

POSITIVE PRACTICE

'The Commission will identify and promote good practice. Every inspection will look for examples of good practice and innovation, and for creative ways to overcome barriers and resistance to change or make better use of resources.'

(Seeing is Believing).

Positive practice is something which makes a service more effective and, ultimately, more able to deliver what the customer wants. The positive practice found during our previous inspection is being maintained by BHP and is summarised below along with additional items found during the current inspection:

Access

- Evening and Saturday appointments are available for residents to have repairs carried out and appointments are also made with tenants prior to carrying out post and pre inspection of repairs.
- Two new ways of paying rent have recently been added to the more traditional methods. They are the PayPoint [Footnote 1](#) facility and the on-line rent payment service, provided by Girobanks BillPay system. The methods of payment are advertised on the BHP website as is the pay your rent advice leaflet. It is also possible to download this leaflet in Arabic, Urdu, Tamil and Farsi.
- BHP produces written documentation in large fonts for partially sighted users and also documentation in Braille for blind users. There is also access to the Minicom [Footnote 2](#) service and staff are aware of how to use 'typetalk' [Footnote 3](#) facilities. BHP are providing training for staff to become qualified BSL Signers. All offices have induction loops fitted [Footnote 4](#).

Customer Care

- BHP has produced a customer care policy document that incorporates its general customer care principles (for example all staff will be polite) as well as sets out the service standards for each service area (for example voids to be let within 33 days). It also details the performance targets that each service will be trying to meet.

Service Improvements

- As part of their campaign to assist tenants to reduce and clear their arrears BHP have introduced a 'set aside policy'. It works by BHP agreeing to set aside 25 per cent of a tenants' arrears if they clear the remainder of the arrears and maintain a clear account for 12 months. If they do not maintain a clear account then the set aside amount is reinstated and the repossession proceedings is implemented. To date, £63,156 has been set aside.

- The neighbourhood relations team was set up especially to deal with more complicated cases of harassment and anti-social behaviour. The team has developed expertise in dealing with these cases as well as leading the multi-agency approach to dealing with problems. It has successfully obtained interim ASBOs and introduced ABCs. It also is responsible for overseeing the activities of the estate security warden service
- A estate security warden service has been introduced across all housing estates in the borough. It operates between 3.00 pm and 3.00 am, seven days a week. This service is popular with tenants as it demonstrates that BHP is serious about tackling anti-social behaviour and addressing people's concerns over crime. Feedback we received from tenants was that there had been a reduction in youths congregating in particular parts of estates and intimidating residents. Tenant satisfaction with service is high both by users and non-users. The evaluation of the service carried out after six months has shown that residents believe that there has been an impact on crime on the estates. The police have yet to provide statistics that confirm this.
- Designing out crime consultation meetings are run jointly by BHP, the council and the police. These meetings consider, with residents, proposals to improve estate environments with aim of making them more secure places to live for example the installation of additional lighting, CCTV, rebuilding walls and demolishing garages or pram sheds.
- The estate services monitoring officers (ESMOs) attend regular pre arranged estate walkabout inspections with residents in order to identify communal and other external repairs which are logged and actioned. The ESMOs are responsible for progressing these repairs and inspecting them after they are completed. The four ESMOs also have access to an environmental improvement budget of £200,000 between them. They are able to fund communal repairs and small environmental improvements to the estates in consultation with residents.
- A programme of visits to tenants over 75 years old or those with a vulnerability is maintained, collecting information on nature of vulnerability, ethnicity, disability and priority for repairs or garden maintenance. Staff also combine this with a programme of verification visits to detect and deter unauthorised occupation, as well as to visit new tenants (six weeks after they have moved in). Officers are therefore assigned individual targets of five verification and three vulnerable visits per week. A vulnerable tenants register is also maintained to assist tenant support arrangements, the giving of welfare advice and the recording of life episodes. Vulnerable tenants are visited twice yearly.
- BHP have set up a disrepair team that draws on the expertise of various sections within BHP and the council. The team has

successfully reduced the number of disrepair cases going to court and have also reduced the amount of compensation and costs paid out by 35 per cent since 2001.

