

## HOUSING INSPECTORATE - SELF-ASSESSMENT PRO-FORMA



<b>Name of organisation:</b>	Northwards Housing
<b>Title of Inspection</b>	ALMO re inspection
<b>Date:</b>	September 2008

<b>Section 1 – Setting the Scene</b>	<b>Maximum of four A4 pages</b>
<p><b>About Manchester</b></p> <p>Manchester is the regional capital of the North West and has the fastest growing economy in the UK outside of London. The city is regarded as a cultural centre with international festivals such as the Commonwealth Games, the International Art Festival and world-renowned sport and music venues. Manchester is also the number one choice for students and has a high retention rate for graduates.</p> <p>However, this success should be viewed in the context of the levels of deprivation within the city. Manchester was ranked the 4<sup>th</sup> (out of 354) <a href="#">most deprived local authority area in 2007</a> (1 being the most deprived). This was, however, an improvement from 2004 when Manchester was ranked as the 2<sup>nd</sup> most deprived. Within the context of a city that is receiving more investment than any other core city in the UK, the residents of Manchester actually have a wage that is below that of all other core cities and more importantly has actually fallen between 2006-07 (<a href="#">view wages p.23</a>). Furthermore, the gap between Manchester residents' wages and Manchester workplace wages between 2006 and 2007 has increased. Workplace wages average at £402 for 2006 and £431 for 2007, whereas residents' wages average at £333 for 2006 and £327 for 2007.</p> <p>The economy of Manchester is expected to grow. There are currently 306, 000 people employed within the city (a 14.3% increase since 2000) and it is anticipated that there will be a further 100, 000 jobs created over the next 15 years. This has lead the Manchester Partnership – the local strategic partnership (LSP) of key public, private and third sector organisations - to tackle worklessness in Manchester. Employment amongst Manchester residents is increasing; between 2005 and 2007 by 6.5% to 66%. Charged with delivering Manchester's Community Strategy (CS) through the Local Area Agreement (LAA) Manchester's LSP has a range of priorities that focus on improving employment, health and education for the city's communities, as well as making Manchester a more desirable and attractive place to live and work. The CS has three core elements to it: <i>Reaching Full Potential in Education and Employment; Individual and Collective Self Esteem – Mutual Respect and Neighbourhoods of Choice</i> (<a href="#">link to CS diagram demonstrating 3 core elements section 5</a>). Northwards Housing's (NH) main contribution to the CS is towards the <i>Neighbourhoods of Choice</i> agenda. This is the context within which NH has been managing the Council's housing stock in the northern wards of the city for almost three years.</p> <p><b>About North Manchester</b></p>	

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The District covers 11.3 square miles and is bounded by Salford and Bury to the west, Oldham and Rochdale to the north and Eastlands Homes (LSVT) to the east. The 2001 census showed the **population** of North Manchester is 102,388 in 86,000 households. NH manages **12,458** properties. The wards covered by Northwards are: Ancoats & Clayton (part); Charlestown; Cheetham; Crumpsall; Harpurhey; Higher Blackley; Miles Platting & Newton Heath (part) and Moston. The NH area is effectively all of north Manchester between the City Centre and the M60, with the exception of **Collyhurst Village and Miles Platting PFI areas**. NH also manages properties in the New East Manchester regeneration area.

Using robust predictive techniques based on ordinance survey mapping with data from the Office of National Statistics (ONS), the Cheetham ward was estimated to have a non-white population of up to 59% in 2006. Crumpsall was estimated to have a non-white population of up to 26.5%. Other wards in the NH district were estimated to be less diverse with non-white populations not exceeding 11.5% ([link to State of the Wards report](#)). The 2004 Sub-National Population Projections have predicted changes in minority ethnic groups living in the north Manchester area during the period 2007-2011. Figures from the ONS indicate that the wards of Harpurhey, Miles Platting & Newton Heath will see the greatest increase in ethnic minority people living in the area, followed by Higher Blackley and Moston. These population changes are not unexpected considering recent influxes of asylum seekers, refugees and migrant workers coming to the north of the city.

**Employment opportunities** in north Manchester are not available to the same extent as opportunities in the south of the city and the city centre. Apart from major public sector sites, such as North Manchester General Hospital and MANCAT's north Manchester college campus, there are no major employers in the north of the city, although Manchester Fort (a retail park located in Cheetham) employs over a 1000 people. A large Tesco in Cheetham, which is currently being built, will also provide opportunities for local people. Expected changes in the district which will have an impact on job opportunities for local people include the closure of bus company First's Cheetham depot, the relocation of Booth Hall Children's Hospital and the redevelopment of Boddingtons Brewery, the latter expected to create 1850 positions. As of July 2008, current unemployment rates across the district average out at 4% (with a range of 2.9%-5.4%) which, whilst only 0.3% behind the Manchester average, is significantly behind the regional average of 2.7% and the national average of 2.3%.

As stipulated earlier, Manchester is the 4<sup>th</sup> most deprived local authority area in the country. In the NH district deprivation is heightened further still. The 2007 Department for Communities and Local Government's 32,482 lower super output (Iso) areas showed that Manchester has 9 in the top 100 most deprived – all of these but one are in north Manchester. The second most deprived Iso area in the country is in North Manchester - Harpurhey ([link to 2007 Iso index of multiple deprivation table](#)).

Other indicators also demonstrate a negative variance between north Manchester and the city as a whole. All of the wards within the NH district experience both life and healthy living expectancy that is significantly below the national and city average. Furthermore, the mortality rate for all wards within the NH district is higher than both the Manchester and the national average. In fact, for several key health indicators (cancer mortality, smoking cessation and circulatory disease mortality), the NH district consistently, without exception, fares worse than the national average ([link to State of the Wards report](#)). The other major indicator demonstrating a negative variance is educational attainment. In 2007, across the city, 6.1% of school leavers gained no

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GCSEs at grades A\*-C; in north Manchester this figure rose to 8.8% ([link to state of the wards report](#)).

**Demand for housing** has been increasing for several years, giving rise to pressures which previously tended to be experienced mainly in the south of the city. The number of empty homes has reduced year on year. As of August 2008 there were 163 empty homes, 1.3% of total NH stock. Upward pressure has been experienced on rehousing queues and waiting times across the whole NH area, with 2755 people waiting for a home in the NH area.

### **About Northwards Housing and its Partners**

NH, a round 4 Arms Length Management Organisation (ALMO), was created by Manchester City Council in December 2005 following a resounding “Yes” vote (91.7%) on a 66% turnout in a tenant ballot in Autumn 2005. Tenants exercised that vote in response to the offer document [Your future Your choice](#) which set out the Council’s promises should an ALMO be established.

In order to deliver effective services to the communities of north Manchester, indicated above to inhabit a more deprived environment, NH has actively listened to and engaged with the most vulnerable sections of the community to ensure that all voices are heard. This has resulted in proactive and innovative ways of engaging with children and young people such as Greater Manchester Music Action Zone (GMMAZ) which has been utilised by NH to gain thoughts on community and place from younger people.

With regards to ethnic breakdown, sexuality, disability, faith and gender, [the NH Board is broadly representative of the communities NH serves](#). NH is a key partner in the Valuing Older People (VOP) partnership, securing funds for a range of activities for older people aimed at engagement, health and providing social opportunities. Due to 2001 census data becoming less reliable, NH has profiled 65% of its tenants, allowing it to identify the following information about the tenants:

**31% are over 60 years of age;**

**9.5% are from BME communities;**

**33% class themselves as disabled ([link to profiling report](#)).**

**NH’s corporate objectives** are well placed to ensure the organisation is providing top class services in an efficient manner. They are: the provision of *Warm, Safe and Affordable Homes*; to contribute to the LSP’s *Successful Communities* agenda; *Quality Services*; services provided in a way that is in line with *Value for Money*; to Promote *Equality and Diversity*; to help make an *Attractive Environment* and creating *Safer Places to Live*.

The North Manchester Public Service Board (DPSB) brings NH together with its key partners to prioritise locally-based issues informed by ward coordination across the north of the city. These issues are then fed back into the LSP structure ([link to Strategic Housing Partnership diagram](#)). The DPSBs across the city are currently under review although the partners in north Manchester meet quarterly to agree on action for key priorities ([link to DPSB delivery plan](#)). With regards to housing partnerships, NH is a key contributor to the Strategic Regeneration Framework for North Manchester (SRF) via the North Manchester Strategic Partnership. Particularly through being on target with the Decent Homes Standard (DHS), NH is having a significant impact with regards to physical regeneration.

Action carried out through various partnerships operating throughout the city is contributing to Manchester’s LAA, which was signed

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off by the city in June 2008. The LAA sets out targets derived from strategic priorities detailed in Manchester's CS. In January 2008, the Audit Commission reviewed the LAA and concluded that, although there were apparent risks to not achieving the stipulated targets, the general partnership and reporting arrangements were sound, providing the potential for the Manchester Partnership to meet its objectives ([link to 2008 LAA Audit Commission report](#)). Through the above detailed [partnership structures](#), NH is committed to the excellent standard of housing service residents deserve and desire, as well as making a significant contribution to the regeneration of north Manchester.

NH developed its **values and objectives** in November 2005 as part of a Vision Day with the Shadow Board, staff and stakeholders. These objectives drive NH's business and are set out in the Delivery and Business Plan. The objectives are reviewed annually by the Board. NH is directed by a **Board** of 12 Voluntary Members comprising 4 MCC Nominees, 4 Independents and 4 Tenants. Council Representatives are nominated annually by the Council's Executive, whilst Independents and Tenants are recruited through an open and competitive process; with Tenants subject to election if more than the required number stand for the Board. Tenant and Independent Board Members retire by rotation. The Board is chaired by Sue Ratchford, a tenant Board member. The Board in part discharges its business through 4 **Sub-Committees** – Human Resources & Equality; Resource & Audit; Property & Procurement; and Neighbourhood & Quality Service – each of which has clear [terms of reference](#) and delegation. Sub-Committees meet monthly and make recommendations to bi-monthly Board meetings.

There is the potential to **co-opt up to 2 voting members** onto each Sub-Committee in order to increase the skill, expertise and representativeness of the Board. There are 3 co-optees including one leaseholder. The Board receives training on key skills and the strategic role of Board Members. An [audit of Board Members' skills](#) was undertaken in 2008. NH has undertaken Board Member appraisals using Enlighten consultants.

NH **employs 336 staff** across the range of housing functions delegated by MCC and within a number of technical disciplines. Staff operate from **3 public offices**; at Cheetham Hill Road in Cheetham, Monsall Street in Harpurhey and White Moss Road in Charlestown. The headquarters is at Hexagon Tower, in Blackley. Some teams are based at other sites in North Manchester with the Voids Team and 3 Home Improvement teams co-located in contactor partners' premises. Since the last Inspection, NH has increased its capacity by bringing the Mobile Cleaning Team and Programme Planning Team in house from MCC. In addition, new posts have been created to enhance service delivery. Service delivery has also been restructured, notably the Home Improvement and Rehousing Teams. See NH's [structure chart](#).

