

Housing Quality Network

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Best Value in Sheltered Housing - Self-Assessment Workbook

SHELTERED HOUSING SERVICES REALITY CHECK

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1. INTRODUCTION

This HQN sheltered housing workbook asks the sort of questions that the Housing Inspectorate is likely to raise during a Best Value (BV) inspection, and has been updated to include the Supporting People programme which will be incorporated into BV reviews. The workbook is aimed at helping local authorities and housing associations undertake an honest assessment of their provision and performance in sheltered housing and plan for continuous improvement.

Sheltered housing can be defined as independent accommodation for older people with some associated services, often provided in an integrated housing complex. There is usually a scheme manager service that provides support and advice, and acts as a link in co-ordinating services for older people. This workbook covers the three main types of sheltered housing provided by local authorities and housing associations: Categories 1, 2 and 2.5. Clearly different services will be relevant within the three categories and in using the workbook the differences will need to be borne in mind. Some organisations no longer use these terms but they have been used in this workbook for ease of reference. The term scheme manager has also been used throughout the workbook, again for ease of reference, but this term can be taken to mean warden, sheltered scheme officer etc.

There is some flexibility in the definitions, but essentially the three categories of sheltered housing are:

Categories of sheltered scheme accommodation

Category 1	purpose built schemes for older people but with no communal facilities, linked to a central control centre
Category 2	purpose built schemes for older people usually with communal facilities and a scheme manager
Category 2.5	purpose built schemes for older people with extra facilities or services such as assistance with bathing and meals and overnight waking care cover.

This workbook can be used to review accommodation in all three sheltered housing categories. However, whilst it does refer to the use of a central control or call centre, it is not intended to be used to conduct a BV review in this area. The workbook will have some application for the BV review of a mobile scheme manager/warden service, although this may not be all embracing. .

As other HQN self-assessment workbooks have suggested, we recommend that local authorities and housing associations test their readiness for the scrutiny of their BV review by carrying out their own reality checks. This workbook suggests a range of reality checks that should be carried out prior to inspection; it also focuses on the six key questions that the BV inspectors will ask and the two key judgements that these should inform. The questions asked are outlined below:

HOUSING INSPECTORATE JUDGEMENT 1 – HOW GOOD IS THE SERVICE?

Housing Inspectorate questions

- Are your aims clear and challenging?
- Does the service meet these aims?
- How does the performance compare?

HOUSING INSPECTORATE JUDGEMENT 2 – WHAT ARE THE PROSPECTS FOR IMPROVEMENT?

Housing Inspectorate questions

- Does the Best Value review drive improvement?
- How good is the improvement plan?
- Will you deliver the improvements?

These two judgements are examined in detail later in this workbook as part of the self-completion test for organisations to apply to their service areas.

2. HOW WILL PERFORMANCE AND QUALITY IN SHELTERED HOUSING BE ASSESSED?

A range of performance indicators (PIs) and quality standards have been identified by the ODPM, the Housing Corporation and the Audit Commission and these will be used to measure the performance of sheltered housing providers and of the sector as a whole over a period of time. The monitoring of Supporting People services will involve an ongoing process of reviewing performance and quality. In addition there will be periodic Supporting People service reviews that will draw together all the performance and quality data and assess whether the service is strategically relevant.

Sheltered housing represents the largest client group in Supporting People. While monitoring of Supporting People is still at the development stage, it will be included in the next round of comprehensive Performance Assessments in 2005/6.

2.1 Supporting People PIs

There are four groups of Supporting People PIs:

- **Interim contract PIs** submitted quarterly by providers to the Administering Authority (AA):
 - SP1 1 Service availability – the number of bedspaces or units occupied as a % of the number available
 - SP1 2 Utilisation levels – the number of bedspaces available for letting as a % of the number in the support contract
 - SP1 3 Staffing levels – the number of hours worked in providing the support service as a percentage of the number of hours included in the support contract

- **National key PIs** reported annually by AAs to the ODPM:
 - KP1 Service users who are supported to establish and maintain independent living

