



SUMMARY REPORT

For presentation to KNH Delivery Committee 21 November 2014



The sixth investigation for KFTRA Tenant Scrutiny examined the processes used to carry out estate inspections across the Kirklees district.

This topic was prioritised by the KFTRA Overview and Scrutiny Board following concerns from TRA representatives that there were differences in the way inspections were conducted across Kirklees Neighbourhood Housing estates.

Terms of Reference

'To examine the current arrangements for estate inspections and consider whether they are providing value for money for KNH, tenants and elected members'.



The objectives of the task were to;

- Examine the outcomes and value of estate inspections;
- Consider best practice models across Kirklees;
- Further consider the arrangements made in estates that do not have a TRA presence;
- Benchmark with other housing providers in Kirklees and other areas;
- Consider whether current estate inspections offer value for money and propose other models if relevant;
- Examine the partnership approach between TRAs, housing officers and elected members as regards estate inspections;
- Consider how information concerning estate inspections is communicated with tenants, residents and leaseholders;
- Monitor how current response times meet with the quality guarantee standards.

The Panel's investigation included;

- A series of meetings and interviews with officers from Kirklees Neighbourhood Housing and Kirklees Streetscene;
- Benchmarking with other housing providers, locally and nationally;
- Surveys of Housing Officers, Tenants and Residents Associations (TRAs) and Community Voices (CVs), and Elected members.

Estate Inspections

Carrying out regular estate inspections is part of a housing officer's role. Inspections are intended to be carried out alongside individuals who can represent the views of tenants, residents and leaseholders. They are useful to be able to identify issues that may be missed during the housing officer's day-to-day calls and to discuss priorities for the estate.



KEY FINDINGS

The Panel has prioritised its recommendations A to H and the supporting evidence for each finding is listed;

Priority ranking	Recommendation
A	Ownership of estate inspections – That KNH housing officers should continue to co-ordinate estate inspections.
The Evidence: <ul style="list-style-type: none">➤ Panel members considered estate inspections to provide a good opportunity for housing officers and tenants to work together and were pleased that the majority of TRAs had good working relationships with their housing officers. Good relationships are useful not only for ensuring that inspections are comprehensive and safe but also for broader purposes of improved communication and trust.➤ Options of developing models based on ‘street champions’ or ‘estate inspectors’ were considered, but rejected. It was felt to be of particular importance that housing officers see the issues for themselves rather than relying on second-hand information from tenants.➤ Respondents across all three survey categories (Housing Officers; TRAs and Community Voices; and Elected Members) were supportive of estate inspections, despite some negative comments. The importance of estate inspections was ranked as nine out of ten for TRAs and eight out of ten for Elected Members. Only 16% of housing officers thought that they were never worthwhile. The majority of survey replies commented that it was a valued process.➤ The Panel were satisfied that the system is fairly inexpensive and seems to work reasonably well. Value for money is provided by estate inspections in terms of service delivery, quality and investment.	



Priority ranking	Recommendation
B	<p>Policy/procedure and working documents - That KNH documents should be developed and should include the standard systems to be adhered to, in particular;</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Standardisation and version control of all inspection forms to include;<ul style="list-style-type: none">○ Dates when issues have been referred;○ Information on who it has been referred to and any comments;○ Target dates for completion;○ An update section for progress on outstanding issues.• Guidance for both housing officers and other attendees on what an estate inspection should include and a checklist for use by all attending the inspection;• Notification deadlines for issues raised during estate inspections i.e. not only the referral immediately after the inspection, but regular progress reports to each TRA meeting.
<p>The Evidence:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">➤ The Panel felt that shadow training of housing officers in how to carry out estate inspections could lead to the reinforcement of bad behaviours. This is leading to a lack of accountability for estate inspections.➤ The examples of estate inspection reports shared with the Panel highlighted that the forms used have been adapted and amended by individual housing officers over time, leading to a wide variation in design and layout of the forms used.➤ The Panel were keen to ensure that the estate inspection form was standardised and that proposed timescales and progress updates were included.➤ 40% of TRAs responding to the survey stated that they did not receive regular updates on the progress being made with the issues raised by estate inspections.	



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- It was appreciated that not all housing officers are able to attend TRA meetings. However it would be useful if an up-to-date list of outstanding issues could be shared with the TRA and elected member prior to every TRA meeting.
- The surveys of housing officers found that there was some variation in the issues considered during estate inspections.
- Other housing providers used checklists to ensure that all officers and attendees were consistent in their approach to estate inspections.

Priority ranking	Recommendation
C	<p>Use of Technology – That KNH should explore improving the use of technology for estate inspections to assist with the recording and sharing of information and the monitoring of inspections.</p> <p>The Evidence:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Estate inspections have not as yet been reviewed as part of the LEAN process and there are no plans to do so in the near future. However, smarter working processes coming from other LEAN reviews, such as better use of technology, may well be rolled out to make improvements to estate inspection procedures. ➤ The Panel was keen to explore the use of technology in the estate inspection process. There was agreement that appropriate technology could reduce housing officer time before and after inspections, and could improve the sharing of information and the monitoring/supervision of estate inspections. ➤ The use of improved technology would also help with the need to standardise and version control the inspection forms used by housing officers.



