spaces. Estate improvement funding helps tenants engage in determining the look of the neighbourhood where they live.

- 118** There is support for vulnerable tenants to maintain their homes. The Neighbourhoods Services Team provides grass cutting services to elderly and vulnerable people (one of the Promises) and a general 'handyman' service. The scheme has been taken up by 64 tenants to date. A subsidised charge of £10 per visit is made and the scheme is open to anyone over 60 years or who considers themselves disabled. The scheme is promoted in the newsletter and via direct marketing using the tenant profile information. Schemes such as these help ensure that vulnerable residents do not put their tenancies at risk by failing to adequately maintain their properties.
- 119** Support is also provided to all new tenants. The Moving in Project enhances the letting process for new tenants by providing property particulars, accompanied viewings, and regular updates of work in progress should repairs be needed, prior to sign up. In addition, all tenants are offered one free hour of the handyperson service to help them settle into their new homes. This has been used for a variety of tasks such as putting up bathroom cabinets, fixing pictures to the wall, putting up curtain rails and assembling flat pack furniture. This service helps new tenants feel they are supported to settle into a new property and to make it their home.

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### Is the service delivering value for money?

- 120** This is an area where strengths outweigh weaknesses. Overall, DDH's costs are average and compare well with its performance. There is a clear strategic approach to value for money and DDH has embedded sound financial process as these were absent at the time of transfer. Efficiency savings have been made and are being used to reinvest in services. There is a well developed approach to procurement and tenants are at the heart of this. DDH is constrained by its Tenant Promises and is not recovering all of its management costs and not all services have yet been assessed for value for money.

### How do costs compare?

- 121** Benchmarking is an area which is developing. Because of the age of the organisation, and the time of transfer there was minimal financial and performance data, DDH is only now able to use benchmarking for its 2008/09 figures. Now that these are available, they will form part of the regular financial monitoring and will be used as part of the budget challenge process for the 2010/11 budget. It is too early to have used this benchmarking information to improve services although it has not shown any surprises and DDH is already of areas with high costs and is addressing these, such as in the responsive repairs service.
- 122** Benchmarking information has shown that overall costs are lower middle quarter when compared against the benchmarking group of 49 similar associations. DDH is aware that there is scope to improve performance on costs in a number of areas. However, two areas - neighbourhood and estate management and ASB are in the upper quartile in terms of performance. DDH will address costs through its programme of best value reviews.

## How good is the service?

### How is value for money managed?

- 123** There is a clear strategic approach to value for money. The strategy had been developed by FHG and has recently been reviewed and developed further by an external consultancy. The new strategy, although still in draft form, builds on the existing work and has developed this further to make it more comprehensive. The new strategy is supported by an action plan which is still being finalised but should ensure that all aspects of the strategy are implemented and that value for money is further embedded at DDH.
- 124** Value for money is in the process of being embedded at DDH. Staff transferred from the Council without a good grasp of finance, budgeting or an awareness of value for money. This is an area that has had to be developed and has been achieved through the establishment of a performance management system to provide service information, a clear budgetary process and this year, further supported by value for money workshops. A range of ideas have come from staff through these workshops, including the costing of staff time for attending meetings. Posters with this cost are in all the meeting rooms and have resulted in shorter, more focused meetings.
- 125** DDH has achieved a range of efficiency savings. FHG's target for efficiency is 2.5 per cent of budget but DDH has secured 3.6 per cent against its 2009/10 operational costs budget which equates to £253,000. Other savings range from £300,000 having been made through economies of scale purchasing through a consortium to smaller examples in specific service areas such as savings on the training programme for both staff and tenants through membership of a training consortium and an annual saving of £11,843 on the combined procurement of the new housing management IT system with AVHL. Efficiency gains are able to be reinvested to improve other service areas such as the implementation of new group-wide IT systems.
- 126** DDH manages its financial processes well. There are sound financial and budgetary management processes in place which comply with the FHG framework. Managers receive regular information on their budgets and meet with staff from the group finance team to go through this information. Budgets are managed effectively and managers can respond quickly to any over or under spends that the regular monitoring identifies.
- 127** DDH managers now have sound financial awareness. This was not the case at transfer and DDH, supported by the group have enabled managers to develop skills in understanding budgets, budgetary control, general financial management and building efficiency savings into budgets. This means that managers are now confident in managing their budgets and looking for ways to improve value for money.