- KP2 Service users who have moved on in a planned way from temporary living arrangements (*this does not apply to sheltered housing which is usually let as a "home for life"*)
- KP3 Fair access to people eligible for SP services
- **Service PIs** for steady state contracts include the three interim contract PIs and a further five which will be subject to confirmation following piloting during 2003:
 - SP1 4 Price of services – the contract price for the service expressed as an hourly rate for the support service and price per service user per week
 - SP1 5 Throughputs – the number of departures from the service as a percentage of the service capacity contracted
 - SP1 6 Support plans – the number of service users who had a written support plan as a percentage of those in receipt of the service during the period
 - SP1 7 Review of support plans – the number of support plans reviewed as a percentage of planned reviews
 - SP1 8 Complaints – the number of service users that made a complaint as a percentage of the total number of users during the reporting period
- **Local PIs** may also be developed by AAs

2.2 Supporting People Quality Assurance Framework (QAF)

The QAF serves two main purposes:

- To enable AAs to determine quality and performance at Scheme Reviews
- To enable providers to self-assess services and continuously improve them.

There are four Core Service Objectives (CSOs) (which are the minimum compulsory standards incorporated into interim contracts and which will be assessed at the first Scheme Review) and thirteen Supplementary Objectives (SOs) which providers should aim to achieve over time. Four levels of quality (A, B, C, D) have been defined to enable providers and AAs to grade the quality of services. Grading under each objective and related improvement plans can be formulated by addressing the detailed evidence requirements.

Core Service Objectives:

- C1.1 Needs assessment and support planning – service users have support plans based on an up to date assessment of need (*and see SP1 6 and SP1 7*)
- C1.2 Health and safety – the security, health and safety of all users and staff are protected
- C1.3 Protection from abuse – the right of service users to be protected from abuse is safeguarded
- C1.4 Fair access and diversity and inclusion – there is a commitment to the values of diversity and inclusion and to the practice of equal opportunities and the needs of BME service users and staff are protected (*and see KP1 3*)

Supplementary Objectives:

- **Group 1 Empowerment:**
 - S1.1 Informing service users
 - S1.2 Consulting and involving service users
 - S1.3 Empowerment and supporting independence
 - S1.4 Participation in the wider community
- **Group 2 Rights and responsibilities:**
 - S2.1 Privacy and confidentiality
 - S2.2 Rights and responsibilities
 - S2.3 Complaints
- **Group 3 The service**
 - S3.1 Service description
 - S3.2 Choice, sensitivity and responsiveness
 - S3.3 The living environment

- **Group 4 Organisation and management**
 - S4.1 Leadership and accountability and management systems
 - S4.2 Continuous improvement
 - S4.3 Staff recruitment, management and development

The Centre for Sheltered Housing Studies (CSHS Code of Practice) provides an accreditation process that passports achievers through relevant sections of QAF.

2.3 Supporting People service or scheme reviews

Reviews of all services must be carried out by AAs by April 2006 – the exact date will be stated in the interim contract. These reviews, which must be within the overall context of BV reviews, will focus on individual schemes or services and will assess the following:

- Whether the service meets the organisation's strategic objectives
- Current and future demand for the service
- Quality of service, using the four CSOs as a minimum
- Performance of service, using the three interim contract SPIs as a minimum
- Cost-effectiveness

Validation visits will be conducted randomly and where services don't meet the minimum quality or performance standards. Possible outcomes of service reviews include:

- Renewal of contract
- Action plan to improve performance
- Agreement to remodel the service
- Change the provider and retain the service
- Closure.

Supporting People statutory guidance states that AAs should not withdraw funding to sheltered housing on the basis of a scheme review alone but this decision should only be taken in the context of a strategic review of sheltered housing in the area. The guidance also states that changes of the sheltered housing provider will be exceptional as a result of review. However, providers do need to be aware that changes to sheltered services in response to customer expectation and new delivery models are possible in the future.

