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Villages Housing providing tenants with a 'fair' service

The housing service provided by Villages Housing is 'fair' and has 'uncertain prospects for improvement', according to an independent report released today by the Audit Commission.

On a scale from zero to three stars, the Audit Commission inspection team gave the service one star. This is because there are strengths in its approach to dealing with anti-social behaviour cases, but arrangements to manage empty properties and collect rent arrears is weak.

Paul Clarke, Audit Commission Lead Housing Inspector, said:

'Villages Housing has had a crucial role in improving the community and homes of tenants in Stockbridge Village, and it is beginning to deliver similar improvements in Fitton Hill, Oldham. It is particularly effective at dealing with anti-social behaviour to reduce crime and the fear of crime. However, it needs to address inefficiencies in some services, such as income management and empty property management. It also needs to agree its long term aims and objectives, including assessing the long term viability of its multi-storey accommodation, which is difficult to let.'

The inspectors found:

- The Association has been involved in a range of initiatives to reduce crime and the fear of crime.
- It is on course to meet the government's standard for decent homes by the deadline of 2010.
- Tenants have been involved in agreeing property improvement choices and the specification of works is high.
- Service standards are still under development.
- The long term viability of the multi-storey accommodation is yet to be assessed.
- Empty properties are taking too long to repair and re-let.

To help the service improve, inspectors recommended that the Association should:

- Strengthen performance management through comprehensive performance reporting, targeting resources to effectively deal with consistently underperforming services and reviewing services failing to meet standards set.
- Strengthen service user and tenant focus by agreeing and publicising comprehensive service standards, designing services around the communication needs of tenants, carrying out tenant satisfaction surveys for key services and increasing appointments available for responsive repairs.

Villages Housing owns and manages 2,814 homes, concentrated mainly in Knowsley, Merseyside and Fitton Hill, Oldham.

Copies of the report are available from Villages Housing Trust or on the Audit Commission website at www.audit-commission.gov.uk/reports

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