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November 2009

Dear Service Users

As a registered housing association, BHT is subject to inspection by the Audit Commission, a Government body that inspects various organisations that receive government funding. The Audit Commission normally gives a housing association seven days notice that it intends to carry out an inspection.

Obviously, this does not give BHT much time to prepare before an inspection. Therefore, we arranged for a mock inspection to be undertaken to see how ready we were for the real thing. This took place in August and was undertaken by a member of staff working for the Affinity Sutton Group, BHT's group parent, with an independent consultant.

As a result, we have identified a number of strengths and also areas where we can make changes to improve the services to residents and other service users.

Attached to this letter you will find a summary of the findings of the inspectors as well as details of the action plan that we have put in place to make improvements. I would be very happy to provide you with a copy of the full report and our full action plan if you would like to see it.

If having read the summary you think there are any other areas where BHT could improve further, please let me know, either by speaking to staff working in your project, or by emailing the Service User Consultancy at feedback@bht.org.uk.

Service Users at the Consultancy have been provided with copies of the final report and draft action plan - their recommendations have been included in our response.

Thank you for taking the time to read this letter. We look forward to hearing your comments.

Yours sincerely

Andy Winter
Chief Executive

BHT - A Member of the Affinity Sutton Group








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Registered in England No 1618610. Registered Office: 144 London Road, Brighton, BN1 4PH

BHT Mock Inspection Report

November 2009

How good is your service?

The Inspectors examined seven areas of BHT Services. Strengths and weaknesses were assessed, and using the evidence obtained before and during the inspection, they found the following:

Phase One Project	Strengths considerably outweigh weaknesses	
User Involvement	Strengths outweigh weaknesses	
Access and Customer Care	Strengths and weaknesses are equal	
Diversity	Strengths and weaknesses are equal	
Value for Money	Strengths and weaknesses are equal	
Gas Servicing	Strengths and weaknesses are equal	
Responsive Repairs	Weaknesses outweigh strengths	

Below is a more detailed summary of the Inspector's findings in the seven areas under review. **All weaknesses are addressed in our action plan so that our performance can improve.**

Phase One Project



Strengths

- Opportunities for residents to develop skills and learning,
- Achieving a minimum B grade in the Quality Assessment Framework assessments,
- Effectively dealing with antisocial behaviour but with full concern for the perpetrator,
- Cleanliness, rent setting, information to service users, rent increases and rent arrears action,
- Arrears performance is well within target,
- Excellent liaisons between Phase 1 and Housing Benefit offices at the City Council,
- Excellent knowledge by staff of the welfare benefits system,
- Good relationships with external partners.

Weaknesses

The one weakness identified related to whether the target for rent arrears is challenging enough! A review of the targets will be completed early next year.

User Involvement



Strengths

Commitment to service user involvement was identified throughout the organisation and the work of the Consultancy and of the SUI Co-ordinator was praised. The involvement of service users in the planning, reviewing and delivering of services was praised as was *Express* magazine and the involvement of service users on interview panels for staff - including those at a senior level.

Weaknesses

- General needs residents are less involved in user involvement activities than others service users,
- The lack of a formal Resident Involvement Impact Assessment,
- The unfilled vacancy on the Board for a second Service User Representative,
- The lack of a formal procedure for the appointing of Project Representatives to the Consultancy.

What we plan to do to improve

- We will be promoting SUI activities to General Needs tenants with an aim to increase participation in the consultancy over the coming year,

- Resident Impact Assessments will be done at each project, to document SUI activities undertaken across BHT and the impact they have on services and their performance. This work will start now and should be completed before the Spring.
- At the moment recruitment onto the BHT Board of Management is frozen. As soon as we can, we will start proceedings to recruit another service user representative onto the Board.
- We will review and document the procedures already in place for appointing Project Representatives to the Consultancy before the end of this year.

Access and Customer Care



Strengths

These were the quality of our buildings, responsiveness of our staff, the amount of information provided to service users and the important role that service users play in the work of BHT.