2.4 Housing Corporation Pls for supported housing

General Management Pls

Rent levels	Rent levels and HB eligible service charges to be charged and actual charges against the original budgeted totals
Rent increases	Proposed annual rent and HB eligible service charge increase and actual increase over previous year's total
Rent collection	Proportion of rent collected (including HB eligible service charges)
Rent arrears	Rent arrears of current tenants as a proportion of the rent roll (HB eligible rent and service charges)
Rent written off	Rent written off as not collectable as a proportion of rent roll including HB eligible service charges
Rent lost through vacancies	Percentage of rent lost through dwelling becoming vacant (including HB eligible service charges)
Average relet time	Average re-let times for dwellings let in the financial year

Specialist Supported Housing Pls

Resident consultation	Number of residents who responded to a formal (documented) consultation process in the previous 12
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Individual plans	months, as a percentage of all residents Percentage of residents who have a current, written, individual plan at financial year end
Move-on	Positive departures as a percentage of all non-neutral departures
Shared rooms	Percentage of residents living in shared housing with a bedroom to themselves

2.5 EROSH PIs for sheltered housing

The EROSH good practice guide on PIs (2002) proposes further “soft” PI topic areas including:

- the use of the communal areas
- tenant participation
- volunteering
- access to lifelong learning
- joint working
- home for life - terminations – transfers to residential homes
- BME lettings

The guide explains how to turn topics into SMART (Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Realistic, Time specific) objectives and then into measurable outcomes. EROSH has also produced a Support Plan good practice guide (2002), which organisations can adopt to ensure compliance under Core Service Objective C1.1 and Service Performance Indicators SP1.6 and SP1.7.

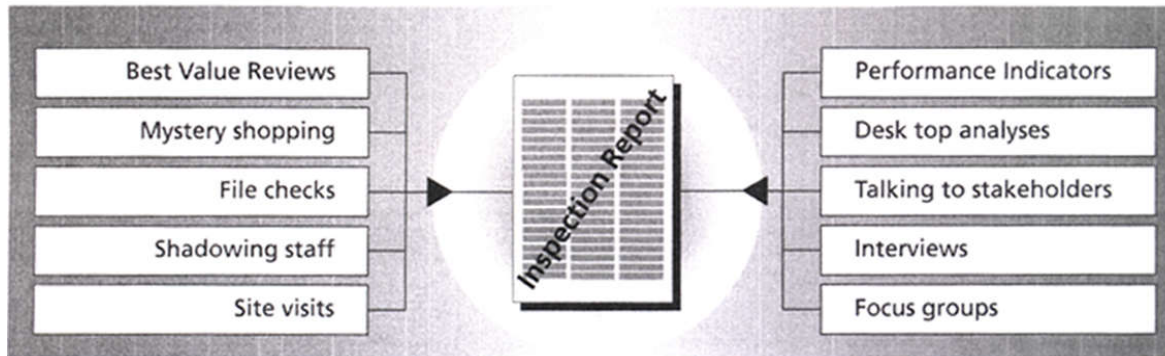
2.6 Approach used by Inspectors

The Inspectors will be looking at the data supplied by local authorities and housing associations but they will also be employing a number of other methods in their assessment of services. These include:

- Meetings with the senior management team and staff at all levels
- Use of focus groups for staff and residents
- Meetings with councillors and board members
- Home, estate and scheme visits
- Contact with other agencies (eg, Social Services, the Primary Care Team)

The diagram below indicates the sources of information for the Best Value inspectors and the variety of methods that are used to assess performance:

The reality check framework



Source: *Housing Inspectorate*

There is much to be learned from what has already been published on Best Value, and it is clear that there are certain prerequisites to a successful Best Value review. Some of the critical success factors are:

- Making sure the review is used to challenge the current position and to act as a driver to obtain continuous improvement in the future
- Having an action plan that is a live document and is under constant review and is effectively monitored
- Equal and rigorous application of the 4Cs
- Member involvement in the process
- Clear aims and objectives that link strongly to the organisation's corporate themes
- Strong consultation with users and stakeholders
- Evidence of mechanisms in place to deliver improvements
- Early progress on delivering the improvement plan
- Awareness of BME issues, including satisfaction with the service by BME groups
- Compliance with the CRE Code of Practice for Rented Housing

Inspectors are also likely to expect providers to have clear perception of how their services contribute to local authority strategic priorities across the broader social care and housing with support agendas. Providers should be aware of central government policy or the better government for older people programme and the whole system approach and of developments in new models of provision, even if these are not directly applicable to individual schemes.

