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Date: February 2010

Dear Resident,

Re - The results of the short notice inspection at Great Places Housing Group

A team from the Audit Commission has recently inspected some of the housing services provided by your landlord. This letter tells you what we found.

We looked at how Great Places Housing Group maintains tenants' homes and concentrated on the following three areas:

- collecting rent and other income:
- the repair of empty homes before tenants move in; and
- servicing of gas appliances.

We also asked the following questions:

- how easy it is for tenants to access these services;
- what do tenants think of the Group's approach to customer care;
- how well does the Group cater for different peoples' needs; and
- whether it provides value for your money.

Overall we found that the Group did most things well, with strengths outweighing weaknesses in all three inspected service areas. (See note on page 2 for an explanation of our judgements). In particular we found the following:

1. Maintaining tenants' homes

- We found that gas servicing is up to date. Empty homes are repaired promptly and are re-let quickly. A close eye is kept on local schemes and neighbourhoods for signs of decline such as an increasing numbers of empty properties so that early action can be taken. Fewer properties than average are empty so less rent is lost through properties being unoccupied and there is greater choice for those applying for re-housing.

2. Being responsive to tenants

- Increasing amounts of rent and arrears are being collected from current and former tenants. Debt and welfare benefits advice and other support are easily available. The website offers customers easy access to information on a wide range of services. However, we also identified some weaknesses including difficulties gaining access to services by telephone. Complaints are not always well handled.
- Information on decoration vouchers and other support for new tenants is not adequately publicised.

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

- resolving customer complaints more quickly
- assessing the impact of policies on all sections of the community and taking action to address any disadvantage
- routinely comparing costs, quality and performance information with other service providers and using this to improve value for money
- provide clear information on the support available to help tenants redecorate their new home.

The report will shortly be available on our website at www.audit-commission.gov.uk/housing. You can also find further information about housing inspections there. Alternatively the association will be able to let you have a copy of the report.

3. Next steps

We have asked Great Places Housing Group to work with its tenants over the next few weeks to develop an action plan showing how it intends to implement our recommendations. Once we have the finished action plan we will consider the likelihood of Great Places Housing Group improving the inspected services. We will then publish our final report. We hope to publish during April.

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

I hope this letter has been of interest to you. Thank you very much for your co-operation.

Yours faithfully

Alan Brownson
Principal Inspector
Audit Commission

cc Tenant Services Authority regulator
Great Places Housing Association board members

Note: The Audit Commission uses a four point scale for judging the quality of services, as follows:
Strengths considerably outweigh weaknesses;
Strengths outweigh weaknesses;
A balance of strengths and weaknesses; and
Weaknesses outweigh strengths.