



WALES AUDIT OFFICE INSPECTION OF VALLEYS TO COAST HOUSING (V2C)

V2C RESPONSE

V2C welcomes the Wales Audit Office report, the timing of the inspection coinciding with the organisations second year of working. Its findings will assist V2C in meeting the expectations of customers and help influence our approach to continuous improvement.

The report recognises the scale of the issues inherited by V2C in September 2003, including the serious deficiencies in the condition of the housing stock and the absence of a basic infrastructure for service delivery. It supports V2C's strategy in identifying and addressing the immediate priorities following the stock transfer and the evolving nature of the services being delivered. We are in no doubt that the re-inspection of key services during 2007 will confirm further advances in the quality of services provided by V2C, firmly supported by a framework that both promotes and secures continuous improvement.

We have always sought to be open with our customers and partners about the challenges we face in improving homes and services and all recognise there are no quick fixes, but that a long term programme of investment was needed to reverse decline and build confidence;

Both V2C's Board and staff have embraced the report findings and work is well advanced in addressing the areas identified by the inspectors for further development. Progress to date includes:

- Improving customer access to clear information and advice, and promoting further opportunities for residents to become more enthusiastically involved in the development of services through, for example, the approval of service standards via active participation in representative groups such as the Customer Service Panel.
- Continuing to work with Bridgend County Borough Council (BCBC) in a positive and constructive partnership over a wide range of housing, economic development and regeneration initiatives.
- The restructuring of our rents function has continued to deliver improvements in rent recovery for both current and former tenants, for example, rent current tenant arrears were reduced by a further £100k in 2005/06.
- V2C is funding an extension to the Shelter Cymru 'Housing & Welfare Benefit Advice Service' project targeted at homelessness prevention.
- The number of empty homes has further reduced with a target of 180 set for 31st March 2007 (down from the 440 inherited from BCBC in September 2003).
- Customer satisfaction surveys have been extended to include the repairs helpdesk, work assessment and responsive repair work. Feedback has enabled us to be more receptive in addressing our customer's needs.



- We have taken further measures to improve the statutory servicing arrangements for both gas and solid fuel heating systems, including more stringent, but flexible arrangements for securing access to tenant's homes.
- Over 4,425 V2C homes have benefited from new windows and doors, with tenant satisfaction levels at 99% and the programme targeted to be completed ahead of schedule in 2007.
- Significant strides are being made on other improvements (2,466 rewires 1,900 new kitchens, 1,849 central heating systems) with tenant satisfaction levels at 95%.
- In addition, energy efficiency works have been completed to approximately 1,500 V2C homes in partnership with British Gas and their 'Here to Help' scheme.
- We continue to work with our partners in the community, for example, the Construction Training Centre is up and running with some 22 trainees – V2C has taken on four – others have secured work placements within the V2C supply chain. With support from V2C, BCBC and Lovell, a Youth Centre, managed by Youth Works has opened on Caerau Park.
- More robust arrangements have been established for implementing plans for improvements in key services and we have introduced more effective measures for monitoring and evaluating performance.

There have been genuine efforts to make a difference and improve the housing service for our customers. Whilst there is much that still needs to be done, the above examples demonstrate that further significant progress has been made on a number of fronts in terms of service delivery, home improvements and working with tenants and residents on priorities to uplift the quality of the environment in many areas.

We endorse the findings of the Wales Audit Office final report and are committed to working with tenants and residents throughout the Bridgend County Borough and our key partners to implement the recommendations within it.

We want to improve the service we provide and are committed to doing so.