3. WE WANT TO DO WELL – HOW DO WE ACHIEVE A TOP RATING?

It is easy to see from the published Housing Inspectorate reports what criteria are being used to assess a top-rating organisation, and these are identified in this section of the workbook. In terms of what a good service looks like, Section 4 looks at some of the lessons that can be learned from organisations that have already had their services inspected.

There are a number of general indicators that will need to be fulfilled in order to achieve a top rating in terms of housing provision. Some of these are set out below:

- The landlord must be in the top quartile for all the relevant PIs for the appropriate category of landlord (ie, unitary, metropolitan, London borough, district)
- The landlord must have a track record of improvement for the relevant PIs and viable plans for further improvement
- Local PIs should be in place to support the Audit Commission and Best Value PIs
- There should be measurable targets set for the sheltered housing service which link into corporate objectives identified in the organisation's corporate plan (for example, response times)
- The service itself needs to be accessible to all members of the community
- Staff must be up to date on all housing and care issues and identified training programmes need to support this
- Councillors/board members should be committed to the service and informed about how it works
- A wide range of stakeholders should have been consulted about the service and any feedback from this fed into changes to service delivery
- The organisation must take account of emerging good practice and implement it where practical and relevant
- The organisation must be at the forefront of developing innovative best practice in sheltered housing
- The organisation should have developed a user group of sheltered housing residents to ensure quality participation, not just consultation, is facilitated.

The Audit Commission paper ***Another Step Forward*** outlines the characteristics of effective organisations. These are general, but it is clearly important that they are integral part of each service review. The characteristics are:

- The use of BV reviews to tackle important social, environmental and economic problems for a local community
- A focus on customers, customer experience and the outcomes of the service provided
- Identification of problems and the will to be self critical and challenging, in an open way.

4. THE LESSONS LEARNED FROM THE SHELTERED HOUSING INSPECTIONS TO DATE

As part of its preparation for carrying out a BV review, an organisation should invest some time in looking at the inspections that have been carried out. There is much to be learned from these in terms of what the inspectors see as strengths and weaknesses of a review, and what observations they make on good practice. The full inspection reports are available on the audit commission website

(www.bestvalueinspections.gov.uk/housing) and on the HQN website (http://www.hqnetwork.org.uk/inspection_reports.html).

Listed below is a summary of commonly identified strengths and weaknesses of sheltered housing services against which providers are encouraged to self-assess their own service:

Strengths

- Satisfaction amongst tenants
- Tenant involvement
- Needs assessment – records
- Service standards
- Communication strategy delivered
- Comprehensive service strategy in place
- Committed staff
- Good accommodation
- Additional services through partnership working
- Procedure manuals
- Health and safety policies and procedures
- Services integrated to mainstream
- Voids strategy
- Access to aids and adaptations
- Sensitive repairs and maintenance
- Multi-agency response

- Operational partnerships in evidence
- Supporting People preparations
- Clear vision for future direction of the service.

Weaknesses

- Lack of service standards
- Inconsistencies in service delivery
- Lack of needs mapping including relevant record keeping
- Low levels of awareness or services to meet needs of BME communities
- Lack of comprehensive data on dependency levels
- No or little care and support co-ordination
- Poor communication and little meaningful tenant involvement
- Poor accommodation
- No co-ordination or enabling additional services
- Poor internal and external environment
- Health and safety issues not addressed
- Role of Scheme Manager not defined and therefore problem and risks and inappropriate care burden on staff/expectations by tenants, relatives and care agencies
- Contribution of services not evaluated and therefore contribution to independent living overlooked or underestimated
- Lack of clarity about costs and charges
- No or poor voids strategy
- No or inadequate performance monitoring
- No clear and challenging aims for the service
- No strategy or vision for the service
- No links with other service areas or corporate/ departmental objectives
- Services not integrated into mainstream housing/ or other activities

5. WHAT JUDGEMENTS WILL THE INSPECTORS MAKE?

Recent inspections have assessed sheltered housing services under the following headings:

- Maintaining homes in good condition
- Letting homes
- Dealing with nuisance and anti-social behaviour
- Involving tenants in service delivery
- Ensuring services are sensitive to the needs of communities
- Services to customers
- Income management

Inspectors will make two judgements about the service provided. Firstly, they will look at how good the service actually is, and secondly, they will look at whether the service has the capacity to improve.