- BHP has created a specialist rent collection and recovery function with dedicated housing officers at each of the area offices supported by a centrally based lead officer responsible for income collection and rent recovery. There are also dedicated welfare benefit officers who are responsible for ensuring that welfare benefits are maximised, and auditing the rent accounts. There is also a housing support officer who is responsible assisting young people who have left care to sustain their tenancies.

IT Improvements

- The innovative electronic document management (EDM) system. This has transformed the housing management services' ability to capture and retain information in easily accessible format.
- BHP's interactive website allows access to the public for:
 - repairs reporting using the diagnostic tool;
 - on-line rent payments; and
 - downloading of certain documents and some service leaflets in various community languages.
- The joint development of gas servicing software with one of their new gas servicing contractors. This is a direct result of signing a ten year contract with company, which encouraged the company to invest in service improvements. The improvements allow for the use of real time downloading of gas servicing information onto portable handheld devices and this leads to the subsequent production CP12 [Footnote 5](#) certificates. It allows for the updating of gas attributes of the stock condition database.
- The introduction of new software in the leasehold management unit, allowing more successful tracking of current and former leaseholder service and major works charges.
- Stock data information is updated as properties are adapted for disabled tenants.

Tenant Involvement and Communication

- BHP has worked closely with tenant representatives to produce a three year programme to complete the decent homes work and tenants have been closely involved in selecting management contractors.
- BHP has involved tenants in the selection of the contractors who will carry out the decent homes works. Tenants were also involved in

selecting the materials and colour schemes that will be used for the decent homes program.

- BHP have produced a monthly newsletter entitled major works which is sent to every tenant and leaseholder as a means of communicating with residents over impending works. It is a well presented and informative publication. Other ways residents are kept involved and informed include, preliminary consultation meetings held to confirm the scope of works and tendering process and pre-start of works consultation meetings held to confirm scheduling of works and introduction to contractors, supervising agents and officers, the emphasis being on customer care. A final newsletter sent to all residents once works are complete.
- BHP is conducting surveys of tenants and leaseholders following the completion of major works on an estate. There have been high levels of satisfaction on the most recent surveys.
- BHP has produced a resident participation strategy (2002–2005) which outlines BHP's approach to involving residents' in its decision making processes. The document sets out the strategies that will be employed to ensure residents are at the heart of BHP's services and are able to influence the decision making processes. The document contains a three year action plan that links BHP's objectives to those of the council. The plan is also SMART, with milestones and identified lead officers. It was agreed with the support of the residents advisory committee.

Difficult to Engage Groups

- Residents community groups are designed to bring together residents who are spread throughout the borough and feel isolated or vulnerable through age, infirmity or work demands. Social events are organised to get these residents together and they have then the opportunity to voice their concerns and views on the services they are receiving.
- Two focus groups have also been developed as informal gatherings allowing residents to get their views across without being constrained by the formal processes in TRA meetings. The groups met every two months to discuss, review and consult about new policies and procedures.
- In a bid to increase BME involvement in the tenant movement a Somali tenants conference was held last year (2002). Brent has the second highest Somali population in London and has approximately 450 Somali tenants. The conference was deemed a success by its attendees and a subsequent publication was produced setting out how and why the conference was organised and the outcomes of key discussion and learning points.
- Action has been taken to encourage existing Associations to recruit more BME members. A criteria requiring that Associations should strive

to recruit a minimum of 5% from the BME community has been built into the revised Residents compact which, was tabled and accepted at the Residents' Advisory Committee

- 1 A system that enable tenants to pay their rent at convenience stores, newsagents, supermarkets and service stations.
- 2 Minicomms are text phones which allow people with hearing impediments to type text instead of using speech.
- 3 This allows residents who are unable to hear to communicate with a third party by phone via a suitably trained telephone operator
- 4 An induction loop allows people with hearing impairments to hear better when their hearing aids are switched to T position by cutting out background noise
- 5 A certificate confirming that gas the servicing has occurred. It is the maintenance sheet filled out by the gas engineer at the time the service was completed. It will show among other things when that service was done.