Weaknesses

- Not all complaints are reported to senior managers. So, while each complaint is dealt with appropriately, not all learning points are necessarily identified and acted upon,
- There is no reporting of complaints handling performance. This means that we do not know whether all complaints are being responded to within the timescale set out in our policy,
- There is no single publication to summarise service standards throughout the organisation. While we have them within individual projects, it has been suggested that we should have them clearly stated across the organisation.
- User involvement activities are less focused for general needs tenants,
- Satisfaction with responsive repairs is not measured,
- A recent tenant satisfaction survey had a poor response rate.

What we plan to do to improve

- We are reviewing our Complaints policy and procedure and will be including guidance notes for staff on logging and monitoring all complaints, target timescales for responses and procedures for monitoring our performance against these targets.
- Early next year we will be publishing service standards across the organisation and will be reporting how well we are doing against these targets annually.
- Procedures will be put in place to monitor satisfaction with repairs. The results will be reported regularly to senior managers so we can improve on any areas of concern. This work has already started.

Diversity



Strengths

- Knowledge and understanding amongst BHT staff of service users,
- BHT's ability to reach people who are significantly disadvantaged or marginalised,
- BHT's Service User Consultancy,
- Our use of interpreting services,
- The make up of our staff which reflects the diversity of the local community in which we work.
- Downland Housing Association, who are responsible for delivering our repairs and gas servicing contracts, demonstrated a good understanding of the needs of our residents. The contractors appointed to carry out work on BHT properties have mostly demonstrated sensitivity when working with residents.

Weaknesses

- While it was recognised that we work well with people from diverse backgrounds, it was noted that BHT has not undertaken specific Equality Impact Assessments on services to demonstrate that this is always the case.
- It was noted that we rely on other organisations, such as the City Council, to nominate residents into our services, and therefore we could not prove that there was a fair access. It was also noted that because of the design of many properties in the City, especially listed buildings such as the Phase One Project, there were restrictions imposed on what we could do to improve access for people with mobility issues.

What we plan to do to improve

- As services are commissioned or remodelled and as policies and procedures are reviewed Equality Impact Assessments will be undertaken. Training for staff on this is being arranged for early next year,
- We will be asking agencies that refer clients to us to demonstrate that they are operating within their own Equality & Diversity policies.

Value for Money



Strengths

Many examples of BHT providing value for money were identified, including service re-modelling, increased competitiveness in securing new contracts, *Express* magazine, the close monitoring of repair costs, our commercial and social enterprises and the bringing of all staff training in-house.

Weaknesses

- A lack of analysis which demonstrates how far services represent value for money,
- The need to develop a more strategic approach to achieving value for money,
- The risk of overspending on responsive and major repairs.

What we plan to do to improve

We are currently exploring methods of measuring, analysing and reporting value for money and each autumn we plan to run value for money initiatives at projects so staff and service users can be consulted on all areas of value for money, including repairs.

Gas Servicing



Strengths

BHT was praised for its strict annual gas servicing compliance, as well as reporting performance to the Board of Management and the frequency of gas boiler inspections at various properties.

Weaknesses

- The lack of our own gas servicing policy (we have informally adopted that of the Affinity Sutton),
- That we had no system for checking that all properties are covered by inspections (there is no reason to believe that they are not),
- That there is no formal timetable for gas inspections held at our residential schemes.

What we plan to do to improve

- We will ask our Board of Management to formally adopt the Gas Servicing Policy we are currently working to
- We will manually check that the contractors are checking gas safety at every property with gas appliances. This will be an annual task that we are planning to carry out for the first time in the next few months. A timetable for inspections will be drafted at the same time.

Repairs



Strengths

The methods by which we communicate with Downland Housing Association through regular meetings was seen as going beyond what was required by the original management agreement.

Weaknesses

- Not achieving performance targets,
- Not monitoring and reporting on standards set out in the agreement with Downland,
- Not having formally adopted Downland's repairs policy,
- Not publishing satisfaction rates,
- Until recently, not having undertaken enough post-work inspections,
- Contractors arriving without notice to undertake works.

What we plan to do to improve

- We will ask our Board of Management to formally adopt the Maintenance Policy we are currently working to
- We need to review our service standards, key performance indicators and the Service Level Agreement we have for maintenance with Downland to make sure that all these are reported on and performance in measured, to identify any issues or concerns, including post work inspections and contractors giving notice for works to be undertaken.