In order to make these kinds of judgements, the BV inspectors will ask a number of questions about the service provided. So, in order to prepare itself for inspection, the organisation should look at these questions, set out overleaf, and apply them critically to the sheltered housing service it provides.

HOUSING INSPECTORATE JUDGEMENT: HOW GOOD IS THE SERVICE?

Service aims and objectives: policies and guidelines

Inspectors look to see how a landlord has agreed the key aims for the service being inspected, how clear these aims are to the people that receive the service and whether these reflect the corporate aims of the organisation as a whole.

Housing Inspectorate Questions

- Are the landlord's aims clear and challenging?
- Has the organisation challenged the need for the service?
- Does the service support corporate aims and the community plan?

Housing Quality Network Suggested Tests:

Test	Comment	Current position	Improvement plan
Are national priorities and the local Supporting People strategy taken into account?			
Has the organisation challenged the way it plans and delivers the service?			
Are resources being maximised?			
Is there a local vision for the service?			
Do you know what you are seeking to achieve?			

Test	Comment	Current position	Improvement plan
Has the need for the service been properly challenged?			
Is the service consistent with the local Supporting People strategy for sheltered housing?			
Have the aims and policy objectives of the service been agreed by councillors/board members and the senior management team?			
Are the aims challenging enough to drive the organisation to deliver the service in a more relevant and appropriate way?			
Is there a long-term plan for sheltered housing?			
Does the plan include assessment of the need for extra-care and/or intermediate care?			
Does the plan link with the Council's community plan/housing association's			

Test	Comment	Current position	Improvement plan
business plan?			
Is there an Older Persons Housing Strategy in place linked to health, social care and other local strategies? <i>(See "Preparing Older People's Strategies" ODPM/DOH/Housing Corporation and "Quality and Choice for Older People's Housing" ODPM/DOH)</i>			
Is there a customer charter/service level agreement in place ie, does it define to customers what they can expect? (eg, number of visits per week from scheme manager, number of communal activities per month etc)			
Are the aims of the service translated into performance plans for individual scheme managers?			
Does the service meet specific needs of customers eg, hours of staff cover on a scheme?			
Is the service provision based on a clearly			

Test	Comment	Current position	Improvement plan
identified need? (eg, a need identified by housing needs survey, other data or on research.)			
Has there been consultation with service users (including those hard to reach) on service aims & targets?			

Meeting the aims

Having considered the aims the landlord has set for the service, inspectors make an assessment of how well the council is performing in meeting these aims. This includes an assessment of performance against specific standards and targets and the landlord's approach to measuring whether it is actually delivering what it sets out to do.

Policies in themselves will not achieve a good service - even if they are excellent, they are only as good as the people who implement and manage them. The organisation must have a detailed understanding of the customer, and this is particularly important with sheltered housing because of the intensity of customer contact. The organisation should therefore have a detailed profile of the tenants in its sheltered housing, including knowledge about age, gender, dependency levels and care and support needs of tenants using the service, in order to assess current and future needs.

This next set of questions summarises the main areas in which performance, and success in achieving the stated aims, can be measured. It focuses on the issue of actual service delivery.

Housing Inspectorate Questions

- Does the service meet its aims?
- Is there effective performance management?
- Is the organisation delivering?

Housing Quality Network Suggested Tests

Test	Comment	Current position	Improvement plan
How does the organisation track delivery within the sheltered housing service?			
Which Supporting People PIs have been adopted?			
Which Supporting People Service Objectives have been self-assessed?			
At the very minimum, are the Core Service Objectives met at level C?			
Is the service easy to access – is there a range of customer leaflets available in easy			

Test	Comment	Current position	Improvement plan
to access outlets eg, libraries, day centres?			
How accessible is the stock for minority groups (BME, people with mental health problems or learning difficulties etc)? What training has been done to help staff be more pro-active in reaching BME elders?			
Are there clear and up to date procedures that all staff are aware of and familiar with?			
<p>Do staff have training in these areas:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Health & safety • Abuse • Support planning • Diversity • Care co-ordination • Communication skills • Manual handling • Assertiveness • Food hygiene, first aid, fire safety? <p>Is there a standard detailed training plan for all sheltered housing staff?</p>			
Are staff offered long-term training and development opportunities eg, an NVQ			

Test	Comment	Current position	Improvement plan
qualification or National Housing Certificate?			
Do staff receive appropriate supervision and development opportunities?			
Are the performance plans of scheme managers monitored regularly, and performance against targets measured?			
Are there protocols in place to enable scheme managers' involvement in case conferences, assessments, hospital discharge planning? (using EROSH checklists)			
Is there scope for scheme managers to undertake the full housing management role within the scheme? Do they have access to computers?			
Are there individual care and support plans for each service user, against which service delivery is monitored?			
Is there a written statement of what service users can expect of their scheme manager?			

