

## **'How was it for you?'**

'Housing inspection: how was it for you?' is a biennial survey of Northern Housing Consortium (NHC) members' perceptions of the Audit Commission's inspection process. The latest project surveyed 20 Northern housing providers (including a local authority, ALMOs, stock transfers and traditional RSLs), whose inspection reports have been published since November 2005.

The report showed better results than in the Consortium's last survey in 2005. At that time, just over 50% received two stars and there were no three star awards. This time, there were 65% and 10% respectively.

The survey also found that in a number of key areas, NHC members' perceptions of the inspection process were considerably better than when the 2005 survey was conducted. These improved perceptions were the result of enhancements to the pre-inspection communication and meetings and in the self-assessment process – all respondents finding it useful, as well as a large increase in those finding the support useful.

However, housing associations have less confidence in the inspection system than councils or ALMOs – a pattern repeated from the NHC's previous surveys. Only housing associations felt that there were problems with the scope of the inspection and that the timing of the inspection was not helpful. There are still issues around the amount of information the Inspectorate requests from housing organisations, despite there being an improvement in this area on the 2005 results.

**The Northern Housing Consortium's Director of Performance Improvement, Ian Wright, commented:** "This is our fourth survey of members' inspection experience and once again it shows a continuing improvement in what organisations get out of the inspection process. We have worked closely with the Housing Inspectorate to ensure our members' concerns and feedback is fed into the review process and these findings back up the fact that the process has evolved successfully and the inspection framework really does act as an incentive for improvement."

The findings of the survey are being used to inform discussions between the Consortium, on behalf of its members, and the Housing Inspectorate. The two organisations will continue to work together on ways to drive further improvements in the inspection process, particularly in the current changing climate.

**Roy Irwin, Chief Inspector of Housing at the Audit Commission said** "It is heartening to see a wide range of improvements since the last survey two years ago, and that overall these positive signs far outweigh any misgivings. For instance, there is endorsement of the effectiveness of pre-site meetings from 90% of respondents, with the numbers finding the meetings very effective up from 27% to 70%. There is also good news on other fronts with a sharp rise in those believing that they have every opportunity to influence inspections and agreeing that judgements are fair. However we are not complacent and will be looking at those areas where concerns were raised by the survey."

For further information contact: Ian Wright, Director of Performance Improvement or Yvonne Davies, Lead Housing Inspector (North East), Audit Commission

**Ends**

### **Notes to editors**

- 1 The Northern Housing Consortium is a non-political, not for profit, member based organisation, whose members between them manage almost 90% of social housing in the North. Our main roles are:
  - To provide a comprehensive range of timely, relevant and affordable services for members with a distinct focus on Northern issues
  - To take a lead role in enabling the improvement of housing and organisational performance in the North
  - To work with Government and other bodies to ensure the region benefits from the resources and funding available to provide safe, vibrant, sustainable communities

Our provision of support is delivered across four themed areas: Quality of Life, Quality of Place, Performance Improvement and Investment & Resources.

Further information can be found on our website at [www.northern-consortium.org.uk](http://www.northern-consortium.org.uk)

- 2 The Audit Commission is an independent body responsible for ensuring that public money is spent economically, efficiently and effectively, to achieve high quality local and national services for the public. Their remit covers around 11,000 bodies in England, which between them spend more than £180 billion of public money each year. Their work covers local government, health, housing, community safety and fire and rescue services.

As an independent watchdog, they provide important information on the quality of public services. As a driving force for improvement in those services, they provide practical recommendations and spread best practice. As an independent auditor, they monitor spending to ensure that public services are good value for money.

The Housing Inspectorate was established to provide the public with an independent assessment of whether best value has been achieved by their local council. Inspection reports judge how well a housing service is currently serving local people, based on a star rating from 0-3, where 0 is poor and 3 excellent. It also rates prospects for improvement in the future.

- 3 'Housing inspection: how was it for you?' is the fourth in the Consortium's series of reports on recently inspected organisations. The previous ones were published in 2001, 2003 and 2005.

- 4 The Consortium contacted 81 recently inspected organisations in the north, of which 20 sent responses.

- 5 A copy of 'Housing inspection: how was it for you?' is attached. Further copies can be obtained by emailing [enquiries@northern-consortium.org.uk](mailto:enquiries@northern-consortium.org.uk)