- 128** There is a well developed approach to using a range of procurement options to gain better value for money. Internal expertise at group level is used by DDH to appraise the best procurement options to maximise value for money. This is guided by a sound group procurement policy. A range of procurement has been undertaken for services, including the major improvement programme, void repairs and gas and heating servicing. FHG has also procured services through consortia arrangements. The results are a mix of partnering and framework contracts depending on the value and volume of the work. As a result of the robust approach to procurement, DDH can demonstrate improved performance and costs and efficiency savings have been secured.
- 129** DDH has added value from the MIP partnering contract. This has been by establishing an integrated supply chain for materials and components. This supply chain is available to other contractors working with DDH and ensures that the same materials are used for improvements, voids and responsive repairs. Effective procurement has also achieved savings of £100,000 through the re-tendering of the void repairs contract. This has not been at any loss to quality as the standard of work and customer satisfaction levels are high. Better procurement results in savings which can be used to further improve services for tenants.
- 130** Tenants' involvement in procurement is well developed. All procurement exercises have involved tenants who are part of the whole tendering process. They are also involved in contract management through regular monitoring meetings and by tenant board directors sitting on the partnering board. This ensures that tenants are able to influence the level and quality of service that contractors are providing.
- 131** The cost of the repair service is average. Although repair costs are currently under budget, these are still on the high side and place DDH 23 out of its benchmarking club of 49 LSVT organisations. The average spend per property on responsive repairs is £389 per annum and DDH carries out an average of 3.2 repairs per property per annum. DDH is working at controlling costs and implementing further improvements to the service. It is already addressing costs through batching work to achieve economies of scale as well as financial savings. Jobs such as roofing and fencing are released in batches of about ten jobs to achieve a 5 per cent saving on costs over £3,000. Controlling and monitoring costs is essential in providing a cost-effective service.
- 132** A value for money exercise has been undertaken with tenants on tenant engagement activities. This enabled DDH to have a clear understanding of how much it cost to arrange and support events and to make cost savings. For example, by using communal areas in sheltered housing schemes DDH has been able to make savings on the cost of room hire for events, as well as encouraging tenants from the schemes to attend events and become more engaged as a result. Using different schemes around the district has also meant there has been a further saving on transport costs. Such an initiative, as well as actively involving tenants ensures that they are aware of how much money is spent on engagement activities and are able to make informed choices which result in savings to DDH.

## How good is the service?

- 133** DDH agreed not to change service charges until five years after transfer as part of the Tenants' Promises. A review of service charges will be undertaken within the next financial year. This is expected to identify additional services for which a charge can be levied and will ensure that all costs are recoverable after the initial five year period. Although this leads to a current under-recovery of management charges this is constrained by the Promise and will be addressed in the future.
- 134** Not all services have been reviewed for value for money, although a programme of reviews is scheduled. For example, DDH does not know if the aids and adaptations service is delivering value for money and this service will not be reviewed until the New Year. The repairs service is currently being reviewed and DDH is aware that this is a high cost service by comparison with others. However, until the review is completed, it will not have identified and implemented recommendations to address this. Until all services have been reviewed DDH cannot be sure it is achieving best value for money.
- 135** DDH is looking to attract external funding where this is available. For example, in its project on ground and air source heating it is looking to maximise grants that are available for the development of alternative energy sources. The ability to attract funding from other sources will help DDH to improve services and reduce costs.

# What are the prospects for improvement to the service?

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## What is the service track record in delivering improvement?

**136** This is an area where strengths outweigh weaknesses. DDH has clearly been focussed on making improvements across many areas since the transfer in November 2007. It has made good progress on delivering the Tenants' Promises and in particular has demonstrated improvements in the responsive repairs service. It has also made improvements to 842 homes through the major improvement programme. DDH is able to show improvements in other areas such as the amount of money it collects in rents. It has just completed a new STATUS survey and preliminary results show improvements in a number of areas including tenants overall satisfaction with the organisation. However, DDH does not yet have comprehensive profile on its tenants to tailor services to meet needs. Nor has it has not improved all areas and the aids and adaptations service, telephone answering and dealing with complaints do not yet demonstrate clear improvement.

**137** DDH is on target to deliver the Tenants' Promises made at the time of transfer. These promises cover six themes:

- the delivery of home improvements including a five year programme of £43 million investment;
- service improvements including a faster, better quality repairs service;
- affordable rents, including the establishment of a tenant led scrutiny group on rents;
- tenants involved in decision making including the development and implementation of a tenant participation compact;
- regeneration including the establishment of a budget of £2 million over the first five years for environmental improvements to estates; and
- delivering sustainable communities including the introduction of starter tenancies.

