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17th December 2009

Dear Resident,

**Re - The results of the short notice inspection at Gateway Housing Association**

A team from the Audit Commission has recently inspected some of the housing services provided by your landlord. This letter tells you what we found.

We looked at how Gateway Housing Association maintains tenants' homes and concentrated on the following two areas:

- responding to repairs reported by tenants, including gas servicing; and
- how the association manages its income.

We also asked the following questions:

- how easy it is for tenants to access these services;
- what tenants think of Gateway Housing Association's customer care;
- how Gateway Housing Association caters for different peoples' needs; and
- whether it provides value for your money.

Overall we found that weaknesses outweighed strengths in most areas. (See note on page 2 for an explanation of our judgements). In particular we found the following:

**1. Repairing tenants' homes (including gas servicing)**

We found this an area where weaknesses outweigh strengths. Although there is a range of ways to report repairs, both performance and the quality of the service are weak. A large number of repairs are not completed right first time, and repairs to communal areas are not satisfactory. As a result, residents are not satisfied, and they sometimes have to ring the association a number of times to have repairs completed.

Strengths and weaknesses are in balance in terms of gas servicing. We found some positive aspects to gas servicing. The number of properties without a valid gas certificate is reasonably low, and residents are happy with the way the service operates. However, processes to ensure all gas appliances are serviced in time have weaknesses, and there is not enough publicity about the service.

**2. Income management.**

We found that strengths balance weaknesses in this area. The level of collection of rents and service charges has improved recently, and it is now about average compared to other similar social landlords. Gateway has effective systems to deal with arrears. Debt advice is available for residents, but the association cannot be sure how effective this advice is.

### **3. Being responsive to tenants**

Weaknesses outweigh strengths in terms of customer care and value for money. The association provides good information, and services at the office are positive, but residents do not find it easy to contact the association by phone, and telephone calls, correspondence and complaints are not answered quickly enough. The association cannot be sure that the services it provides offer value for money.

There is a balance of strengths and weaknesses in terms of diversity. The association does engage with a range of residents, and some enhanced services are provided to older and vulnerable residents. However, Gateway does not know enough about the needs of residents, or about how its services affect the wide variety of residents it serves.

To help your landlord improve its service to all residents, we have made the following recommendations:

- it should ensure that telephone calls, correspondence and complaints are responded to quickly and effectively;
- it should work in partnership with contractors to improve the speed and quality of repairs, and take firm action where this is not satisfactory;
- it should improve information about the needs of all its residents, so that vulnerable residents receive the support they need;
- it should improve gas servicing processes to make sure that appliances are serviced in time;
- it should improve its systems, so that performance is clear, and that there are robust plans to address poor performance; and
- it should implement a sustained programme, driven from the top of the organisation, to improve the approach to value for money and diversity

The report will shortly be available on our website at [www.audit-commission.gov.uk/housing](http://www.audit-commission.gov.uk/housing). You can also find further information about housing inspections there. Alternatively the association will be able to let you have a copy of the report.

### **3. Next steps**

We have asked Gateway Housing Association to work with its residents over the next few weeks to develop an action plan showing how it intends to implement our recommendations. Once we have their finished action plan we will consider the likelihood of Gateway Housing Association improving the inspected services. We will then publish our final report. We hope to publish this by February 2010.

The Association's regulator, the Tenant Services Authority will work with them to make sure that the recommendations in the inspection report are acted upon and improvements to your service are delivered.

I hope this letter has been of interest to you. Thank you very much for your co-operation.

Yours faithfully

Patrick Mulrenan  
Principal Inspector  
Housing Inspectorate  
Audit Commission

CC Tenant Services Authority regulator  
Gateway Housing Association board members

The Audit Commission uses a four point scale for judging the quality of services, as follows:

- Strengths considerably outweigh weaknesses;
- Strengths outweigh weaknesses;
- A balance of strengths and weaknesses; and
- Weaknesses outweigh strengths.