Test	Comment	Current position	Improvement plan
How clear is that agreement and does it represent what actually happens?			
How are users (including those difficult to reach) given information and involved in planning day-to-day activities, service evaluation and policymaking?			
What measures are in place to ensure there is adequate investment in sheltered housing in order to maintain desirable and lettable schemes?			
Are the results of satisfaction surveys monitored by ethnicity, gender, age and disability?			
Are there adequate access arrangements for those in wheelchairs and those with restricted mobility?			
Are health and safety and security and anti-burglary issues adequately addressed?			
Is demand for particular schemes measurable and are problems with lettings investigated and defined?			

Test	Comment	Current position	Improvement plan
Is there adequate analysis of the finances of the individual schemes to ensure that, in the case of local authorities, the HRA only meets additional costs of housing related support and net care costs are paid for by the General Fund?			
Are the staff to user ratios sufficient to mean that targets and service standards set out in the business plan can be met?			
Is the central control facility compliant with the standards of the Association of Social Alarm Providers (ASAP) Code of Practice?			
Is there scope for working with a social care provider to ensure services are responsive and meet customers changing needs? What are the quality and quantity of liaison arrangements?			
Are there good links in place with the local Supporting People Co-ordinator?			
Does the service provide good value for money for the organisation?			

Test	Comment	Current position	Improvement plan
Is the service revised in response to customer feedback?			
Is the service inclusive and non-discriminatory?			
Is the service forward looking?			

Comparing performance

Having reviewed policies and procedures, the inspectorate will also want to establish how these translate in performance terms.

Informed comparison provides a sound basis for performance management and is crucial to an effective review. Wherever possible, providers should aim to compare their performance against other suppliers across a range of sectors. The aim of the comparison exercise is less that of exact comparison and more that of exploration of how similar services are provided elsewhere and with what results. If this is explained to private providers (competitors) the issues around market sensitive information should be overcome. By comparing with other service providers, differences in service and performance can be identified as well as the reasons for them and where necessary improvements can be actioned over a period of time. Joining a benchmarking club (such as the HQNS sheltered housing benchmarking club) to look at key data often is a good way of achieving this.

It is a requirement of the Best Value regime that services be continuously improved and that all organisations strive to match the performance of the top 25% of councils by the end of a five-year period.

The following would be useful quantitative indicators to use as part of a benchmarking exercise, comparing to other sheltered housing providers.

Question	Response	Further Improvements
Unit cost of managing sheltered housing schemes, by category.		
Unit Supporting People costs		
Percentage of tenants with support plans		
Unit cost of repairs for sheltered housing		
Void turnaround		
Black and minority ethnic origin of sheltered housing users		
Ratio of staff to residents		

When comparing the service provided, ensure this comparison is carried out across the sheltered housing sector. There are, for example, a number of private sector companies providing and running sheltered housing schemes, and these should be included in any comparison. The comparisons carried out do not need to stop at the measurable PIs but can include a range of practices, from which much can be learned eg:

- How do other providers ensure care packages are provided to support residents?

- How is unpopular stock let?
- What are the benefits of conducting accompanied viewings with potential customers?
- Is there a regular scheme open day to promote equality of access and to develop waiting lists for unpopular schemes?
- How is tenant participation in the scheme promoted?
- How many communal activities are there in schemes and what range do they cover? (eg, lifelong learning activities)
- How do the job descriptions of scheme managers compare?
- What are the working hours of scheme managers and how is off site time covered (by mobile scheme managers, relief scheme managers or by central control?)
- If the scheme manager is resident, what is the reason for this (ie, if all night-time and weekend calls are fully dealt with by central control and mobile staff, question the point of a resident scheme manager service)

Housing Inspectorate Questions

- How does the organisation's performance compare?
- How does it compare with the top 25%?
- Has the organisation demonstrated cost effectiveness?