By October 2009 DDH had completed 40 of the 54 promises and is on target to deliver the remainder by the agreed deadlines. This has improved the quality of services to tenants over a number of areas.

## What are the prospects for improvement to the service?

**138** DDH has been able to demonstrate a positive direction of travel in key areas since its establishment in November 2007. Performance has been improving in a number of key areas including:

- average re-let days for void properties have reduced from 42.2 days in 2007/08 to 33.8 days in August 2009;
- in October 2008 only 85.8 per cent of properties had a current gas safety certificate and 176 services were outstanding, this has improved to 100 per cent of properties with a current gas certificate at October 2009; and
- in 2007/8 only 2.19 per cent of the rent was not collected and performance had improved to only 1.60 per cent at August 2009, this is top quartile performance nationally.

These improvements show that DDH is focusing on areas that are important in the overall management of the association.

**139** DDH has a positive record of making improvements in tenants' homes. Since transfer, the MIP has improved a total of 842 homes. Positive outcomes for tenants include:

- the delivery of 560 new kitchens;
- the delivery of 381 new bathrooms;
- the delivery of 370 new heating systems;
- 243 properties benefiting from the installation of new windows; and
- 50 major adaptations through the improvement programme.

These improvements directly benefit tenants and show that the association is delivering on the promises made at the time of transfer.

**140** DDH has been successful in making improvements that tenants will notice. This includes improvements to the responsive repairs service. One of the promises made to tenants was to address the low satisfaction level of 61 per cent at the time of transfer. Since transfer, DDH has achieved:

- all responsive repairs completed within time has improved from 76 per cent to 98 per cent;
- emergency repairs completed within time has improved from 50 per cent at transfer to 96 per cent; and
- tenant satisfaction with the service has increased to 92 per cent.

Tenants we met told us that the improvements to the repairs service was the biggest change they have seen since transfer.

## What are the prospects for improvement to the service?

- 141** Feedback through the STATUS survey is showing improvements in a number of areas. The last survey was completed in 2006, before the transfer. This survey has just taken place and preliminary results shows improvements. These include overall satisfaction with the organisation which was 68.9 per cent in 2006 and has gone up to 84.93 per cent. Similarly, the percentage of tenants who felt staff were able to deal with their problem has also gone up from 67.80 per cent in 2006 to 80.63 per cent. While there is still room for more improvement, these results do show a positive direction of travel.
- 142** The creation of the FHG has helped increase the pace of change. DDH has benefited considerably from learning from AVHL and being able to put systems and process in place both at the time of, and before, the transfer from the Council. For example, it benefited from AVHL experience of making major improvements to tenants' homes and recruited a team to manage this process before transfer. As a result of this, DDH was able to start making improvements immediately and on the first day of transfer was fitting a new kitchen in a tenant's home. This demonstrated to tenants that the new organisation was focussed on making improvements and on the delivery of the promises it made.
- 143** DDH has made improvements in other areas such as equality and diversity and value for money. Staff, Board members and involved tenants have received equality and diversity training which has helped establish a culture of respecting diverse needs. Where DDH has profile information on tenants, it has used this to tailor services such as addressing disability or language needs. DDH has embedded sound financial process as these were absent at the time of transfer and there is now a clear strategic approach to value for money. Efficiency savings have been made and are being used to reinvest in services. There is a well developed approach to procurement and tenants are at the heart of this. This means that DDH is now more able to focus its resources on delivering the improvements to services that it has agreed with its tenants.
- 144** However, there are still a number of areas where DDH cannot demonstrate a positive track record in making improvements. It does not yet have comprehensive profile information on all of its tenants and leaseholders. So far, it only has information of four of the six strands on 63 per cent of its tenants. This means that it is not able to shape services to meet all the needs of its tenants. The provision of aids and adaptations is a service that has not yet been improved and there are still a number of aspects of this service which mean that it is not yet customer focussed.
- 145** Complaints are not well managed. Although DDH has implemented a new complaints process, only 31 per cent of complaints were being dealt with within the target times at November 2009. Similarly, DDH has not set challenging times for telephone answering. The target time for answering calls is not challenging at 30 seconds and DDH is failing to answer all of its calls in this time. These areas are important for DDH to be able to demonstrate a fast, fair and responsive service which addresses its tenants' needs.