NH seeks to equip its staff to deliver excellent customer service through a **Workforce Development Plan**. NH is seeking IIP Accreditation in its own right. Chartermark Accreditation was first given in May 2007 and reaccredited in May 2008. NH operates within the Council's HRA. It negotiates a **Management Fee** each year reflecting the subsidy determination to the Council. In 2008-09 NH's Management Fee is £19.7M, plus £5.4M other income. This finances £9.1M repairs and £16.0M management costs. NH's **Business and Delivery Plan** is approved annually by the Board and sets out a 10 year financial projection for the business. This Plan reflects the priorities of NH and its commitment to continuous improvement in service provision. There has been stakeholder consultation on the 2008/9 Plan.

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<b>Section 2: Service Areas</b>	<b>Maximum of 20 pages</b>
<p>In this section NH sets out how it is organised in order to deliver responsive and cost-effective services to its tenants and customers. It explains where NH currently stands against the overarching and service specific KLOEs.</p>	
<b>STOCK INVESTMENT &amp; ASSET MANAGEMENT</b>	<b>LEAD OFFICER: LARRY PATRICK</b>
<p>The overall purpose is to deliver our objectives especially warm, safe and affordable homes. <b>Customers are involved in our services</b> through the Procurement &amp; Property Sub Committee, 3 Area Panels, the Repairs and Improvement Task Group and a Leaseholders' Forum. There is a 'Board Champion' for the Asset Management Strategy. We have published service standards for customer care for all our services and carry out satisfaction surveys once works are complete. These are monitored using Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) which show that 97% of tenants are satisfied or very satisfied with improvement work, 84.7% with repair work and 98.9% with gas servicing work (Q1 2008/09). Repairs can be reported by a wide variety of methods including internet ordering and text. We improved in March 2007 our diagnostic software by upgrading to KeyFax in order to ensure we order the right repair as often as possible. All appointments are confirmed by letter except same/next day repairs and we monitor satisfaction on all completed repair jobs by postal survey. We learn from complaints and have taken action to improve services including ensuring our Call Centre clearly flags leaseholder properties, moving specialist work into our appointment system and changing specifications for DHP plus work.</p> <p><b>Equality and Diversity</b> data is used to analyse the results of our customer satisfaction surveys and KPIs. Equality Impact Assessments have been completed on the Responsive Repairs and the Home Improvement Service involving representatives from our partner contractors and the BME and Disabled Forums. Following this, an <a href="#">Equality and Diversity Impact Assessment Action Plan</a> for Home Improvements was produced which is reviewed for progress, every two weeks. All our main contractors have carried out Diversity Training with their staff. Our contractors have calling cards using 10 community languages. We plan to meet and exceed the <b>Decent Homes</b> Standard. NH's website has a facility for searching by address to find out what work is planned and when. <b>A DVD on home improvements</b> is given to all residents prior to work commencing. We are currently <a href="#">ahead of target</a> in delivering the Home Improvements Programme, by spend and number of homes made decent. CLG set back some of our ALMO funding into 2011/12 as part of the reprofiling exercise. However we are still confident that we can <a href="#">achieve Decent Homes Plus</a> by December 2010 through careful targeting of resources.</p> <p>We have <a href="#">procedures to offer private owner occupiers</a> the same internal and external improvement work carried out to their homes as tenanted properties, including internal work to leasehold properties. We provide details of discounts and loans available for energy efficiency measures, and energy saving tips. The Council provide assistance to owner occupiers through Property Essential Renovation Loans so they can benefit from major external insulation works that we are carrying out to our Corrolite non traditional properties. Leaseholders are consulted on external improvement work in accordance with legislation, and we reclaim the cost of the work from the leaseholders <a href="#">'sinking fund'</a>. The new Leaseholder Handbook explains to leaseholders what they</p>	

can expect.

All our communal TV aerials have been upgraded to **digital**, and information is published on our web site advising residents of what they need to do before the switch in Winter 2009. We have applied for a [Digital Accreditation Award](#) with Digital UK for our efforts in preparing for the change.

NH has updated and revised the original **Asset Management Strategy and Action Plan**. It is updated it on an annual basis. Quarterly meetings are held to [review the Action Plan](#) and discuss key areas such as difficult to let properties and long term voids. We have developed an option appraisal methodology.

Our **stock condition survey** in 2007, based on a 20% representative sample, has been cloned to cover all stock. The data is verified by surveyors as properties become void and updated with relevant repairs data. The survey provides an up to date assessment of decent homes compliance, including the Housing Health and Safety Rating System. A new asset management system, Promaster, has been bought to manage all the stock condition data and play a key role in the business and operational planning of the organisation. We have created a new post - Strategic Asset Manager – to develop the Asset Management Strategy. The stock condition survey included a 'Type 1' **asbestos** survey to identify asbestos risk in surveyed properties, which has also been cloned to cover all stock. More detailed 'Type 2' asbestos surveys, which involved sampling and analysis of suspect materials, were undertaken of the communal areas of our housing stock. This information has informed all contractors of the asbestos risk present, prior to carrying out any home improvement or responsive repair work. Asbestos information is included on [work order forms](#) for repairs operatives. As well as the general information issued to all tenants, specific property information is communicated to our own employees, tenants of Northwards and the emergency services; thus discharging our duty under the Control of Asbestos Regulations. ([Asbestos Management Plan updated Sept '08](#)).

The stock condition survey collected **fire risk information** for our communal areas and prepared detailed fire risk assessments and a Fire Action Plan to address such risks. We are implementing this plan and keeping the fire service fully informed of our progress, which fulfils our responsibilities imposed by the introduction of the Fire (Regulatory Reform) Order 2007. We have a trained surveyor who [manages any fire risk](#) and is now our competent source of advice.

It is intended to carry out a further stock condition survey in 2010/11 following completion of the Decent Homes programme. Together with the Neighbourhood Sustainability Indicators. This will inform our post 2010 investment plan.

We are working with our contractor partners to develop a robust procedure for 'site **waste** management plans' to be produced for relevant construction activity, so as to comply with the new construction waste legislation. Much has been completed in advance of the legislation. Valuable progress has been made in material procurement, waste segregation, recycling and shared [site waste management](#) facilities. Our **repairs service** is the most frequent point of contact with our tenants. The annual Customer Satisfaction Survey told us that 75% of tenants were satisfied with the repairs service which is top quartile performance, with higher satisfaction for those tenants who have had a recent repair. **Repairs performance** has been at best static since the last Inspection. However, the change to Manchester Working Limited (MWL) was well managed with no loss of service. Since then, there have been major changes in ICT systems both at NHL and MWL. There have been a number of other issues over the last

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year and we are now in a position where we can drive ahead with performance improvement. Almost all our responsive repair operatives have a multiskill capacity. A number are fully multiskilled and can carry out a variety of work. All operatives have the right to vary a job to ensure completion or carry out additional work at the tenants request up to an agreed limit.

Caretakers in **multi storey blocks** and Scheme Managers in **retirement housing** daily inspect the condition of communal areas. There is a detailed recording of this inspection on a monthly basis, which includes resident involvement. Work is checked on a weekly basis by our Caretaking Manager and Retirement Housing Manager. Tenant Inspectors also check on our communal areas. Our published **void** standard has been revised in consultation with residents and use tenant inspectors to monitor performance against these standards. We are proud of the continued reductions in void numbers, void rent loss and void turnaround times. Void repairs were included in the void process review which led to- establishment of a dedicated void team now co-located with the contractors void team; new set of criteria for classifying void properties to speed up turnaround; achieving far greater consistency in turning around properties to time and standard; and recruiting a joint void manager with MWL. There is more to do, but considerable progress has been made.

**Gas Servicing** remains an area of strength. We have consistently high rates of servicing within 12 months. We have an effective No Access Procedure, no cases have gone for more than 4 months beyond expiry. We improved VFM through a move from 10 to 11 month cycle, improved service through co-location of NH and MWL staff, a new escalation procedure and consistent customer satisfaction monitoring. There are [very high rates of satisfaction](#).

Our gas service contractor carries out Fire Risk Assessments on behalf of the Fire and Rescue Service at the time of gas service. The [innovative scheme](#) promotes safety and we will monitor for reductions in fire cost. It has been recognised as leading the field by GM fire and Rescue Service.

**Adaptations** are a retained function of the Council. However, we work closely with the Manchester Equipment and Adaptations Team (MEAP). We have a [procedure](#) to ensure that, wherever possible, adaptations are carried out by our partner contractors when decent homes works are being carried out. This means that waiting times are reduced, disruption is minimised, the lives of vulnerable residents are improved - some of whom may not have otherwise accessed the service - and better value for money is achieved. Nearly all equipment is recycled, and stairlifts (or parts) where possible. Our protocol with MEAP monitors how well adaptations are being delivered for our tenants. One of our Home Improvement Co-ordinators is dedicated to this area of work.

In August 2006 a Framework Contract was signed with **Manchester Working Limited (MWL)** which links all Responsive Repairs and Servicing plus home improvements within 2 of the 3 Local Area Panels (Fourways and Wilton) under a Partnering Contract. MWL is a Joint Venture Company owned by Morrisons Facilities Services Ltd (80%) and MCC (20%). The Decent Homes Work within the Riverways Area Panel is delivered by three partner contractors under a Framework Agreement signed in January 2007. This will be reduced to one from 2009/10 as the Riverways programme reduces, in order to achieve better VFM. Both procurements were modern shared procurements, based on partnering, using Public Sector Partnering Contracts and assessed on a 60:40 quality price split. Both include community and legacy benefits. Residents from one retirement scheme helped our staff, and an Impact Contractor designed a show garden which won two RHS prizes at the Tatton Park which are now placed at

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various retirement schemes.

**IMPACT Manchester** is a client led consortium of housing clients using the Framework Agreement to share best practice and ensure continuous improvement in service delivery. This also includes MWL. A number of task groups meet regularly to promote Performance Management, Community Benefit, Value Engineering, and Customer Care. Progress is monitored using KPI's. A review of IMPACT has been carried out by independent consultants and a [Business Plan](#) has been produced which will be implemented with the help of an efficiency grant bid from the National Change Agency. An open book approach to accounting is used with both Frameworks, with a pain/gain share mechanism. We appointed auditors in April 2008 to carry out [independent financial systems audits](#) of our partner contractors. **Repairs and Servicing** are carried out using a Schedule of Rates.

