

# Agenda item 6

**Report to:** East Durham Homes Board

**Date:** 26 May 2011

**Title of report:** Customer Inspection and Improvement Panel (C.I.I.P.)  
Inspection of Estate Management service

**Report by:** Customer Inspection and Improvement Panel

**Report for:** Decision

## 1. Purpose of report and link to strategic objectives

The purpose of this report is to outline findings from the recent Estate Management tenant inspection, and highlight any recommendations.

The report links to all five strategic objectives:

Providing quality homes

Regenerating estates and communities

Involving customers to improve services

Delivering excellent services to all

Employer of choice and financially stable

## 2. Recommendations

As a result of the C.I.I.P. inspection 23 recommendations have been made. These are outlined in the action plan for the Board's consideration (Appendix 1).

East Durham Homes management team have also provided a response to the recommendations (Appendix 2).

## 3. Executive summary

This is the first inspection carried out by the Customer Inspection and Improvement Panel. The report covers minor repairs, communal areas, upkeep of estates, estate walkabouts, condition of gardens and litter. Regeneration work and garages are not included. The inspection involved job shadowing, an estate walkabout, interviews and focus

groups with members of staff, consultation with tenants and residents groups and a customer focus group

#### **4. Risk implications**

If recommendations are not investigated and/or implemented the Estate Management service provided will remain a good service but will not become an excellent service.

#### **5. Consultation**

As part of this inspection, the C.I.I.P. has consulted the following people:

- ❖ Staff
  - Tenancy Services Manager
  - Senior Estates and Regeneration Officer
  - Estates Officers and Assistant Estates Officers
  - Customer Involvement Manager
  - Customer Services Manager
  
- ❖ Customers
  - Mystery Shopping Group
  - Tenant and Resident Associations
  - Focus Group

On completion of the inspection, the C.I.I.P. consulted with the Tenancy Services Manager and Senior Estates and Regeneration Officer and further to this, the Executive Management Team to review the recommendations.

#### **6. Background**

Following the 2009 Audit Commission inspection, within the East Durham Homes (EDH) Estate Management service the strengths outweigh the weaknesses. Decent Homes are in progress, regeneration is taking place and the involvement of tenants in the review process helps to drive the company forward.

Our findings have confirmed that rather than showing only re-active responses, East Durham Homes demonstrates a pro-active attitude to challenges which may present themselves in the future. The estates are continuing to improve in appearance, graffiti is under control, as is litter and at the moment E.D.H. is tackling untidy gardens with fixed penalty fines. Of 105 notices dispensed to tenants 77 have come to a satisfactory conclusion. Support for older and vulnerable tenants is available in assisting with garden maintenance. A handyman service

has also been introduced for older and disabled tenants; this covers both internal and external areas within the curtilage of the property.

The C.I.I.P. has identified several areas which if improved would benefit customers and staff, for example, the communication problems between EDH and Durham County Council (DCC), and the ensuing impact upon both customers and staff. Also, effective monitoring of use of the Handyman service, (not all calls come through the call centre so it is unclear as to how effectively this service is being utilised).

However, to return to the positive, tenants are currently involved in service review panels and estate walkabouts with new ways of becoming involved being investigated and/or implemented continuously, for example, inroads are currently being made in arm chair consultations with customers via facebook.

#### **7. Impact for customers (including access and customer care)**

Many of the recommendations made are linked to customer access. The implementation of these recommendations should ensure customers can access services more easily and should receive a better level of service, particularly in terms of the services provided by DCC.

#### **8. Impact on equality and diversity**

Several of the recommendations are linked to equality and diversity, for example, the 'card in window' scheme will allow an increase in customer participation for many vulnerable tenants. In addition, changing the font colour on the company's website could improve access for those who are visually impaired or who have learning difficulties.

#### **9. Impact on value for money**

There are a number of positive impacts on value for money. Improvements to the service level agreement with DCC should improve value for money as it will enable officers to concentrate their efforts on EDH commitments instead of duplicating services which DCC should provide.

In addition, better use of handhelds would ensure estate officers and assistants spend less time in the office checking their schedule and more time on the estates.

#### **10. Legal impact**

There are no legal implications in this report.

## **11. Financial impact**

There are a number of actions identified within the report that may have a financial impact, which may not currently be included within East Durham Homes' budget. For these actions EDH will have to assess the feasibility of carrying out the actions and the costs associated with them.

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