## What are the prospects for improvement to the service?

**146** DDH is not yet able to demonstrate how it delivers services against its standards. Although it has comprehensive service standards in place, these have only recently been developed with tenants and monitoring and reporting has only just begun. This means that DDH is not yet able to demonstrate how it is performing over time and meeting tenants' expectations.

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## How well does the service manage performance?

**147** This is an area of strength. Improvements needed at DDH have been prioritised through the promises made to tenants at the time of transfer. There is clear leadership for DDH from its board and executive team and a sound planning process is in place. Performance management is embedded and is clearly used to assess performance and drive improvement. Tenants are involved in managing performance and are able to shape services. Risk management arrangements are robust and DDH can demonstrate that it is a learning organisation and takes the opportunity to learn from as many sources as possible.

**148** Leadership at DDH is established. DDH's board is providing robust leadership for the organisation. There is a strong relationship between the board and the executive. The executive is providing strong leadership for the staff group. While there is close working between the DDH and FHG, there are examples of DDH's board making decisions for organisational benefits rather than going with the group on all decisions. This includes a decision about performance indicators that the DDH board wanted to remain more challenging with stretching targets. There are open and frank discussions between the board and the executive that enable sound decisions to be made. Strong leadership provides a clear focus for continuous improvement and delivering better services for tenants.

**149** The Futures Housing Group, including DDH, has a vision for its future. This vision is supported by clear objectives and shared values. Part of the benefit of belonging to the group is that DDH has been able to put in place clear plans for its future. These are clearly focussed initially on delivering the promises it made to tenants at the time of transfer. The promises address all areas where performance needs to be improved and good progress is being made in achieving these. Clear planning processes help to drive improvement across the organisation.

**150** A clear and well developed planning framework is in place. Each year staff, tenants and stakeholders are involved at the early stages of the planning process in identifying priorities for the coming year. These are assessed through a rigorous process and eventually lead to the production of the corporate plan. This is supported by specific team and individual plans. Plans are regularly monitored through appropriate tenant groups, team meetings and at a higher level through the executive management team and the board. This ensures that there is clarity about future plans and projects and that these regularly monitored.

## What are the prospects for improvement to the service?

- 151** A performance culture is now embedded at DDH. This was an area it had to work on as prior to transfer, there was no history of collecting and using performance data to measure and improve service delivery. DDH adopted the TEN IT performance management system used at AVHL. The system captures the whole service planning framework and allows progress to be monitored against objectives and service improvement initiatives, as well as providing comprehensive performance information. DDH has built on this system and recently expanded it to include a projects module to be able to monitor delivery of corporate plans and projects. Sound performance management means that the organisation can focus on what is important and ensure that these services are improving.
- 152** Performance information is used to manage services. The board regularly scrutinises performance data and sets targets. It has set challenging targets for improvements in key areas which matter to tenants such as responsive repairs and performance on voids. Performance management is a standing item at management meetings. Individual staff members present their ideas for improving their service areas and it is an opportunity for others to contribute with further suggestions and support. An example of how this has worked is the improvement in the number of hard to let sheltered housing bed-sits. A range of actions to reduce the vacancies included advertising them to all tenants over the age of 60 had been suggested and discussed. This has been successful and seven hard to let properties were let in October 2009. Regular discussions about performance and service improvements ensure that all staff are aware of actions across the whole organisation and how they can contribute to these.
- 153** Staff are aware of their performance and the impact it has. DDH has recently introduced a number of screens in the office which show a variety of information, including performance information. The system uploads information from the housing management system every ten minutes so staff are looking at live information. This has helped to ensure that staff are continuously aware of performance and the impact that their actions can have on how well the organisation is performing. For example, call centre staff are able to see at a glance how the repairs they are taking are being categorised into emergency, urgent and routine. Having this information available enables staff to consider how calls are being handled and how their categorisation is meeting targets set in each band.
- 154** DDH 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.

