

Date: March 2009

Dear Resident,

## **Re - The results of the short notice inspection at Southern Housing group Limited (SHGL)**

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

We did not inspect all of the services provided by the Association, but we did focus on those where we believe there is room for improvement. We looked at the following three areas:

- the reporting of tenants' repairs;
- how tenants are involved in decision making; and
- how rent is collected and arrears managed.

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

- how easy it is for tenants to access these services;
- what tenants think of SHGL's customer care;
- how SHGL caters for different peoples' needs; and
- whether it provides value for your money.

The results of our inspection are set out below. Overall, we found that SHGL provided reasonable services with strengths outweighing weaknesses in resident involvement, and with strengths and weaknesses being in balance in the other two inspected services. (See note on page 2 for an explanation of our judgements).

### **1. Resident involvement**

We found that the opportunity for tenants to influence services was an area with more strengths than weaknesses. SHGL encourages resident involvement by giving both financial support and staff time. As a result tenants are more satisfied that their views are taken into account. Involvement activity is reaching a wider range of tenants and customer feedback shows that this is leading to improved outcomes for tenants.

### **2. Being responsive to tenants**

We found that strengths and weaknesses are in balance. The service is readily accessible by telephone, email or in person. The website helps tenants to access service at their convenience while information for tenants is generally clear and is provided in other languages and formats. However, written service standards are not comprehensive and timescales are not clear. We also found that performance reporting does not fully explain how well services are delivered against published standards. Access to translation services is not consistently offered and the needs of tenants are not fully taken into account when services are being planned.

### **3. Income collection**

We found that strengths and weaknesses are in balance. SHGL provides clear but basic information to help tenants understand the service and help for those with difficulties in paying their rent. Tenants express high levels of satisfaction with the service. However, SHGL does not take enough action to prevent new tenants getting into arrears or to collect the debts left by former tenants.

To help your landlord improve its service to all residents, we have made the following recommendations:

- Improve its customer focus and its approach to meeting different needs;
- Improve its approach to income management; and
- Develop a robust approach to value for money.

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

### 3. Next steps

We have asked Southern Housing Group Limited to work with its residents to develop an action plan showing how it intends to implement our recommendations by **11<sup>th</sup> May 2009** and to send this to us. Following on from their report back to us we will consider the likelihood of Southern Housing Group Limited improving the inspected services and publish our judgements, together with the Association's action plan, as part of our final report. It is our intention to publish these documents in **June 2009**. Our web site will record any changes to this date.

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

A copy of this letter is also being sent for information to each member of the board of SHGL.

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

Yours faithfully

Judine Alleyne  
Principal Inspector  
Housing Inspectorate  
Audit Commission

CC Tenant Services Authority regulator  
Southern Housing Group Limited board members

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