

# Brighton Housing A&A

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6<sup>th</sup> March 2009

Martin Symonds – Housing Inspector



# Key messages

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- Positive relationships built with residents since 2006
- Strong self-awareness of current service delivery and areas that need to improve
- Solid progress in improvement
- Effective improvement planning
- Understanding of costs and use of benchmarking is an area for development

# Access and Customer Focus

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## Strengths

- Committed staff who demonstrate a professional and caring approach towards customers
- Sign up / settling in visit encourages involvement
- Late opening of HIMT (6.30 p.m. M-Th)
- Informative website - rents payable on line
- Effective use made of newsletters
- Information about rents is comprehensive - easy to understand
- Helpful advice leaflets
- Home visits and office interviews provided with 5 days of request

# Access and Customer Focus

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## Areas for improvement

- **Some staff not fully engaged in RI – could be clearer part of induction e.g. for income management staff**
- **Clear and measurable service standards not in place**
- **Tenant handbook does not explain RI well**
- **Website not being used to full potential**
- **Interview room facilities at Bartholomew House do not support the Income Management service**
- **Innovative methods of communication e.g. texting not being used to full potential**
- **Residents not fully involved in complaints monitoring**
- **Satisfaction surveys not coordinated**
- **Telephone systems do not enable analysis of answering performance in the HI team**

# Diversity

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## Strengths

- **Diversity awareness among staff and customers seen is generally good**
- **Some good examples of wider engagement outside of traditional structures (AMP)**
- **Clear progress being made on EIAs for both HIM and RI**
- **Information available in a range of languages and formats**
- **Some good (and emerging) work with component communities - youth, BME**
- **Meeting venues are generally accessible (but not all offices meet DDA)**
- **Wide range of payment methods enables people with diverse needs to pay in a convenient way**

# Diversity

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## Areas for improvement

- **The profile of some tenant representative bodies does not reflect the profile of the local community**
- **Participation by different methods is not monitored by diversity**
- **Not monitoring all diversity strands in rent recovery activity. (the IT system has a facility to record this)**
- **Gaps in information about tenant vulnerability on the IT database is a barrier to arrears prevention and income generation**

# Value for Money

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## Strengths

- **Good understanding of various payment transaction costs and promotion of cost effective method**
- **Making some good use of additional resources – contractor input**

## Areas for improvement

- Understanding of costs of different elements of RI is not as strong as it could be – making benchmarking difficult
- There is little commentary and analysis on those benchmarking reports seen
- Management costs are higher than those for your peers
- Cost and quality is not clearly linked - e.g. levels of satisfaction v cost of service

# Resident Involvement

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## Strengths

- Resident involvement is well resourced and supported
- Relationships between tenants and councillors are mature and productive
- Residents consulted on wide range of issues - various WGs etc
- Short term tenants focus groups are a useful way of engaging on policy issues
- There are many examples of the council, residents and partners working to build community capital and cohesion – e.g. Our Neighbourhood
- RI integrates well with other partners
- Devolved budgets for residents associations play an important role in encouraging and maintaining interest in resident associations
- Tenants are an integral part of planning processes - they inform the SIP
- Residents play an active role in performance monitoring
- Effective use is made of the independent resource centre - builds capacity
- Annual feedback provided on RI impact



# Resident Involvement

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## Areas for Improvement

- **There is no over-arching resident involvement strategy**
- **The TP compact does not spell out clearly what to expect from the council. It does not list the resources available nor service standards**
- **There is not a clear menu of options for engagement – including informal ways**
- **The formal structures work but may now be too heavy**
- **There is no database of preferred method of consultation on the computer system**
- **More steps could be taken to tap into existing representative bodies in the city to encourage a wider representation**

# Housing Income Management

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## Strengths

- The establishment of a dedicated HI team has had a positive impact
- Rent arrears have reduced to around the median for unitaries
- Staff are aware of the importance of preventative work to reduce evictions – focus on financial inclusion
- Evictions have reduced significantly
- Good, quick access to money advice
- Liaison between the Income Team and HB is strong
- The introduction of E-benefits has enabled faster HB processing
- Effective use is being made of DHPs to reduce any HB shortfall for vulnerable tenants
- Staff are provided with clear procedures and policies in relation to rent collection and recovery
- A broad range of initiatives are used to promote a rent payment culture (eg signs on vans)
- Service charges are disaggregated and are shown clearly on rent increase letters
- FTAs are being actively managed - use made of prompt tracing

# Housing Income Management

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## Areas for improvement

- There is a lack of a financial inclusion strategy
- Training arrangement for Income Management staff are not robust - Staff need more guidance on which agency to sign post people
- Rent reports do not allow sufficient analysis of performance (e.g. how many agreements have been broken)
- Interview rooms do not include appropriate IT facilities
- Mobile technology is not available to assist Income Managers when carrying out home visits
- Integration and communication between area offices and HIMT may not be as effective as it should be
- There is no weekend or late evening working for the HIMT
- Payment by DD could be further promoted
- It can still take too long to set up rent accounts
- Targets have not been set for reduction in FT arrears

# Future prospects

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- Significant progress has been made in strengthening / rebuilding trust with tenants since the ballot
- Trends in PIs are generally positive
- High level of self awareness
- The HRABP reflects the principles of effective service planning and the full range of housing management challenges faced by the Council
- The SIP sets out a clear 3 year programme for management of the housing stock and is built on strong links to residents priorities
- Staff have been widely consulted over the development of the SIP 2009-12
- It will be easy for residents to hold the council to account over its SIP 2009-12. There is a clear list of success factors
- But some aspects of draft service BPs could be clearer – eg milestones
- Budget provision allows for IT capacity to be built
- High staff turnover and sickness is a barrier but is being addressed

# Recommendations

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Recommendations will follow