Housing Quality Network Suggested Tests

Test	Comment	Current position	Improvement plan
How does the service compare in terms of product/range of service provided?			

What is the cost of management and how does this compare with other providers?			
How can the service demonstrate value for money?			
How has competitiveness in service delivery been demonstrated?			

HOUSING INSPECTORATE JUDGEMENT: IS THE SERVICE GOING TO IMPROVE?

The BV review is the mechanism for ensuring organisations deliver continuous improvement in the services they provide. The Housing Inspectorate is concerned to know that the service currently provided is going to improve, and that this improvement is driven by the BV review. It must therefore ask the right questions, with a clear framework for the process, communicated to staff, relevant members and other stakeholders. It is suggested that providers take quite a wide view of the possible stakeholders. For example, it will be useful to consult other agencies that make and receive referrals from sheltered housing staff.

Housing Inspectorate Questions

- Does the BV review drive improvement?
- How good is the improvement plan?
- Will the organisation deliver the improvements?

This section of the workbook includes a review of the 4Cs and raises questions to check that they have been rigorously applied throughout the BV review. Clearly the tests are not exhaustive but they do provide a good basis for checking the links between the actual BV review and the improvement plan.

The 4Cs are Challenge, Consult, Compete, Compare.

Question	Response	Further Improvements
Challenge		
Has the organisation fundamentally challenged what it does?		

Question	Response	Further Improvements
How did the organisation demonstrate that it has openly challenged the form of its sheltered housing service, and who delivers it?		
Have the objectives, policies and practices been challenged?		
Has the landlord fundamentally challenged the need for and the shape of the service?		
Has the BV review identified the main issues facing the organisation that require action?		
Have the 4Cs been applied rigorously in the BV review?		
Have the levels of resources available now and in the future been examined realistically, and is the service sustainable given projected resource availability?		
Has the organisation looked seriously at different means of service delivery that could improve quality or efficiency?		

Question	Response	Further Improvements
Has the organisation acted on the results of the challenge element of the BV review? If not, why not?		
If status quo is being maintained, how can this be justified?		
Did the effect of challenge make a real difference to the way the organisation seeks to deliver services?		
Has the service been subjected to external scrutiny, with the involvement of key stakeholders?		
Consult		
Is the scope of the BV review wide enough to be able to promote a customer focus?		
What has the organisation done to talk to customers and other local people and stakeholders?		

Question	Response	Further Improvements
Is there a meaningful customer survey (with users and non users of the service) that is used to identify necessary improvements to service delivery?		
Did the results of the consultation process make a difference to what the organisation has decided to do?		
How has the organisation balanced the needs of customers with the political or service objectives?		
Are regular meetings held with stakeholders to review the service?		
Has the organisation consulted with the wider community eg, with potential customers in rented homes who would be eligible for sheltered housing?		
Are complaints about the service recorded, monitored and analysed?		

Question	Response	Further Improvements
Compete		
What has the organisation done to test whether another provider could provide the service more competitively?		
How does the cost of the service (separating out support) compare with what other organisations pay?		
If the service is provided directly, is the organisation convinced this is the most cost effective way?		
Has the organisation examined the external market for this service?		
Has the organisation looked at ways the service could be organised/ packaged to attract interest from other providers?		
Compare		
How does the organisations performance compare to others in terms of inputs, outputs and effective outcomes?		

Question	Response	Further Improvements
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What has been done to learn from others? What sort of benchmarking has been carried out? Have lessons been learned from the top performers?		
Did the comparisons inform the organisation about how its performance compared with others?		
Has the organisation acted on the results of this, if not why not? If it has, what difference will it make?		

The Improvement Plan

A BV review should produce an improvement plan that sets out what needs to improve, why, and how that improvement will be delivered. It should contain certain targets that are not only challenging but are also designed to demonstrate and ensure the continuous improvement necessary to put the service amongst the top 25% of councils within five years. The inspectors will want to see improvements targeted at areas that have been revealed as problematic by the review. Some of these will be quick fix; others will need to address serious flaws in the service.