NH's Home Improvement Service is co-located with our partner contractors which has resulted in [more efficient and cost effective](#) working practices. It has geographical focus aligned along Area Panel boundaries in order to facilitate better relationships with tenant representatives and Councillors. Through the Value Engineering and Procurement task groups [significant cost savings](#) have been achieved without compromising on quality, through product selection, improved management of the supply chain, bulk purchase etc. We are now in the process of benchmarking our costs with those of other organisations. We have standard briefs and specifications and we continually review them to maximise value for money and customer care. For example wherever possible we now do a rewire upgrade rather than a full rewire, and by changing the supplier of decorating vouchers in conjunction with our tenants we have improved the service and made 40% cost saving.

We have accessed other funds whilst implementing the **Energy** Action Plan and various improvements are being delivered through the Home Improvements Programme. We have a partnership with British Gas who part fund our cavity wall and loft insulation programme, and have secured 50% grant funding from the Low Carbon Building programme for the installation of photovoltaic panels on 10 multi storey blocks and 2 blocks of maisonette/walk up flats. Further schemes are being developed to take advantage of [renewable energy technologies](#), including the installation of solar panels to our sheltered housing blocks.

We have begun a trial of **fixed cost repairs and servicing** to a group of 5 multi storey flats. The scheme will cost no more than last year, includes an annual visit for each tenant from a multi skill operative and there is an agreed means of sharing efficiencies based on open book accounting.

**Efficiencies** delivered include a number of materials priced to take advantage of efficiencies delivered through Impact Manchester (see VfM section). Post Inspections had fallen behind recommended levels so reorganised our service to have two surveyors dedicated to post inspection. Our auditors gave the green light to [these new arrangements](#). Pre Inspections are targeted at high cost and renewal requests. We have very recently reviewed the criteria for generating pre inspections and have changed the procedure and moved some inspections to an operative job order. Although no longer a major indicator, on planned: responsive repairs, we improved by 5% the ratio of planned spend since the last Inspection and our planned budget for 2009/10 increases that by a further 5%.

**Areas for Further Progress:** examining further **partnering efficiencies** and service improvements with our partner contractors; further develop our Promaster **asset management system** including the use of hand held technology; further develop the

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**Energy Action Plan;** develop an **Investment Appraisal Framework** including engagement of tenants for post 2010 and drive forward **Repairs Performance**.

### HOUSING INCOME MANAGEMENT

**LEAD OFFICER: ALISON FOSTER**

This service operates within our [Rent Policy and Procedures](#) and our [Financial Inclusion Strategy](#). NH is also signed up to the MCC [Corporate Debt Policy](#) which assists tenants with multiple debts repay these at manageable and sustainable levels. NH provides a wide range of **payment options** including the NH website, Pay Point (Post Offices and numerous shops) and a dedicated automated Telebanking line. We still offer cashiering services at our local offices as this provides a service to MCC for collection of other debts. In the same way, tenants can pay their rent at the Town Hall in the city centre. Direct Debit is in the process of being rolled out with over 300 tenants already having expressed an interest to pay in this way.

The Rents Team who provide the service have a **dedicated rents number** for tenants to call for payment or rent account enquiries. **Surgeries** are held at local offices, at regular times, and local staff are available to deal with issues and provide related advice or put the tenants in touch with other members of the team. Telephone contact and home visits are being increasingly used for arrears recovery processes. Surgeries were extended this year to a local **Sure Start** centre.

The rent setting process is carried out by MCC, in line with Government guidelines and communicated to tenants. Rent statements are now being sent out quarterly, but are also available at any time via [the website](#). With the introduction of internet kiosks at local offices, as well as free access through local public libraries, this service is now accessible to a wider range of tenants. Much of the information already available is brought together in the [Helping You to Pay](#) booklet.

On **arrears recovery**, processes have been reorganised and made more efficient with a focus on rent collection through "Operation Col – Collaborate and Collect". This initiative has engaged the whole organisation and partners in playing their part to help collect rent. Liaison with the court is monitored closely under an [SLA](#) and the time taken to get a court date is between 14 and 21 days. A recent piece of partnership working with the North Manchester Law Centre has seen training being offered on pre-court protocols. From April to September the number of evictions was as low as 8, with possession seen as the last resort.

The performance management of rent recovery is improving and, since the move to patch working, there are clear individual and team targets. **Performance** has not been where we would like it to be and was affected by the introduction of a new computer system and lack of regular reports. This is shown in published performance information, but there is now a real drive towards high performance. The [latest figures](#) for recovery (99.2%) show the effect of the changes that have been put in place.

We continually take steps to foster a culture of payment among our tenants including a regular [Christmas campaign](#) and articles in the tenants newsletter. NH has an excellent working relationship with MCC's **Revenue and Benefits Unit (RBU)** in order to maximise Housing Benefit for its tenants. NH and RBU meet on a [monthly basis](#) and RBU also hold surgeries for NH tenants in a number of libraries to impart benefits advice. NH and RBU have produced a [Protocol](#) to ensure their good working relationship continues. The team go out on the Benefits Bus in conjunction with RBU when it is in North Manchester and took part in the North Manchester FM radio shows. With almost 70% of NH tenants reliant on some form of benefit, the [online Rents and Benefits Calculator](#) is a valuable tool, in ensuring NH tenants are accessing all the benefits to which they are entitled. We have also

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carried out a series of drop in sessions at Retirement Schemes to promote benefits and have a programme of visiting each scheme in relation to the changing benefit rules from 1<sup>st</sup> October.

The Rents Team includes two dedicated **Money Advisors**, members of the Manchester Advice Group and Institute of Money Advisors, who are there to provide valuable debt and welfare benefits advice to a wide range of tenants. The service is promoted through the [website](#) and in local offices, as well as through the Manchester Wide **Financial Inclusion Forum** of which NH is a key member. This group shares best practice and initiatives with RSLs from across the City, as well as Manchester Advice, the Citizens Advice Bureau and DWP. NH has also been working closely with the **Manchester Credit Union**, to assist tenants in accessing affordable credit, as well as encouraging them to save. NH currently offers this service at its Cheetham Hill local office, but is looking to roll this out to other offices in the future.

NH has done significant work in the area of **Financial Inclusion**, but we are looking for the next service that we might reasonably provide. The [Financial Inclusion Strategy](#) helps to shape our approach and has driven the agenda forward. In February 2008 NH took over managing the **Manchester Tenants Insurance Scheme** on behalf of MCC and other RSLs. NH is looking to provide [Financial Literacy Training](#) targeted at single males, single parents, families and the elderly. The training will ensure NH's tenants have a better understanding of basic budgeting, and how to manage finance more effectively. This follows on from team training in Financial Inclusion, raising awareness within the organisation of some of the issues faced by our tenants. As part of all of this focus, NH organised a **Financial Inclusion Conference** on behalf of the Northern ALMO Group with speakers from DWP and CIH.

**Areas for Further Progress: continue to improve performance to improve rent collection our benchmark position and build the results of the tenant profile into all the rent reports.**

### RESIDENT INVOLVEMENT

LEAD OFFICER: CLAIRE TYRELL

NH's values say "Tenants are the heart of everything we do. We involve tenants in our decision making, consult and listen to them to develop and improve services". We therefore have a strong commitment to resident involvement throughout the organisation. We work to ensure that our resident involvement activity complements the City's [Community Engagement Strategy](#) and key [LAA](#) priorities. We have a team of 3 **Resident Involvement Officers** (RIOs), whom we have based at our 3 local offices in order to be accessible to tenants and be an integral part of local teams. We use a variety of ways to publicise the methods which people can choose to engage with us. Our [Resident Involvement Agreement](#) was updated by a panel of residents in 2008 and will be reviewed in early 2009. Good quality, accessible information about resident involvement is on our [website](#) and in our [Tenant Handbook](#). We have reviewed and improved information for residents. Our quarterly Tenant Newsletter, "[Northwards Natter](#)" is issued to all tenants and leaseholders. It provides information on the ways tenants can get involved, articles on community engagement and news and information about events. We also produce a monthly newsletter, [Revolve](#), issued to all **Tenant and Resident Groups** (TRGs) and **Area Panel** members, giving updates on resident involvement and keeping in touch. We have 30 TRGs, supported by our RIOs and a dedicated budget of £41k to provide training, and support community facilities. We have reviewed the way that TRGs are funded to make this fairer and simpler. NH created a

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[Community Sponsorship Fund](#), where residents can apply for grants up to £500 for community activities or events. The RIOs provide training to TRGs, with the [Resident Involvement Forum](#) having input into the content of the training and approving each course. Staff at the 3 local offices work closely with the RIOs and enjoy good relationships with the TRGs, attending meetings, organising [Estate Walkabouts](#) and contributing to other **community events** such as our hugely successful [It's a Northwards Knockout](#). NH is committed to going beyond established mechanisms to develop ways in which residents can get involved. We are keen to improve engagement with under-represented groups and we have a number of [Resident Forums](#) to help us achieve us. The Forums include a **BME Forum**, which assists us in increasing involvement from the BME community. We also work closely with **faith groups**, particularly in the Cheetham area, to forge links with the BME population. Work has taken place to encourage involvement from areas lacking representation. As a result, we have created new TRGs in areas where take up of engagement has been traditionally poor. This has included using innovative methods such as our ["Tea Mobile"](#) mobile living room. We are putting resources into **youth activities** in order to engage with young people and gain their views on their neighbourhoods. We have recently launched our own [Facebook](#) page to attract more young people. Our [Tenant Inspectors](#) provide valuable feedback on our services. We now have a **resident involvement database**, which stores details of all our involved residents, TRGs, local groups and other useful contacts. We are using **Customer Profiling** data to help us understand who our customers are and target resources effectively. We enjoy excellent relationships with the two [Tenant Management Organisations](#) in the NH area, one of which has only recently taken over responsibility for managing their estate. We have established a Complaints Panel, with tenant involvement, helping to make sure we learn from complaints to improve services. Our [3 Area Panels](#) help shape, improve and monitoring services. They are also responsible for prioritising our programme of spending on **local environmental improvements**. This programme has had a real impact not only in terms of the physical environment, but also in terms of community engagement and empowerment. It has also involved the panels themselves in making sometimes difficult decisions about prioritisation of resources; and this has been beneficial to their development. NH enjoys a positive working relationship with Manchester Residents Association (MRA), the umbrella group representing tenants and residents across the city. This includes participating in MRA events; sharing ideas and exchange information about resident involvement in different areas of the city.

[Performance \(see page 30 of attached report\)](#) against our communication and participation PIs has improved, and we have set challenging targets to improve even further. We have also adopted a PI for **Community Cohesion**, and many of our resident involvement activities - for example our hugely successful [International Food and Dance Festival](#) in May 2008 - are intended to promote cohesion.