## What are the prospects for improvement to the service?

- 155** DDH has a good framework in place to enable tenants to shape services and monitor performance. Tenants are involved in the corporate planning process. This is through a consultation process and means tenants are having a key role in deciding how budgets and services are aligned to priorities, as well as building the greater trust and influence of tenants. Tenants are involved in monitoring performance information as well as suggesting areas that also need to be monitored. While this is mostly through the range of tenant groups, performance information is also widely available through the web site. The involvement of tenants in this area means that they are able to influence and shape services to meet their needs.
- 156** Risk management is robust. There is a sound risk management framework in place which includes a regular review of key business risks by FHG and DDH at both board and executive level. The risk maps are informed by the corporate planning process and form part of a composite performance report presented to the boards. The risk maps are reviewed and updated as new risks, such as the swine flu pandemic and the credit crunch arise. The credit crunch has, however, led to opportunities as well as risks, for example an ability to secure lower interest rates. This process means that risks are being managed and minimised.
- 157** DDH is open to learning from others. Board members, managers and staff attend a range of meetings where there are opportunities to learn from others and consider other models of service delivery. DDH has learned a lot through the move to FHG and being able to benefit from the experiences of AVHL. While this has enabled the organisation to establish sound policies and procedures in the minimum of time, DDH also routinely looks to other higher performing organisations to learn and improve. There are a number of examples of DDH learning from others including implementing a training programme for sheltered housing wardens to be assessors for minor adaptations and starting a gardening club to encourage tenants to work together and share produce. Using all opportunities to learn from others maximises the opportunities to improve services.
- 158** DDH is developing its learning from all sources. It is systematically learning from customer feedback as satisfaction surveys are in place for the majority of its services. It has also started to learn from complaints and has put solutions in place to deal with service failures. Feedback from tenants provide opportunities to build and develop improvements to services.

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## Does the service have the capacity to improve?

- 159** This is an area of strength. Joining a group structure has enabled DDH to add to its capacity and access specialist group-wide staff. Staff at DDH are well managed have access to training and support to carry out their jobs. Financial capacity is strong and IT and procurement have also been strengthened through joining FHG. Partnership working is delivering a number of positive outcomes for tenants. However, sickness absence is high at DDH and there is limited use of mobile technology to help staff deliver services away from the main office. The low level of profile information has also impacted on the capacity of DDH to tailor services to meet the needs of all of its tenants.

## What are the prospects for improvement to the service?

- 160** DDH has benefited from added capacity through joining FHG. The decision to operate with AVHL within a group structure reflected the strong view of tenants. Tenants wanted to retain the advantages of a locally-operating, stand alone organisation while benefiting from a successful LSVT's experience of meeting the transfer promises. The advantage of a small group structure provides DDH with greater financial viability, centralised support services, including IT support, expertise in transfer and delivering a major improvement programme, as well as leadership and governance support. In addition, AVHL have provided a positive challenge, close benchmarking and sharing good practice, which is now happening to the mutual benefit of both organisations. This has added capacity to DDH, which has enabled it to make more improvements in services to tenants.
- 161** Staff capacity is strong. Staff are positive about working for DDH. 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 highly 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. As a result morale is high.
- 162** FHG and DDH are investing in its staff. Training needs are identified through the annual appraisal system and are then built into the annual corporate training plan. There is a current annual training budget throughout the group of £208,000. On average staff at DDH attend 4.4 days of training per year. Staff have had the training they need to both do their current job and also for future needs such as IT training. DDH is currently delivering a comprehensive Leadership Development Programme for all managers based on delivering core competencies. This is aiming to provide consistent and improved management within the association. Training and development helps ensure that staff are able to deliver the organisation's objectives as well as develop their own skills and careers.
- 163** In addition to staff training, there is training programme for board members. As with staff this is developed through an annual appraisal system. Training needs are met in a variety of ways depending on the need and the number of board members involved. This adds to capacity by ensuring that the board fully understand the organisation and the challenges it faces.
- 164** There are effective HR systems. DDH is benefiting from the FHG group-wide approach to managing human resources. HR staff are group employees and support the overall strategic and operational approach within both FHG and DDH. Group wide policies ensure that all staff are working to the same procedures and there is that same approach to management of terms and conditions. Aligning terms and conditions and training enables more effective sharing of staff so that services are covered in times of need.
- 165** However, sickness levels are currently high and average 18 days per year for each employee. There are robust sickness management arrangements in place and DDH is aware of the reasons for the high levels of sickness and is addressing these. For example, there is close working with Occupational Health specialists, a recently revised disciplinary, capability, and attendance policy that managers have been trained on. These support managers with better information to deal with staff attendance.