How good is the improvement plan?

Question	Response	Further Improvements
<i>Are the planned improvements ambitious?</i>		
Has the organisation established an ambitious and timely improvement plan that flows directly from the BV review?		
Will the full implementation of the plan deliver substantial improvements from the current service?		
Are the areas requiring improvement reflected in the Improvement Plan?		
Does the plan: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Outline clear responsibilities and accountability for actions? • Outline the financial, human, and physical resource implications? • Set out clear and feasible timescales for improvement? • Outline the performance management arrangements for the Plan? • Have SMART goals? 		

Will the organisation deliver the improvements?

Question	Response	Further Improvements
<i>Does the plan have the commitment it needs from members and others?</i>		
Is there clear commitment among the organisation's members to deliver continuous improvements?		
Is there clear commitment among staff to deliver the planned improvements?		
Are members and staff capable of overseeing a 'change management' process?		
Are members and staff willing to take (and stick to) tough decisions and tackle difficult problems?		
Is there support for change from key players and stakeholders, and is this reflected in terms of commitment and accountability?		
<i>Does the organisation have the capacity and capability for managing both change and performance?</i>		
What changes have taken place since the BV review?		

Question	Response	Further Improvements
What plans are there for future improvement? Are they achievable? What is the timetable for these plans?		
Has the organisation any monitoring processes to track progress in implementing change?		
Is there a sustained focus on what matters (concentrating efforts on what matters most to local people and achieving impact in priority areas)?		
Are there sound performance management systems at the heart of financial and policy planning?		
Are there clear lines of accountability for action?		
Are there the skills required to build effective partnerships with other organisations to meet shared objectives?		
Is improvement seen as the day job and BV integrated with other management processes, not treated as an add-on?		

6. HOUSING QUALITY NETWORK SUGGESTED REALITY CHECKS

As part of their review, BV inspectors will look at the service from the customer's perspective, to check that actual service delivery matches what the organisation has said about the service it provides. HQN therefore recommends that organisations should carry out regular reality checks. Such checks for the sheltered housing service could include:

- Talking with agencies that come into contact with the sheltered housing service about their impressions of the service provided (e.g. primary care groups, carers, social services, Supporting People manager, relevant charities, members of voluntary organisations, other housing service employees)
- Talking with existing and potential tenants about the service and how well it meets their needs. Can they shed light on ideas for improvement, additional facilities required, how easy it was to access the service, the quality of accommodation, the extent of the services of the scheme manager and any other issues raised?
- Talking with scheme manager, mobile staff and staff at central control
- Making site visits to look at facilities and talk informally to residents
- Mystery shopping - making telephone enquiries of the service
- Randomly checking files to ensure documentation is in order
- Interviewing current and recent service users where this is possible to see what their experience of the service is – looking at the service through the eyes of a customer

7. USE OF THIS TOOLKIT FOR PEER REVIEW

A peer review is when a group of landlords come together to jointly assess each other's services. HQN have been involved in facilitating such reviews and would suggest that the following process could be worth adopting:

- Each landlord should complete the HQN Suggested Tests forms
- Each landlord should provide a summary of any important issues in relation to sheltered housing not covered by our Suggested Tests
- The peer review group should draw up a comparative report that sets out the responses to the Suggested Tests. This report should also draw out points of interest e.g. examples of good practice
- The peer review group should meet to discuss the report and share information on good practice

- The peer review groups should arrange to visit each other to undertake some of the reality checks suggested by HQN. A short report of findings and suggestions should be prepared after each visit
- The group should reconvene to discuss the findings of the visits
- Visits should be arranged to organisations with examples of good practice and innovation.

8. CONCLUSIONS

Sheltered housing is a complex area in which to conduct a BV review because of its numerous links with other older people's strategies and with other service areas, particularly housing management, lettings and the provision of central control where this is in-house. However, using this workbook it is possible to work methodically through the service review and to draw up a workable improvement plan. The advice we give in all our workbooks is to prepare early and to be aware of any shortcomings in the service prior to the inspectors' visit so that steps can be taken to build these into a working improvement plan. This will also help demonstrate the organisation's responsiveness to identified problems.

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