**Areas for Further Progress:** examine the role of TRG **community facilities**, to ensure they are an effective community resource and give VFM; continue to increase involvement of **under-represented groups**; continue to develop work around **Community Cohesion** and continue to support the **TMOs** and help them to develop their capacity.

**TENANCY AND ESTATE MANAGEMENT**

**LEAD OFFICER: JULIE WILSON**

Services are delivered from 3 fully accessible **local Housing Offices**, [opening times](#) of which have been reviewed with tenants

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as part of our [Access to Services Review](#). Customers access services in a variety of ways: by calling at one of the offices, by email, on line using one of a range of internet forms, or by phone using our On Call contact centre. Although satisfaction levels with the On Call service are generally high, we have undertaken a [fundamental review](#). **Environment Officers** (EOs) have a high profile presence on estates and work with local people to ensure that their neighbourhoods are pleasant, safe and attractive places in which to live. This includes: making sure gardens are kept tidy; monitoring standards of grounds maintenance and dealing with other "street scene" issues such as fly tipping and graffiti; making sure void and concessionary gardening is effectively managed; and dealing with fencing issues. They also carry out [estate walkabouts](#) with local residents; lead and take part in local [clean ups](#) and similar initiatives; and support the development and implementation of the environmental improvement programme decided upon by the **Area Panels**. They also work alongside colleagues in the social enterprise sector and the probation service to involve workless residents and offenders in undertaking environmental work programmes. [Service standards](#) are set out on the website and in the Tenant Handbook. We have made a number of significant [changes to the way estate services are delivered](#). We have also introduced more systematic measurement of **customer satisfaction** with estate services; and have seen significant [increases in satisfaction](#) across all aspects of estate environment.

NH plays a leading role in **partnership working on ASB and crime**; going well beyond day to day enforcement action by being a key player in a range of multi-agency structures within the framework of the [Manchester Crime and Disorder Reduction Partnership](#). This includes fortnightly Local Tasking Meetings (LTMs); Neighbourhood Partnership Meetings involving local residents; and Area Casework Panels which coordinate multi-agency interventions with the most challenging families. NH is also a key contributor to neighbourhood focused multi-agency initiatives such as [Respect Action Weeks](#). All this is overseen and performance-managed by the North Manchester Partnership Business Group (PBG) to which NH is a key contributor. NH staff enjoy close working relationships with **Greater Manchester Police** (GMP) at all levels; and also work closely with **MCC's Crime and Disorder Team** in helping to shape and develop partnership working in North Manchester and across the city. Northwards is represented on the city wide **Safer Neighbourhoods Board** which oversees the further development of Neighbourhood Policing approaches in the city; as well as [the Respect and Community Cohesion Workstream of the Strategic Housing Partnership](#) which brings together housing providers from across the city at a senior level to develop approaches to ASB, crime and community cohesion and to share good practice. We have reviewed our services against the [Respect Standard for Housing Management](#), and are implementing further improvements identified by residents. We have implemented a new ASB case management IT system; alongside systematic measurement of **customer satisfaction** including [ASB complainant surveys](#).

Our [Neighbourhood Wardens](#) play a key role in helping to tackle ASB and crime; not least in terms of their work with young people. They tackle environmental issues such as fly tipping and dog fouling, including issuing Fixed Penalty Notices for these. They also contribute in a variety of ways to community engagement and cohesion, for example by working with a range of community groups and residents from BME communities. We have undertaken a major [review of the service](#); as a result of which we are currently reconfiguring the service to cover the whole area managed by NH by early 2009. We expect this to lead to significant further benefits for NH customers as the service is reconfigured in consultation with local residents to better reflect the

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needs of the communities we serve.

We also work to **reward and incentivise good behaviour**: for example through our [Northwards Xtra](#) Tenant Incentive Scheme, annual NorthAwards competition and [Gardening Competition](#).

Residents consistently say that tackling ASB and crime is a key priority. It has and will continue to be a major focus of our work.

This has been helped by the creation of a specialist rehousing team; meaning that our **Neighbourhood Services Officers** in particular have been able to focus more effectively on tackling ASB and crime. The considerable efforts put in have been reflected in positive customer satisfaction ratings and reductions in crime and ASB. We are clear however that there is still a great deal to do and we will continue to seek further improvements within the context of the [Manchester Crime Reduction Strategy 2008-11](#)

A team of **Caretakers** provide block cleaning and other services to tenants of multi-storey blocks, as well as a mobile Estate Care Service currently being piloted in the Riverways area. Bringing Caretakers and Retirement Scheme Managers together into a single service unit has led to better joint working between the two groups. Along with more flexible working this has helped us to improve services to residents, as well as delivering efficiencies. A new service standard has been developed in consultation with residents; and staff are being trained to NVQ 2 Level in Cleaning and Support Services. Systematic monitoring of **customer satisfaction** has been introduced; and the [High Rise Living Forum](#) is helping residents have a real input into shaping and developing services and monitoring standards.

Staff continue to work with a strong **neighbourhood focus** within the context of [Ward Coordination](#). 2 NH managers are Ward Coordinators, and Ward-based data and intelligence informs our work across the whole service. NH is represented on the Neighbourhood Management Workstream of the SHP which brings together housing providers from across the city to look at ways of making services even more joined up at a local level. Local housing staff also work alongside the Resident Involvement Officers (RIOs) on a range of **community engagement** activities including [community events](#).

We have reviewed key policies and procedures including on **Hate Incidents, Domestic Abuse** and **Safeguarding Children**; and we have placed greater emphasis on working to [prevent homelessness](#).

**Customer satisfaction** is now measured much more systematically. Our [performance management](#) framework has been revised to reflect this and to bring our own measures of performance more into line with those adopted for instance by the CDRP and within the Manchester Local Area Agreement (LAA). We will continue to set challenging targets and improve satisfaction.

**Areas for further progress**: further develop partnership working and community engagement on **ASB/crime**; complete the reconfiguration of the **Neighbourhood Wardens** service by early 2009; continue improvements being made in relation to **estate services**; continue to improve **voids** performance and continue to improve services to **multi-storey tenants** in conjunction with the High-Rise Living Forum.

### ALLOCATIONS AND LETTINGS

LEAD OFFICER: ANNE DUFIELD

NH let 269 properties from April – June 2008: 25% of lettings were to transfer applicants. 82% of all lets (96% of eligible lets) were made via [Homefinder](#) (the city wide **Choice Based Lettings** scheme). Demand for the NH area is strong. From April –

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June 2008, 689 rehousing registrations were carried out. At 30th June 2008 there were 2755 active applicants awaiting rehousing. NH is part of the [Manchester Housing Register \(MHR\)](#), a common register involving NH, 23 RSL partners and MCC. The MHR had 20232 active applicants in total at the end of June 2008. There is a requirement for applicants to re-register every 6 months; this keeps the register fresh. The MHR provides valuable services to partners such as persons from abroad checks and serious offender panels (to which NH contributes). This ensures that all applicants have all the necessary checks carried out and new tenants can be rehoused with compliance tenancy conditions where appropriate. NH has a SLA with MCC for operating the MHR and CBL. Both SLAs have recently been reviewed with MCC.

[MCC Allocations Policy](#) has a number of priority categories including [Community Connection](#). Comprehensive information is available for applicants explaining how rehousing works; and there are a variety of ways to register (by post, interview, on-line and home visit for transfer applicants). NH has for 2 years had a specialist **Rehousing Team**. This has brought significant benefits for the customer. Team members have dedicated roles of either registering and assessing applicants or offering properties, which helps to give greater focus, accuracy and consistency. An Allocation Policy review took place in 2007 and a number of changes were made to ensure that the policy was more reflective of higher levels of demand now being experienced and to reflect customer feedback. NH was a key partner in this review.

The number of **empty homes** as at 31st August 2008 was 163; 1.3% of total stock. Of these, 122 (0.97%) were undergoing minor works and available for re-letting and 54 (0.33%) were undergoing capital works or being used for decant. In 2007, NH carried out [a fundamental review](#) of the whole void process and a number of changes have been implemented as a result. This has led to significant improvements in all performance indicators measuring void performance, including average re-let times, actual void numbers and rent loss. Changes to processes included a revised [4 week notice procedure](#), introducing [move out visits](#), revised void work bandings, a revised [empty homes standard](#) agreed with tenants, reorganised and co-located teams, and improved performance monitoring arrangements. We now carry out **accompanied viewings** on every property, and updated procedure for **post let visits** has been introduced, enhancing the service to the customer at the start of their tenancy. A revised sign up procedure has also been implemented, with an accompanying DVD to be introduced in October. CORE information is collected at sign up, which gives us valuable information about who we are rehousing. Information on working households, as well as lets to BME applicants, are regularly monitored using this information adding to a fuller understanding of our neighbourhoods. NH also monitors [customer satisfaction](#) with the allocations and lettings process. We have an 87% satisfaction rate with the services. NH has 2 SP funded resettlement workers who work with vulnerable new tenants. [Exit surveys](#) have also been introduced so as to understand more about why tenants are leaving and where they are going to.

Changes made have led to significant improvements: a 60% decrease in voids, an estimated £350K saving in [rent loss](#) for 2008/09 and a 30 day reduction in [relet times](#). The benefit for the customer has been significant, with applicants moving more quickly and smoother processes enhancing the customer experience. Average relet time for April – August 2008 was 48 days (a 30 day improvement on the same period 2 years ago) with the monthly relet figure for August 2008 being 38 days. Whilst recognising that this is still lower quartile performance against other ALMOs, it nevertheless represents a very significant

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improvement. Rent loss has moved from lower to medium quartile in the last 12 months with a 2008/09 Quarter 1 outturn of 1.7% and an August 2008 outturn of 1.4%. We have set challenging stepped targets to reach top quartile performance. Void turnaround time is projected to decrease to 26 days by March 2010; with void rent loss projected to reduce to 1.35% for 2009/10.

NH is working closely with MCC and other partners in the continuing development of CBL using a Housing Opportunities based approach. We are key partners with representation at both practitioner and project board level.

**Turnover** has fallen over the past 4 years. As more people want to access social housing to meet their housing need, managing of applicants' expectations is vital as is ensuring other housing options are available and promoted. This includes links with Manchester Advice, the Rent Deposit Scheme and Private Sector Housing to ensure that applicants are aware of all housing options available to them so they can make an informed choice. NH is a member of [Homeswapper](#) and has registered over 100 tenants in the first 8 months of membership. This gives another housing option to existing tenants; and is actively promoted by rehousing officers. MCC is also a key partner in the Manchester City Region Sub Regional CBL scheme; we are currently actively working towards ensuring that this choice is available for our applicants. MCC is a CLG overcrowding pathfinder and NH is a key partner in this.