## What are the prospects for improvement to the service?

- 166** Services are being supported by investment in improved IT systems. During the recent preparation for the new IT system, DDH have processed mapped all operations throughout the organisation. This has allowed it to identify overly complex process and develop more efficient services by reducing stages in processes which quicken delivery and reduce any duplication. The new IT system is supporting value for money and adding capacity through more efficient services, reducing costs, and freeing up staff time to deliver more customer-focused services, such as estate walkabouts in the community.
- 167** However, there remain gaps in the provision of IT support. There is limited use of mobile technology to allow staff to respond quickly to changes in priorities, such as emergency repair requests, or to deliver services directly to customers in their homes. This is important as DDH covers a wide, dispersed area and many tenants rely on staff coming to them in their own homes.
- 168** Financial capacity is strong. DDH has a robust 30 year business plan predicated on savings achieved by joining a group structure. These have been realised and have been out performed in the first two years since set up. A loan facility of £60 million is secured over the life of the plan. The current plan shows a peak debt of £48 million which gives capacity within the total credit facility. The 30 year plan is supported by an annual budget and performance against this is monitored at management level and at board level. DDH is in a strong financial position and can deliver its promises.
- 169** Procurement is a strength for DDH. It has benefited from procurement expertise from AVHL and FHG. This has ensured that prior to, and since transfer, contracts have complied with good procurement practices and overall savings have been achieved. There is a regular review of prices and this information is used to ensure that the group is able to achieve the best price for its purchases. Better procurement not only reduces costs but also helps to ensure funding is available for new and improved services.
- 170** Partnership working is delivering a number of positive outcomes for tenants. The capacity of DDH is added to by positive working with partners such as the police, the council, local voluntary groups and local development agencies. This ensures that DDH is able to play a role in the development of the whole area and contribute to plans which will impact on its communities.
- 171** DDH does not yet have comprehensive profiling information on all of its tenants. It currently has customer profile data on 63 per cent of its tenants, and this just covers four of the six diversity strands. DDH is currently collecting the remaining information through a census and staff are pro-actively seeking this information on contact with tenants. However, until DDH has more information across all strands, its capacity to tailor services to meet the needs of all of its tenants and leaseholders is restricted.

# Appendix 1 – Performance indicators

Performance Indicators	Result	National average
	2007/08	2007/08
% Social housing stock failing the Decent Home Standard	12.1	10.9
Average SAP rating of self-contained General needs dwellings	67.0	68.0
% Social housing rental dwellings vacant at 31 March	1.1	2.4
Average days to relet all managed social housing dwellings	42.2	40.2
%Customer satisfaction with overall service	69.0	79.5
%Customer satisfaction with opportunities for participation	59.0	60.8
%Customer satisfaction with repairs and maintenance service	61.0	75.5
Average relet time for General needs dwellings managed (not new and not subject to major repairs) Days	n/a	
Average relet time for General needs dwellings managed (including those subject to major repairs before letting) Days	n/a	
% General needs (managed dwellings) lettings to BME customers	n/a	
% General needs dwellings vacant and available to let at 31 March	0.7	
% General needs dwellings vacant but unavailable to let at 31 March	0	

## Appendix 1 – Performance indicators

Performance Indicators	Result	National average
	2007/08	2007/08
Total HOP units/bedspaces owned and managed	882	
Average relet time for HOP units/bedspaces managed (including those subject to major repairs before letting)	n/a	
Average relet time for HOP units/bedspaces managed (not new and not subject to major repairs)	n/a	
% SH and HOP units/bedspaces vacant and available to let at 31 March	1.8	
% SH and HOP units/bedspaces vacant but unavailable to let at 31 March	0	

# Appendix 2 – Reality checks undertaken

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

# Appendix 3 – 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)**

## Value for money costings

- 1 DDH has calculated the average cost of a member of staff attending a meeting for one hour. A poster with this cost and an example of how much it would cost for six people to attend a one hour meeting are now in all meeting rooms and at other locations through the organisation. Staff are now much more aware of how much meetings can cost and this has resulted in shorter meetings and more thought about who needs to attend.
- 2 A value for money exercise has been undertaken with tenants on tenant engagement activities. This enabled DDH to have a clear understanding of how much it cost to arrange and support events and to make cost savings. Such an initiative, as well as actively involving tenants ensures that they are aware of how much money is spent on engagement activities and are able to make informed choices which result in savings to DDH.

## Handyman settling-in service

- 3 All tenants are offered one free hour of the handyperson service to help them settle into their new homes. This has been used for a variety of tasks such as putting up bathroom cabinets, fixing pictures to the wall, putting up curtain rails and assembling flat pack furniture. This service helps new tenants feel they are supported to settle into a new property and to make it their home.

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# The Audit Commission

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