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Inspection of Valleys to Coast Housing Association: a Summary Report

Valleys to Coast Housing Association

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Valleys to Coast Housing Association

1. Valleys to Coast Housing Association (the Association) was the first large scale voluntary transfer association in Wales. It was established in September 2003 to take transfer of homes from Bridgend Council and manages approximately 6,000 homes and provides management services to 700 leaseholders in the Bridgend area.
2. The Association has approximately 220 staff operating from three offices.
3. The Association has a Board of 12. Four of the board members are tenants, four are nominees from the council and the other four are independent members.
4. An Executive Management Team manages the Association and is responsible for delivering the annual operational plan, managing the budget and making sure that performance targets are met.
5. When inspected, the Association had been in existence for more than four years. At the time of transfer, the Association took on a large number of problems such as a high number of empty homes, housing that was in poor condition and poor quality services. Since taking over, the Association has been concentrating on improving this situation.

The Inspection

6. The Welsh Assembly Government (the Assembly Government) has commissioned the Wales Audit Office, an independent agency, to carry out a programme of inspections of all of the larger housing associations in Wales. The inspection of the Association took place in May 2008. In carrying out the inspection, inspectors work to the Regulatory Code for Housing Associations in Wales (the Regulatory Code). This is explained in more detail in the full inspection report.
7. The inspection asks two questions:
 - Does the Association deliver good-quality services?
 - Does the Association secure continuous improvement in services?
8. To answer the first question, the inspection looks at eight areas of the Association's work. These eight areas are listed in the table below, along with a summary of the inspection findings and the inspectors' rating of how well the Association did.
9. 'Satisfactory' services are what inspectors would expect to find; 'good' or 'excellent' services exceed those expectations. If services do not meet expectations, they will be found to have 'scope for considerable improvement' or to 'fail to comply with the Regulatory Code'.
10. To answer the second question, the inspection looks at the way the Association forms its strategies and at its arrangements for ensuring that it continues to improve services to residents. The most effective organisations are found to 'demonstrate strong corporate and strategic capabilities' and those doing least well are judged to 'fail to demonstrate capability'.

The Findings

Does the Association deliver good-quality services?

Service area	Findings	Judgement
Relationship to residents	The Association encouraged residents to get involved in its work.	Satisfactory
	Information for tenants about services was clear and accurate and it was easy to get access to services.	
	The Association consulted tenants about services in a variety of ways but did not always let tenants know what it was doing as a result.	
	The Association was not managing complaints well and needed to do more to ensure it was accountable to its residents.	
Equal Opportunities	The Association was promoting equality of opportunity and was taking action to find out more about their customers to improve its approach.	Satisfactory
	The Association provided services in English and Welsh.	
Providing Housing	The Association had a well established working relationship with Bridgend Council to identify where housing was needed and to provide it.	Satisfactory
	The Association was working to regenerate communities but needed to do more to assess the impact of that work.	
Rents	The Association was helping tenants with problems with rent arrears and other debts	Good
	Arrangements for managing rent arrears and recovering money owed were resulting in improved performance	
Lettings	The Association had put a lot of work into reducing the significant number of empty properties inherited at stock transfer	Satisfactory
	The Association needed to provide a bigger range of better information to people who might wish to apply for housing	
	The Association worked well with Bridgend council in relation to lettings	
	The Association let properties fairly	
Managing Housing	Tenants were offered the most secure form of tenancy possible	Satisfactory
	The Association had policies and procedures for managing anti social behaviour and keeping estates in good condition but did not make sure that these were always worked to	

Service area	Findings	Judgement
Maintaining Housing	The repairs service was improving. The Association needed to make sure that its systems for making sure work was done to standard were always applied.	Satisfactory
	The Association managed gas servicing well but needed to complete the implementation of its arrangements for managing asbestos.	
	Many homes had benefited from major improvement work although work to improve the look of estates had yet to be scheduled. The Association needed to put a programme of regular repairs work, such as painting, in place.	
	The Association had plans in place to bring almost all homes to the Welsh Housing Quality Standard by 2012.	
Housing for People with Support Needs	The Association made available accommodation for older people and people with high level support needs. It didn't make sure that all applicants with support needs were able to access its homes and didn't have good arrangements to make sure that tenants who needed support could get it.	Scope for considerable improvement
	The Association didn't have all the information it needed to make sure it could deliver services in a way that would meet tenants' differing needs.	

Does the Association secure continuous improvement in services?

11. The Association's approach to securing continuous improvement was raising standards in service delivery:
- it had clear plans for the future;
 - it was continuing to improve the way that it managed its performance and needed to get better arrangements in place to make sure that it achieved its future plans;
 - it needed to improve its approach to reviewing and improving services;
 - performance and the quality of services to residents was improving; and
 - arrangements for planning and delivering improvements in service in the future were being strengthened.

What happens next?

12. Within eight weeks of the full report being published, the Association should circulate this Summary of the report to tenants.
13. The Association should produce a Commentary, which will be available on the Wales Audit Office's website, and an Action Plan to show what it will do to address any issues the inspectors have identified. The lead inspector will agree the Action Plan with the Association.

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14. The Assembly Government's Regulation Coordinator will monitor work on the Action Plan. When inspectors and the Assembly Government are satisfied that the Action Plan has been completed, they will sign it off.

This document is a summary. The full report is available from the address on the back page of this document.



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