We have worked proactively to involve residents in shaping and improving services: not only through the Area Panels but also by setting up an **Allocations Forum** which will help tenants to gain a better understanding of local rehousing in a wider context. The Forum will monitor the work of the rehousing team and service improvements, while acting as a consultation group for wider service changes. Discussions to date included patterns of supply and demand in North Manchester and the marketing of our Retirement Housing stock.

NH has carried out a series of information and prospects sessions for partners since June 2008. This has been to officers within MCC and voluntary agencies to give a consistent message about the current climate of supply and demand in North Manchester, along with up to date information about allocations policy changes. 5 sessions have been carried out reaching over 60 officers and agencies working with people wanting to be rehoused. A [Rehousing Information Day](#) took place in July 2008 for the Cheetham Hill area and was attended by more than 80 applicants. Advice was given about priority, prospects and mutual exchanges. This is one of our most diverse areas and the use of translation services on the day helped many people receive up to date advice. We have learnt from this and have begun to roll out further events in other areas.

**Areas for Further Progress:** to continue to improve **voids performance**; to ensure that NH is represented on and influences the **CBL and other city wide improvement projects** to ensure that services meet the needs of tenants and potential customers; to further develop the work of the **Allocations Forum** and to continue to develop the quality of **housing options advice** given to customers.

### HOMELESSNESS AND HOUSING NEEDS

**LEAD OFFICER: MIKE STEVENS**

Whilst this function has not been delegated, NH sees this as a priority and contributes in a number of ways to make sure that early and effective interventions stop a problem becoming a homelessness crisis. The **homelessness prevention** agenda is now a high priority within the city, and we are continuously developing services which fit within this. A number of key activities

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ensure that we contribute to this agenda:

- Developing the [Domestic Abuse Policy and Procedures](#) including the sanctuary scheme and decant procedure for avoiding temporary accommodation where possible, in partnership with other landlords in the city.
- Introducing dedicated **money and benefits advisors** who have dealt with over £750,000 of personal debt.
- Working with a full range of **support agencies** to help sustain tenancies and prevent homelessness including [Housing Support Services](#), [Tenancy Support Plus](#) and [Foundations](#).
- Early intervention to deal with **ASB** cases which includes working with [Mediation](#) and Area Casework Panels along with Tenancy Support Plus and Foundations.
- Employing specialist **resettlement workers** so that vulnerable applicants have support in the early stages of their tenancy.
- Ensuring that a range of **housing options** are promoted to rehousing applicants so that they can make an informed choice about securing a settled home.
- Providing up to 60 homes for use as **temporary accommodation** for homeless families.

NH is a key partner for MCC and has attended sessions with RSLs and MCC to share best practice and take forward the new [homelessness strategy and delivery plan](#).

**Areas for Further Progress:** to continue to develop and promote services and partnerships to address **domestic abuse**; to continue to work with MCC to further develop the homelessness **prevention** agenda within Northwards and to ensure that NH is represented on and influences the CBL, overcrowding and other **city wide improvement projects**.

<b>SUPPORTED HOUSING (including SUPPORTED PEOPLE)</b>	<b>LEAD OFFICER: MIKE STEVENS/PAT SCAPPATICI</b>
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NH operates 11 **Retirement Housing Schemes**, offering people over 60 a safe, secure and comfortable home with tailored support and advice to ensure that residents maximise their health, well-being and independence. There are **546 units** with an on site Scheme Manager service in a variety of property types, including high-rise apartments, bungalows and traditional schemes with community facilities. All units are fully self-contained and have at least one bedroom; there are no bedsits or shared bathrooms. Schemes have attractive communal gardens with on site parking and all are DDA compliant. We also offer a **Visiting Scheme Manager** Service which currently provides visiting support to **134** residents outside Retirement Schemes proper. We offer a range of retirement housing. Victoria Square, the first social housing in Manchester, was built in 1896 and comprises 162 units. The smallest scheme, for thirty residents, was built in 1975. All schemes have received or are programmed for improvement works, including extensive work to communal areas, with new lighting, decorating, scooter stores and extended community kitchens. Homes will be refurbished to a high standard to include extended kitchens, new fires, heating systems, lighting and complete redecorating. Some flats will be remodelled to provide more space and make them more attractive. Schemes are generally well located with easy access to transport, shopping, leisure, parks, libraries and medical centres. Strong partnerships with MCC Adult Social Care, Hospital Discharge Teams, and other health professionals, has seen an increase in the take-up of homes by older and sometimes vulnerable people.

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As part of our strategy to modernise the service, we have rebranded the schemes as retirement rather than sheltered housing. We have also developed the role of the Scheme Manager; and a number of Scheme Managers have gained the **National Certificate of Professional Practice in Supported and Sheltered Housing**. In 2007, a number of schemes were assessed at Level B in 6 out of 8 objectives in the **Supporting People Quality Assessment Framework (QAF)** NH staff have carried out a number of briefings to other providers on how to achieve Level B. NH provides a **relief scheme manager service** to three local housing companies. This demonstrates our commitment to partnership working and providing quality services, whilst at the same time generating extra income. In conjunction with colleagues at North Manchester General Hospital, we have set up a **hospital discharge flat**. This helps older people stay near to home whilst their longer term housing needs are resolved. It also generates extra income for NH. We were also successful in securing through **Valuing Older People** a **Community Health Trainer** to work specifically with retirement housing residents. The Health Trainer is funded through the PCT. He has worked with **86** individual residents and a number of resident groups, to provide advice on health and well-being and to organise events and activities aimed at promoting healthy living ([case study attached](#)). We promote a wide range of health and well-being services to residents through **needs assessment and support planning**, including:

- Referrals to **MCC Adult Social Care** for a range of services to promote independence;
- **Sensory Services** have provided portable loop systems for 1:1 meetings with residents, which are very effective Scheme Managers work closely with the PCT **Active Case Management Service** to help residents with long term health conditions manage their condition effectively and prevent frequent hospital admissions;
- Referrals to **specialist services** providing support to older people with early onset dementia, alcohol related issues, mental health issues and learning disability;
- Scheme Managers are trained by **Manchester Equipment and Adaptations Partnership (MEAP)** in the assessment of small items of equipment which enables them to order directly for residents providing a prompt and responsive service;
- **MEAP** have held **equipment and assessment road shows** at most of our schemes;

We work closely with our community alarm provider **First Call** to ensure that there is continuity of service 365 days a year.

Bringing the Scheme Managers and Caretakers together into a single service unit has led to better joint working between the two groups; and has helped us to improve services to residents as well as delivering efficiencies reflected in a 7.7% reduction in the support charge since April 2006.

We work strategically with partners to ensure that the future housing needs of older people in North Manchester are fully met. We attend [Valuing Older People \(VOP\)](#) strategy meetings and are also represented at local network meetings. NH also participates in the **SP Provider Inclusive Forum**, the **Sheltered Housing Providers Forum** and also the **Older People's Services Meeting**; thus ensuring that we are strategically aware and continually developing services, as well as sharing best practice. At our most recent **Supporting People Review** we were regarded as "successful and strategically relevant".

Our [Retirement Housing Strategy](#) considers the future needs of the service in the context of demand and demographic change, and the overall supply of supported housing for older people in North Manchester. The strategy has a linked Action Plan which we

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are now implementing.

Working in partnership with MCC we were recently successful in securing £6.75m DoH funding for [Whitebeck Court Extra Care Scheme](#) with properties for rent and also sale/shared ownership. We are also working closely with Greater Places as they start work on an Extra Care scheme in Blackley.

Regular **resident meetings** are held at schemes; and some schemes have very active tenant and resident groups. We also have a well established [Retirement Housing Forum](#) which meets quarterly. We produce a quarterly [Retirement Housing Newsletter](#).

**Staff meetings** are held every six weeks so that we can ensure that best practice is shared and developed. We have benchmarked with **Sitra** for the last three years and used the information to develop our service. NH carried out a [Retirement Housing Survey](#) this year and satisfaction levels were very high. An action plan has been developed to **address** areas where we can improve; and targets have been set to achieve further increases in satisfaction in future.

We work with a range of partner agencies to ensure resident well-being is maximised. This includes ZEST, Ageing Well- Age Concern, and HIPP (Healthy Independent People). These agencies work with residents and scheme managers to organise programmes of events at schemes. NH is a member of EROSH( Emerging Role of Sheltered Housing) and we were cited as an example of good practice in partnership working in their recent Partnership Working Good Practice Guide.

**Intergenerational work** is high on our agenda and we are working with local high schools and <http://www.skillforce.org/> to break down barriers which often exist between generations. ([see attached news article](#))

We have a very successful programme of work with the [Unpaid Work Unit section of the Probation Service](#) whereby volunteers are working with residents to create fabulous communal gardens which have been recently judged in the In Bloom and other garden competitions. Scheme Managers and residents have also been successful in applying for grant funding which has secured funds to [refurbish gardens, hold social events and celebrate a wide range of different themes](#).

NH is confident that we are achieving our aim to provide safe, secure homes for older people, whilst offering tailored packages of advice and support to ensure independence, health and well-being.

**Areas for Further Progress:** implement further improvements to the **physical fabric of schemes** as part of the investment programme; implement the **Retirement Housing Strategy Action Plan** and take forward the Whitebeck Court **Extra Care Scheme**.

### LEASEHOLDER MANAGEMENT, SHARED OWNERSHIP AND RIGHT TO BUY

LEAD OFFICER: ALISON FOSTER

Leasehold Management is an area of considerable progress since the time of the last Inspection. Since 2006 the number of Leaseholders has increased to 250. We have worked hard since the last Inspection to involve leaseholders more in activities,, together with tenants, whilst at the same time recognising that they may have different concerns and priorities. The Right to Buy (RTB) and Leaseholder service is a retained function of the Council within the Management Agreement and it has been agreed that this will remain with MCC at the end of the Housing Investment Options process in Manchester. NH and MCC work to an agreed [protocol](#) to ensure a joined up service to all NH tenants looking to exercise their Right to Buy. Since the last Inspection

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information about [service charge recovery](#) is now provided to NH and since 31<sup>st</sup> March, £171,000 has been recovered including five major works contributions.

NH continues to produce much of the information required in setting service charges so future capital works are correctly estimated at the time of purchase. To this end, a [Leasehold Service Charge Guide](#) for setting charges has been developed with a series of letters, forms and calculation sheets to ensure consistency of approach and accuracy.

