



Date: September 2009

Dear Resident,

**Re - The results of the short notice inspection at Paddington Churches housing association (PCHA)**

A team from the Audit Commission has recently inspected some of the housing services provided by your landlord. This letter advises you of the outcome of our inspection.

We did not inspect all of the services provided by PCHA, but we did focus on those where we believe there is room for improvement. We looked at the following two areas:

- responding to incidents of anti social behaviour (ASB); and
- the management of service charges.

We also asked the following questions:

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

The results of our inspection are set out below. Overall we found that PCHA is providing services with weaknesses outweighing strengths in the management of service charges and in responding to ASB. (See note on page 2 for an explanation of our judgements).

**1. Responding to incidents of ASB**

We found that the service provided to tenants was an area with more weaknesses than strengths. Low level cases of ASB are not managed effectively and there is no evidence of tenants being kept properly informed of progress when a complaint has been made. Enforcement activity is low and evidence gathering is not effective. Satisfaction monitoring is not comprehensive and overall performance management of ASB cases is poor. However, there are positive examples of PCHA working with others to resolve cases and levels of visible ASB such as graffiti on estates are low overall.

**2. Being responsive to tenants**

We found that strengths and weaknesses are in balance. Services are readily accessible and phones are answered promptly. There are positive examples of customer involvement in service development. The approach to supporting vulnerable people is strong while staff training on the diversity agenda is effective. However, robustness of impact assessments is limited due to the lack of understanding and analysis of the diversity of complainants and alleged perpetrators. Service standards which enable residents to know what quality of service to expect are not comprehensive. And tenant satisfaction with services overall is not strong.

### **3. Managing service charges**

We found that weaknesses outweigh strengths. The introduction of variable service charging has proved problematic and PCHA is still working to ensure accuracy in billing and while there have been improved outcomes for tenants the quality and efficiency of the service is not certain. Information on service charges is generally effective and easy to follow and the availability of a broad range of payment options means payments are made at tenants' convenience. PCHA is proactively reviewing processes to deliver improved outcomes for tenants although there is still more to do and tenant feedback is improving information on costs and services for greater accuracy in subsequent billing. The introduction of variable service charges is giving tenants a better understanding of the services they pay for.

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

- Strengthen its approach to customer care and meeting different needs;
- Ensure robust systems are in place for administering and managing service charges; and
- Develop a robust approach to value for money.

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. If you require further copies of this report, or a copy in large print, in Braille, on tape, or in a language other than English, please call 0844 798 7070.

### **3. Next steps**

We have asked PCHA to work with its residents over the next few weeks to develop an action plan showing how it intends to implement our recommendations by early December and to send this to us. Following on from their report back to us we will consider the likelihood of PCHA improving the inspected services and publish our judgements, together with the Association's action plan, as part of our final report. It is our intention to publish these documents in December 2009. Our web site will record any changes to this date.

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.

A copy of this letter is also being sent for information to each member of the board of PCHA.

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

Yours faithfully

Judine Alleyne  
Principal Inspector  
Housing Inspectorate  
Audit Commission

CC Tenant Services Authority regulator  
Paddington Churches 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.