

Extracts from the Audit Commission Report into Lambeth Living Spring 2009

Context

The Labour administration established its Arm's length Management Organisations (Lambeth Living) in June 2008 to manage the 34,010 domestic properties owned by the council, of which 24,601 are tenants and 9,413 are leasehold. This includes around 4,000 homes in Tenant Management Organisations.

Overall Judgement

"In this inspection we found the overall service is weak and in some areas there are significant weaknesses. Telephones are not answered promptly, the quality of customer literature is poor, the complaints system has broken down and there is low customer satisfaction.

"Response repairs are not completed promptly, there is a suspension on non essential repairs, the management and delivery of repair diagnosis and appointments is poor and there is a high level of litigation for disrepair. There are backlogs of empty homes, no strategy for dealing with long term voids and the quality of re-let voids is mixed. The number of homes without a valid gas certificate is high and access procedures do not reflect best practice."

Failure to Collect Rent

"Rent collection performance is consistently weak, current and former tenants' arrears are high and arrears prevention is weak. There are high levels of empty homes, re-let times are poor and choice-based lettings has not been implemented effectively. The collection of service charges and major works charges from leaseholders is poor and engagement with leaseholders is weak. Lambeth Living lacks a robust approach to value for money and has a limited understanding of how its costs and performance compare with others."

Weak Leadership

"Performance is comparatively poor and deteriorating. Lambeth Living lacks strategic direction and a comprehensive range of improvement plans and strategies. It has not yet established stable or effective leadership at a senior management and board level and the performance management framework is weak. The capacity of the board is underdeveloped, the financial outlook is uncertain and key building blocks such as human resources, ICT and procurement have not been established."

Phones Ring Unanswered

"From April to October 2008, 8.9 per cent of calls were abandoned and only 68.1 per cent of calls were answered within the target time of 15 seconds. In October 2008 performance fell to 42 per cent of calls answered within target, with an average waiting time for an answer of just over a minute."

Out of Date Information

“Documents we saw were significantly out of date. The tenants’ handbook has not been updated since 2002 when an amendments booklet was published. Tenants therefore do not have a clear picture of the services they can expect and their rights and responsibilities.”

Complaints

“The system of complaint resolution by Lambeth Living has broken down with large numbers of complaints being referred to the Local Government Ombudsman. In 2007 83 were referred and 71 in 2008. Lambeth Living was also slow in responding to the Ombudsman responding to only 63 per cent on time.”

Discriminating Against Disabled People

“Accessibility of offices and estates is not Disability Discrimination Act (DDA) compliant. The Streatham office is not accessible to wheelchair users, a number of offices have high reception counters, and Tenant Management Organisation offices were not fully DDA compliant.”

Asbestos

“A 100 per cent asbestos survey of communal areas has not been completed. Policies for the management of asbestos have not been updated in a timely manner following the introduction of new regulations. The weak approach to asbestos may have prejudiced the health and safety of residents during planned works.”

Rent Loss from Empty Homes

“The level of rent loss from empty homes is high based on 933 empty homes at February 2009 and the average rent of £72.85 (now uplifted by £12 a week) there is an annual rent loss of approximately £3.5 million per year.”

Tenant Rent Arrears

“Current tenants’ rent arrears are high. In February 2009 current rent arrears stood at £9.9 million or 9 per cent of the annual debit. Arrears management has historically been poor and there are currently a large number of current tenants with high arrears. In February 2009, 2,276 tenants (approx 10 per cent) owed over £1,500.”