NH has also developed, with partners, an approach to offering Capital Improvements to leaseholder and private owner occupiers. A [Good Practice Guide](#) has been developed which assists the Home Improvement Teams in working with and consulting Leaseholders on external works and provides a framework for offering internal works to both Leaseholders and Private Owner occupiers. Work was done in partnership with the Contractors and MCC to set up charging mechanisms and appropriate payment options. On Call have a flag on the system for leaseholders which clearly assists in communicating what repairs leaseholders are entitled to. Feedback from leaseholders remains very important to NH and the primary vehicle for this is the [Leaseholder Forum](#) which ensures that Leaseholders are well informed and consulted. Over the past year the main piece of work was the development of a [Leaseholder Handbook](#) that has brought together elements of the main tenants' handbook that leaseholders felt were important to them, as well as specific information around leaseholder rights and responsibilities. The MRA held a leaseholders conference in July 2008 at which NH gave a presentation on our work and received positive feedback. Leaseholders have the opportunity to play a part in Area Panels and other Forums. One leaseholder serves as a co-opted member of a Sub-Committee, there is a place for a leaseholder on each Area Panel and leaseholders are eligible for nomination to the Board. There is a specific section of the website for leaseholders with links to MCC's website information on rights and responsibilities, as well as the facility to get an online service charge statement.

**Areas for Further Progress:** explore proposals to enable leaseholders to buy into the gas servicing contract and development of an overarching Leasehold Management Strategy coordinating the various pieces of work done or being done.

### ACCESS AND CUSTOMER CARE

**LEAD OFFICER: STEVE FINEGAN**

[Our Values](#) state we will provide service that is top class, "we will provide an excellent and accessible level of service to all of our customers". This is an area where NH has continued to build on its strengths. We have effective mechanisms in place to ensure our service is flexible and tailored to the different and varied needs of all our customers. Since the last Inspection we have carried out an [Access Review](#) and produced our own [Access to Services Strategy](#) in consultation with residents. This sets out our ongoing commitment to access and customer care including our action plan to improve access up to 2010. We have a wider range of opportunities for involvement, no less than 21, as outlined in the [Resident Involvement Agreement](#) (page 9). These documents complement our [Single Equality Scheme](#). Our Customer Insight has progressed significantly since the last Inspection from 14% to 68% (Sept '08) and this is increasing all the time. Tenants have been offered a prize draw incentive to return their [Fair and Equal Access Survey Form](#) which also captures information about a customer's [preferred communication method](#) and any other personal needs they have to ensure they can access the service. This information is available on the main housing management system as well as access to telephone and face to face translation services. As well as a postal

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survey, our customer profiling work has been supplemented with a telephone and door to door survey. Information from the [customer profiling survey](#) has already been used to review targets, refresh the main community languages, and assist with consultation in specific geographical areas. Consultation has been undertaken with [the Access to Services Forum](#) around office opening hours; although there is no appetite amongst tenants to pursue more flexible opening hours at this time. A pilot of [extended opening times](#) one evening per week is, however, currently taking place at one of our busiest offices to assess customer usage. In the meantime, customers have the choice of booking early or late appointments for repairs or gas servicing on Saturday mornings and Wednesday evenings.

Access to services via our website has grown significantly from an average of 8,500 visits per month in 2006 to 18,377 during 2007. The website offers a range of [interactive services](#) (currently 48) including [repair ordering](#) and appointment booking, [rent statements](#) and benefit calculation and payment of rent and other Council bills. Customers can view and bid for properties on line through the [Homefinder](#) choice based lettings service. Tenants ask questions directly of the Board and make suggestions using the “[Ask Northwards](#)” facility; and an address search allows them to access information on [improvement works scheduled for their own home](#), providing contractor details, timetable, etc. The website contains all NH publications from the Tenant Handbook plus useful links to external websites and translated information. NH website is the one of only a few ALMO website to offer the highest level of accessibility, [the triple A WC3 standard](#). This allows for changing the size of text, use of a text reader and provision of pages with clear content in plain language. As well as a range of short [online films](#), the website promotes an [E-Way Service](#) that encourages customers to sign up for [text and email updates and newsletters](#). Access to web services is available free at local libraries and via [web kiosks](#) in the 3 neighbourhood offices. The kiosks are growing in popularity with an average of 450 visitors per month. To maximise accessibility a **DVD version of the tenant handbook** “Northwards Housing – Everything you need to know” will be available in October for all new tenants, and offered to existing customers. This will increase access to services, especially for customers with low literacy levels because we know the local population has a lower than average reading age. The DVD will be available for download via our website and will be fully accessible, with subtitles and signing. Distribution of the DVD was delayed to allow the incorporation of 3 new languages, Portuguese, Albanian and Czech identified as a result of our customer profiling work. In addition, we are about to launch **digital signage** in the reception areas of our neighbourhood offices as another means of enhancing our ability to communicate key information to customers, and customers with learning disabilities, some of whom may respond to more visual images. In August 2008 NH launched its own facebook page on the social networking site to promote engagement with younger people. NH has also produced a handy [Communication Handbook](#) for assist better communication. The [Communication Forum](#) meets regularly where tenants are consulted and provide feedback on a range of communication issues awarding NH its own “Tenant Friendly” logo to publications that are easy to understand and meet the plain language criteria. A survey of the tenants newsletter ‘[Northwards Natter](#)’ was carried out in 2007 with positive feedback.

Customers can [contact us](#) in a range of ways. Most use **NH On Call** which provides a single number point of contact for all housing enquiries. On Call operates 8am-5:30pm Monday to Friday, and also provides the out of hours emergency service

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(same number) 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. Customers can access services in person at one of **3 Neighbourhood Housing Offices** where they also have access to a freephone to contact our call centre. There are close links with local teams, including the facility to book home or office appointments within 5 working days (or 24 hours if urgent). All our offices are DDA compliant - with information clearly displayed. Analysis has been undertaken of customers who rarely access the service to try and identify if there are any barriers and so far none have been identified. A [value for money review of the On Call service](#), which is delivered under a SLA, has been undertaken since last Inspection and proposals have been agreed to transfer the service to our main responsive repairs partner, Manchester Working from April 2009. This will provide an opportunity for a number of performance improvements and efficiency savings. In the meantime, and despite the transitional impact and teething problems of introducing new technology at the call centre, satisfaction with the service remains high with 84% of tenants choosing to contact us by phone and 85% stating they are satisfied that the contact is helpful.

A strong commitment to excellent customer care, accessibility and listening to tenants is present throughout the organisation. [Customer Service standards](#) have been reviewed with customers and updated where required. In March 2008 our [complaints policy and procedure](#) was reviewed and updated to reflect the request from tenants for more personal contact from managers when dealing with complaints. The new policy incorporates a fast track procedure and our [Complaints Forum](#) comprising of tenants, managers and staff from the call centre and our responsive repairs contractor, review the quality of responses to complaints and capture lessons learned which are then fed back to both staff and tenants via local offices or in the tenants newsletter "[Northwards Natter](#)". The annual [customer satisfaction survey](#) evidences positive customer experience, whilst highlighting some areas and opportunities for improvement. In addition, we have undertaken a number of service specific surveys (e.g. retirement housing). In May 2008 the whole service was re-accredited with the Charter Mark for customer service with a reduction from 7 to 4 areas of partial compliance. In addition, we moved from 2 areas of best practice in 2007 to 6 in 2008. The independent acerator specifically commented on NH's communication with customers and the way they witnessed staff dealing with customers, describing NH as "a very listening organisation."

The [Tenant Inspectors](#) are well established and carry out regular inspections resulting in a number of service improvements. Their findings are published and can be downloaded from our website. NH continues to operate a **Mystery Shopper Scheme** and their reports are considered by the Neighbourhood and Quality Services Sub Committee.

Service standards are monitored as part of our Performance Management Framework agreed with the Council and via the Neighbourhood and Quality Services Sub Committee or, if appropriate, one of the other Sub Committees.

**Areas for Further Progress:** application for **Customer Service Excellence** accreditation; implementation of new Call Centre with Manchester Working Ltd and progress of improvement actions within **Access to Services Strategy**.

<b>DIVERSITY</b>	<b>LEAD OFFICER: TARA KELLY</b>
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One of NH's [core values](#) is to "Embrace Equality & Diverse Communities". NH inherited strong policies and practices from MCC, which it has reviewed to ensure that they are appropriate to our business & the needs of NH's tenants & customers. In September 2008, the Board approved a [Single Equality Scheme](#) which sets out NH's commitment to Equality & Diversity showing how it will

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support the City's equality objectives, but more particularly how NH will deliver its legal obligations under the Race, Disability and Gender equality duties. NH took the decision to go beyond our statutory duties and produce a single equality scheme. This ensures that our equality objectives address all 6 "equality strands", and demonstrates that NH takes seriously the needs of all groups in our role as a service provider & an employer.

The HR & Equality Sub-Committee monitors progress with equality and diversity issues by receiving quarterly reports against the **E&D Action Plan**, which is reviewed each year by the Board. The Single Equality Scheme will also be reviewed annually through the Sub Committee. The "[Fairground Group](#)" (formerly E&D Working Group) comprises staff from across NH and meets regularly to discuss how equality is being embedded across the organisation, with group members taking responsibility to ensure the progress of the E&D Action Plan. The group has overseen NH's accreditation as a [Disability Symbol](#), or "Two Ticks", user and a [Stonewall Diversity Champion](#). NH is a member of the [NW Equality and Diversity Network for Housing Practitioners](#), enabling NH to share best practice on equality and diversity matters. NH achieved Level 2 of the [Equality Standard](#) in its own right in May 2007 and is now working towards Level 3 accreditation by October 2008.

In order to give appropriate priority & commitment to E&D, the Board has agreed that Sue Ratchford will act as the **E&D Board Champion**. The Chief Executive is the Officer Champion. A dedicated E&D Officer supports both the Board & Officer Champions. The Board regularly evaluates its composition to ensure that it reflects the communities it serves. The [Board & Sub-Committee report templates](#) makes specific reference to E&D implications so that potential impact of policy & resource decisions are considered.

The Board has received [E&D Awareness Training](#) which is refreshed annually. E&D is one of the core competencies agreed for Board Members as part of an [appraisal scheme](#). All staff receive E&D training through the use of a [Diversity Workbook](#). This Workbook was cited as a positive practice example in the last Inspection. Further E&D training needs are identified after completion of the workbook & through staff appraisals. Equality Impact Assessment training has been delivered to managers, equipping them with the skills and knowledge necessary to identify any possible differential impacts of NH's policies and procedures.

NH is working with MCC, the Police & other agencies to identify & address [Hate Crime](#) and [Domestic Abuse](#) incidents. This builds upon MCC's successful ASB/Nuisance Strategy. NH is engaged with partners to understand threats to **Community Cohesion &** to ensure it acts quickly, effectively and to address cohesion issues.

NH's [Resident Involvement Strategy](#) addresses the needs of diverse communities in North Manchester & actively seeks to involve vulnerable tenants & hard to engage groups. Smart ways of communicating & consulting have been developed within the **Communications Strategy & Access to Services Strategy**. Two [focus groups drawn from BME and Disabled tenants](#) meet regularly to seek their views on service delivery and how NH can engage more effectively with tenants. NH is also establishing an LGBT tenant's forum to understand and address lower satisfaction rates from LGBT tenants. NH has undertaken a **Customer Profiling Exercise** in order to gain more information on individual tenant's diverse needs, and works with its partners to get a better understanding of communities. All these commitments are brought together into NH's [E&D Action Plan](#), which draws on

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the best practice of other ALMOs.

**Areas for Further Progress:** enhance knowledge of individual tenants & diverse communities by building the customer profiling data; achieve **Equality Standard Level 3** in October and ensure the **Learning and Development Strategy** addresses the needs of all employees.

### VALUE FOR MONEY

LEAD OFFICER: STEVE WOOD

Value for Money is one of the seven key objectives for NH and the development of a VfM culture has driven much of the business processes over the past three years. Through the work of delivering the message that our finances are “Our Budget”, corporately and collectively we believe that this is now an area of organisational strength. Key to our approach is the [Value for Money Strategy](#) and our second [Procurement Strategy](#). The latter was changed significantly in response to internal customers and now sits with a summary [Procurement Framework](#), which is an accessible guide to procurement, as well as the detailed [Procurement Guidelines and Rules](#).

A detailed [Financial Plan](#) is used for Budget preparation, future financial planning, [scenarios](#) and unit cost analysis. The model, linked to the [Housemark](#) benchmarking process, allows a full understanding both of the unit cost per unit compared with others (£516 per unit for 2007-08 [draft figure], a reduction of 4.4% compared with 2006-07), as well as forecasting the unit cost figures going forward. NH knows it is one of the **higher cost ALMOs** but is committed effectively to spending the resource available to it. This is done through good financial management, directing resources to tenant-facing services and achieving top quartile performance in back office cost percentages. Financial management remains strong with a clear [Budget Book](#) produced each year by team, monthly budget review meetings between Finance Officers and Budget responsible Managers and regular accounts to [Resource & Audit Sub-Committee](#) (monthly) and the Board (quarterly). The principle of using resources in a focussed way is demonstrated by the [Resource Pool](#), which was established by the Board in early 2007. Surpluses and cashable efficiencies are placed in the fund and are subject to continual bidding from parts of the business for projects and initiatives that will enhance tenant services or improve communities. In 2007, additional expenditure of **£272,000** was approved by the Board following consideration by the Resource Pool Panel, and in September 2008 further bids of **£120,000** were agreed. In addition, £90,000 from the Pool was allocated to the Area Panels (£30,000 for each Panel) at the [“Pot of Gold”](#) event in February 2008, to fund priority areas identified by tenants. The Pool allows a full audit trail to be evidenced between savings and how they are applied. The “Pot of Gold” event built on the work in 2007 with tenants in assessing budget priorities. Through the playing of a [“Resource Game”](#), a series of [priorities](#) were identified for the budget which have changed the focus of some areas of expenditure. Resulting from this work, the Resident Involvement Team has been given additional funding and an extra £150,000 was added to the Environmental budgets to meet tenants’ expectations.

NH continues to prepare an [Annual Efficiency Statement](#) which tracks the cash recurring efficiencies and the delivery of the VfM objective. Against a target of 4.1% (£799,000) real efficiencies of £1.3M (6.4%) were delivered through a major reduction in agency technical people onto fixed-term contracts (£467,000), improvements in rent loss performance (£294,000) and the overall pressure on budgets driven through the Budget discussions and in year reviews (£517,000). The efficiencies and effective

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financial management allowed the main-stream funding of the Neighbourhood Warden Service in the 2008-09 Budget (£800,000) which gives a certainty to the future of this highly valued service to tenants and communities. The commitment to spending on services that make a difference, and through initiatives identified within the Resource Pool, keeps unit costs higher than average but are firmly driven by customer demands and priorities.

A key expenditure area is that of the Service Level Agreements (SLA) that were entered into with MCC on the creation of the ALMO. The initial list of agreements was 34, but six have now been terminated. 11 are now organised as on-demand service agreements where NH can decide how much it wishes to purchase at any time. The remaining 17 form the [current SLA list](#) with a value of £2.8M, a 17% reduction (£579,000) on the 2006 value. Of these major reviews are taking place to terminate four and replace with services either in-house (IT Network or Mobile Cleaning) or with another provider at better value and quality (On-Call and Repairs Chasers). Two others (Manchester Housing Register and Homefinder) are services which are under formal review with MCC and new SLAs will follow that process. The SLA reviews have been matched by work in other areas to ensure the delivery of VfM. A framework of reviews is in place as a continuous log of on-going activity which has seen changes to Translation Services, Printing and Mobile Phones. The latter was moved away from MCC contract onto a new arrangement through Procurement for Housing (PfH). For decorating Vouchers, NH has achieved a higher value service by not procuring through PfH, but by using a local company, Johnstones, offering a similar range of products with delivery but at a 40% saving. The Voids review process brought about a cash efficiency of £294,000.

NH' VfM agenda is led by a [VfM Project Group](#) which meets to explore initiatives and receive ideas on how VfM can be further embedded through the organisation. The Group led a [session](#) in June with all employees to help further communicate the message and to capture further ideas and initiatives with the use of an [Intranet form](#). The group was also pivotal in improving the Procurement Strategy and reviewing the costing model.

As part of the North West ALMO Group, NH is playing a role in developing a new mechanism for procuring services in the future, through [Shared Services](#). The initial proposals are for a Framework Agreement to cover legal services, but it is hoped that the principles can be further developed in time for other service areas; particularly in the back office. In time, the mechanism may also allow NH to sell some of its expertise back to the group. Third party income has played an increasing role (£133,000) in financing services in the past year with the ICT, Health & Safety and Finance teams all now selling services to other landlords, in addition to the continuing work of managing capital programmes on behalf of the Council and Eastlands Homes.

Through IMPACT Manchester and its [Value Engineering Group](#) significant savings and efficiencies have been made in the delivery of the Capital Programme. Real reductions have been made in the cost of boilers (9%), external doors (16%) and windows (19%). In addition, the reprofiling of the Capital Programme has brought about £1M of inflation savings.

The whole VfM framework is underpinned by a performance framework which is summarised in a scorecard (balanced with other objectives) and which reports on tracking weekly costs and efficiency measures as well as VfM risks. Team and action plan items also have a VfM focus. The result is a well embedded and disciplined approach to Value for Money.

Areas for Further Progress: develop further participatory budgeting ideas for tenants; completion of current major SLA reviews

and more work to be developed on the correlation between costs and performance.

**Section 3: Prospects for Improvement**

**Maximum of 4 pages**

In this Section NH describes progress made against the Inspection Report published in January 2007; this Section also sets out NH's capacity to deliver further innovation and improvement.

**Progress Against Previous Inspection Recommendations**

Following the previous Inspection, a detailed action plan, approved by the Board, was drawn up for the Inspection Recommendations and Supplementary Comments. Progress with implementation of this plan is monitored by the relevant Sub-Committee and by the Board. Progress against the Recommendations is summarised below.

**Recommendation 1**

We fully comply with **statutory requirements on asbestos**. Details are within the Stock Condition and Asset Management KLOE section of the Self Assessment Questionnaire.

**Recommendation 2**

We have developed a **robust stock condition database**. Details are within the Stock Condition and Asset Management KLOE section of the Self Assessment Questionnaire. We have linked the stock condition database to repairs system databases in order to pass asbestos information. We extract relevant data from repairs to input into the asset management system and have plans to further improve the interface between the two systems particularly for use of handheld computers.

**Recommendation 3**

Performance on **emergencies** has not improved and we have been working with On Call to resolve this solution. There has been an increase in our **planned:responsive spend** which has increased by 5% and our budget next year increases planned maintenance spend by a further 5% despite a reduction in repairs spending. We record repairs end to end including inspection time work orders and Variations to orders. We can now separately identify rechargeable repairs from other debts.

**Recommendation 4**

Two reviews of our Performance Management Framework were carried out in 2007 and 2008. As a result of which a range of **performance and activity information were broken down by local area**, and the Area Panels receive regular performance updates. The Panels provide feedback which helps drive improvement. We have introduced local PIs for a number of areas of performance, including voids and rent recovery. The Business Improvement Team has been restructured to deliver greater impact on **service improvement**. This included introducing 2 Performance Improvement Officers to work alongside and support teams in identifying and implementing service improvements. We now have a new methodology in place for **evaluating initiatives and their impact on customers**. We have devised detailed **sustainability indicators at neighbourhood level**, and are using these alongside other information, such as Ward-based data. to evaluate our actions and to plan our services.

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We have changed our **budgeting processes to better capture efficiencies**. In both 2007/08 and 2008/09 individual Managers were set budget efficiency targets to contribute to the overall target. We have also used a Projects line in the budget to hold spend for planned initiatives until other efficiencies are being achieved to ensure that proper financial management is exercised.

### **Recommendation 5**

The **Leaseholder Forum** has continued from **strength to strength over the past year with a committed group of leaseholders** helping to shape improvements to the service we provide them. A key part of the work done by the Forum has been the development of a **Leaseholder Handbook** containing service standards and detailed information about our and their responsibilities. In some areas, service standards are the same as those for tenants, but these are developed in conjunction with Area Panels and there is a place on each Panel for a leaseholder.

A Good Practice Guide and a Protocol have been developed around the **procedures for consulting with leaseholders** on external works that affect their homes, as well as allowing both leaseholders and Right-to-Buy owners to benefit from the Capital Programme.

Information is now provided to NH, on request, on the outstanding amount of **leaseholder service charges**. A review of the information and the tracking of the balances shows evidence of debt recovery as well as action for non-payment. The recovery of the charges remains the responsibility of MCC.

### **Recommendation 6**

The **Inspection Action Plan** reports on progress with the substantive recommendations in the first Inspection Report and 58 "Supplementary Comments". NH has embraced the learning from the first Inspection Report in driving improvements in services for the benefit of tenants and customers. The Inspection Action Plan is loaded within the Covalent performance management system. **All seven recommendations have been completed**. 58 other weaknesses were identified in the Inspection report and these are within the action plan. Progress against this Plan is reported at every Board meeting and the majority of Sub-Committee meetings. Completion of the actions is currently 96.5% with only two outstanding items. These items are both in the process of being achieved.

### **Recommendation 7**

The Inspection Report was **reported in January 2007 to the Board** with a detailed action plan. The key findings were reported to tenants in Northwards Natter, on the website and to the Area Panels.

The strength of the Service was reflected in a **2 Star and Excellent Prospects** assessment by the Audit Commission. The Inspection Report also identified 4 examples of **Positive Practice**. NH has built from its strengths since the last Inspection. NH has developed a comprehensive **Performance Management Framework**, under the direction of the Neighbourhood & Quality Services Sub-Committee which receives monthly performance reports covering the full range of Best Value KPIs, plus local KPIs. Performance is reported quarterly to the Board and reviewed in Quarterly Review meetings with MCC. NH is required to provide annual reports to the MCC's Scrutiny Committee. NH's Performance is compared against the Council's retained stock and tracked against top quartile performance. A performance management system (Covalant) has been implemented and Executive

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management Team invites responsible managers to present their performance data and improvement plans.

Within this framework, NH has developed **Service Improvement Planning** arrangements. Each Team produces an annual **Team Improvement Plan (TIP)** which identifies their contribution to delivery of NH's overall performance and strategic objectives, plus local improvement priorities. In addition, there are specific **Action Plans** which involve issues which cut across Teams, such as Void Management, Value for Money, Equality and Diversity and Rent Collection. Progress against TIPs and Team priorities are reviewed by Directors and their Management Teams.

As a member of the ALMO **HouseMark** Benchmarking Club, NH compares costs and performance against other ALMOs for key services. The latest benchmarking ALMO results have been analysed to refine target setting and to identify best practice. The draft figure for 2007/08 is £516 per unit, a reduction of 4.4% compared with 2006-07. This is higher than average cost but NH understands the breakdown of this figure in detail and where the key cost drivers are.

NH has bought in external support to analyse of key business systems and processes, such as reviewing On Call and Voids Management. In addition, NH has sought to learn from best practice in other ALMOs, particularly through visits to other ALMOs, via the National Federation of ALMOs (NFA), ALMO Performance Clubs and Rent Income and Repairs Excellence Networks. NH has acquired support from other ALMOs, including Leeds West Homes' Equality and Diversity Manager. NH is a learning organisation and shares its experience with other ALMOs and RSLs.

NH has appointed **Internal Auditors and External Auditors** through competitive procurement exercises. An annual programme of internal audit reviews are agreed by Resource & Audit Sub-Committee. Service areas for 2008-09 include Improvement Programme delivery, Repairs and Planned Maintenance, Arrears Management, Tenancy and Estate Management and Human Resources (Absence) as well as the year-on-year reviews covering Finance, Strategy and Risk.

NH has a strong culture of **financial management** demonstrated through close monitoring of budgets, accurate accounts and detailed financial planning. The financial results for 2006/07 and 2007/08 came in below budget which allowed the continued reinvestment of resources.

Good progress has been made with the **review of all SLA's**. Of the original 34 SLA's, 17 remain. A further 3 will come to an end on 31st March 2009 as MCC has given notice to terminate the On-Call (2) and Mobile Cleaning contracts. The cost of the remaining 17 has also reduced by 17% after inflation. Some of the original SLAs still remain as frameworks for ongoing services, but the nature of these agreements has been changed. Six agreements have been terminated completely.

The assessment of NH as having Excellent Prospects for Improvement and the Performance Management Framework provide firm foundations upon which NH can build further improvements. The Board and staff are ambitious for NH to achieve a 3 Star Excellent rating in this Inspection.

NH's Management Fee is formula driven so the loss of stock through RTB will diminish its **revenue funding**. NH has therefore identified efficiencies, plus new and complimentary business streams to mitigate loss of income. Technical services are provided to MCC's Private Sector Housing Team in surveying and repairing miscellaneous properties. NH is already discussing with MCC opportunities to develop its role such as managing the Extra Care Housing Scheme funded by the Department of Health.

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NH has developed effective **Partnerships** in North Manchester particularly with North Manchester Regeneration Team, Valuing Older People Project, the Manchester Residents' Association and GM Police. The range of Partnerships with which NH is engaged was reported to the Board in July 2008.

NH is taking action to ensure it delivers **value for money** and has built efficiency measures into SLAs and contracts. NH is responding positively to the challenges raised in the Gershon Report and has produced its own Value for Money Strategy identifying efficiency gains. NH has undertaken work to understand its cost base and use this learning to drive efficiency with both its own teams and those of its contractors/partners.

The **Procurement** of Responsive and Planned Maintenance and Decent Homes works has delivered excellent services and major efficiencies. NH undertook a joint procurement exercise with MCC for maintenance services and Decent Homes work which is delivered through a **Joint Venture Company, Manchester Working Limited**, into which MCC transferred its City Works business. A parallel procurement exercise was undertaken with MCC and 3 other social landlords to procure additional contractors for **Decent Homes Work**. Senior Managers and Tenant Representatives from NH were involved throughout these procurement exercises.

The new **Universal Housing IT System** was implemented to assist with workflow management and performance management, as well as supporting further service enhancement. Go live date was put back to March 2007 (original date October 2006) which put pressure on services and performance and there were a number of implementation issues. However, the system is now being used effectively and is developing all the time. Recent additions have been the development of the ASB module and a Data Warehouse for reporting, as well as partnership working with MWL on handheld technology.

NH enjoys a positive relationship with the MCC. The Board wants to continue to work in partnership with the MCC, whilst remaining at arms length. The governance arrangements ensure that the relationship remains appropriate and effective.

In order that NH can maintain and enhance **demand for the homes it manages**, it is vital that current and projected demand for housing in North Manchester is continuously analysed and factored into NH's Business and Delivery Plan. NH assesses changing demand through use of demand analysis which provides trend analysis over time for a number of key variables which explain the "health" of neighbourhoods. A G.I.S system provides detailed analysis for the type and location of homes across tenure on an ongoing basis through regular and bespoke reports.

NH has a well resourced **organisational structure** with committed, experienced and capable staff. NH has consolidated this strength by developing core competencies for all staff, promoting effective leadership throughout the organisation and by learning programmes linked to a staff appraisal scheme. A bespoke Leadership Development Programme involving 48 senior managers in 2007/8 was predicated upon 360 degree appraisal. It is intended to roll this programme to new starters and to junior managers. Since the last Inspection, NH has increased its capacity by **restructuring service delivery** teams, notably the Rehousing and Home Improvement teams, in order to provide improved outcomes for tenants and customers. Additional staff and functions have been transferred from MCC (i.e. Programme Planning and Mobile Cleaning) and new posts have been created, notably around energy and debt advice, to further enhance capacity. A Board appraisal scheme seeks to develop the Board collectively and as individual members with support from Enlighten Consultants.

Section 4 – Action Plan	Maximum of two A4 pages
<p>NH has developed a series of detailed Action Plans to address identified weaknesses, to seize opportunities for improvement and to maintain Excellent Service delivery. These Plans are described in various sections of this Questionnaire, but this Section gives an overview of NH’s approach to service excellence, using KLOEs as a key improvement tool.</p> <p><b>Service Improvement Planning</b></p> <p>Service specific Action Plans are approved and monitored by the appropriate Sub-Committee, but with the Board taking an overview of performance. These plans are complemented by <b>Team Improvement Plans</b> prepared and “owned” by every operational team across NH. Key Performance Indicators are reviewed monthly or quarterly by the relevant Sub-Committee. The Board receives quarterly performance reports. Performance management has been enhanced by the introduction of the Covalent system on which performance data and action plans are loaded and regularly updated. The 3 Area Panels receive Performance reports for their area, with the opportunity to make comments and recommendations to the Board.</p> <p><b>Viability and VFM</b></p> <p>The loss of stock, primarily through RTB, presents a significant challenge to NH which is projecting the reduction in stock numbers over 10 years with consequent adjustment to the Management Fee, whilst predicting its operating costs. However, RTB levels are not as high as predicted when NH went live. To ensure continuing reliability and improve efficiency NH has committed:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Preparing <b>Annual Efficiency Statements</b> as the means to identify and implement efficiency savings.</li> <li>• Delivering <b>efficiencies within NH’s resources</b>, both staffing and financial.</li> <li>• Reviewing current <b>SLAs</b>, particularly Neighbourhood Nuisance and On Call, and involving service users in SLA reviews.</li> <li>• Working with MWL and IMPACT Manchester partners to achieve <b>innovation and efficiency in repairs and improvements</b>.</li> <li>• Working with <b>Local Procurement Consortia</b> and with other landlords in Greater Manchester on efficiencies.</li> <li>• Investigating <b>alternative and complementary sources of income</b> arising from new business opportunities.</li> <li>• Continue contributing to the Government’s <b>Review of HRA Subsidy System</b>.</li> </ul> <p><b>Customer Care and Access</b></p> <p>NH is committed to delivering Excellent Services to its tenants and customers and is therefore:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Going beyond the Decent Homes standard in order to meet tenants’ aspirations for their homes and to achieve <b>Decent Neighbourhoods</b>, particularly security, environmental and energy improvements.</li> <li>• Working with MWL and MCC to deliver the new service model for <b>On Call</b> in order to improve the offer to customers, to maximise resolution at first point of contact and to improve VfM.</li> <li>• Annually reviewing the <b>Access to Services Review</b> strategy.</li> </ul>	

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- Continually improving facilities for the public and for staff at **three Housing Offices**, the latest of which is IT kiosks.
- Reconfiguring the Neighbourhood Wardens' Service, using NH's resources, across all NH's area.
- Reviewing the Procurement Strategy backed by procurement risks and procedures.
- Identifying key risks as set out in the Risk Strategy which is regularly reviewed by Resource & Audit Sub Committee.
- Offering further **interactive services** through NH's Website and exploring new ways to engage customers.
- Reviewing **service standards**, information leaflets and the **Tenants' Handbook** (now backed by a DVD) with tenants.
- Constantly assessing **tenants' expectations of NH's services** through a range of engagement methods.
- Seeking to replace, in partnership with RSLs and developers some of the **affordable homes** lost through RTB.
- Seeking **Chartermark accreditation** to the new standard in 2008.

### Equality & Diversity

NH is committed to achieving best practice in E&D by:

- **Improving it's understanding of the diversity of its tenants** and the composition of North Manchester's communities, particularly through customer profiling.
- Adding to a **database of individual customers'** diverse needs which is accessible to staff and contractors.
- **Working with Partners and voluntary organisations** to understand the needs of BME communities and people with disabilities in order to provide services which address those needs, particularly Hard to Engage groups.
- Ensuring NH's **Board and staff** reflect the communities we serve.
- Developing the **Adaptations Service** in partnership with the Council, contractors and service users.
- Developing **services for vulnerable tenants** through packages of support and new housing models.
- Achieving **Equality Standard Level 2** and attaining Level 3 by October 2008.
- Improving arrangements for reporting and monitoring **Hate Crime and Domestic Violence** in partnership with other landlords.
- Working with statutory, voluntary and community organisations to promote better **Community Cohesion**

### Organisational Development

NH is committed to developing the capacity and capability of its Board and staff by:

- Continually reviewing **Governance** arrangements.
- Promoting an **open and inclusive culture** as an employer
- Investing in **learning and development**
- Seeking **Investors in People** accreditation in 2008.
- Extending the **Leadership Development Programme** to our new starters and junior managers.