Priority ranking	Recommendation
D	<p>Frequency of Inspections – That KNH should;</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Continue with their arrangement of a default position of quarterly inspections for each estate and agreeing any variations by the use of a signed agreement form.• Ensure that all variation forms be signed by at least two officials representing the TRA.• Ensure that all variations be reviewed on an annual basis and again signed by two TRA officials.
<p>The Evidence:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">➤ The standard frequency of inspections is that they are carried out on a quarterly basis. Housing officers can vary this frequency by the completion of a variation form that is signed by the TRA Chair or Vice Chair (if a TRA is in operation on that estate).➤ One housing officer stated that they would only carry out inspections when they had time. This officer also responded that they did not have a TRA or Community Voice operating on their estate.➤ Variation agreements are only signed by the Chair or Vice Chair of the TRA. The Panel felt that an issue as important as estate inspections should be agreed with all TRA members and at the very least with the four TRA officials.➤ There is no standard interval for the review of variation agreements; this is decided by the housing officer and TRA representative if applicable.	



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Priority ranking	Recommendation
E	<p>Elected member attendance on estate inspections – That KNH should ensure that all efforts are made by housing officers to build a relationship with their elected members establishing;</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Whether the elected member would like to attend an inspection (at least once a year); and• What time would be most convenient for the elected member to attend. <p>This relationship is of particular importance on estates without TRAs.</p>

The Evidence:

- Councillor attendance is recorded on the inspection report for each estate, but this information is not collated centrally. This means that an accurate figure for Councillor attendance was not available for the Panel.
- Three of the housing officers surveyed stated that they would *not* invite elected members to accompany their estate inspections.
- In the majority of cases, the date for an estate inspection is agreed firstly between the housing officer and the TRA. The Elected Member is then invited to fit in with this date.
- In the survey of elected members, 20% of Councillors responded that they were never invited to attend estate inspections, and 40% were only invited sometimes.
- Only half of the elected members surveyed said that they would attend estate inspections on a regular basis. All Councillors gave competing priorities and other commitments as their reason for not always attending.
- The Panel considered elected member attendance on estate inspections to be invaluable, particularly on estates without a TRA presence. They were keen to ensure that every effort should be made by housing officers to develop a relationship with their elected members. They should find out the best times for elected members to attend and try to ensure that they do attend at least once a year. Elected members should be encouraged to attend all inspections on estates without TRAs.



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F	<p>Notice of the estate inspection – That KNH works closely with KFTRA and TRAs to develop a means of providing notice of estate inspections to all relevant tenants, residents and leaseholders. This should include providing the opportunity for tenants, residents and leaseholders to raise issues before the inspection.</p>
<p>The Evidence:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">➤ Currently notice of inspections is given to TRA representatives but not to all the tenants and residents living on KNH estates.➤ Increased value for money from estate inspections could be achieved by encouraging input from the people living on estates. This would make identification of issues easier, residents more involved in looking after the estates, and tenancy issues more likely to be put right before the inspection.➤ The Panel were keen to explore the approach of notifying tenants and residents prior to estate inspections taking place. It would be useful to post a notification card through letter boxes or put posters up to give tenants and residents the chance to raise issues that they would like to be investigated during the estate inspection.	



Priority ranking	Recommendation
G	<p>Relationship with Getting the Site Right inspectors – KNH to ensure that;</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Streetscene officers are invited to at least one inspection for each estate every year and that this is recorded;• Estate inspections and Getting the Site Right systems work symbiotically to avoid duplication of effort but to allow for easier communication between officers e.g. exploration of the development of a shared database.
<p>The Evidence:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">➤ Estate Inspections and ‘Getting the Site Right’ run alongside each other with some of the same issues being raised across both schemes.➤ Streetscene officers do not attend all estate inspections as they feel that this does not provide a good use of staff time as they would be looking at other issues as well as their own.➤ It has been agreed that grounds maintenance staff should be invited to one estate inspection every year (in autumn) for each estate. However, it was thought that notification is not always received.➤ An analysis has not been carried out to assess how many issues reported during estate inspections have been previously raised by ‘Getting the Site Right Inspectors’.➤ Panel Members considered whether ‘Getting the Site Right’ tenant inspectors should attend the estate inspections to follow up on the grounds maintenance issues raised. However it was felt that this may not be effective as not all inspectors were actively involved and most tended to already report issues through housing officers.➤ Improvements in the sharing of database information may improve the relationship between the two systems and reduce duplication.	



Priority ranking	Recommendation
H	<p>Estates with no TRA – That KNH ensures inspections of estates with no TRA are carried out with at least one other person in attendance i.e. an elected member in the first instance, or failing this, a neighbouring TRA.</p>
<p>The Evidence:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">➤ There are approximately 45% of Council homes in Kirklees without a TRA or Community Voice operating on their estates.➤ On estates without TRAs, the Housing Officer will be the representative for the tenant led budgets and will also be able to vary the frequency of estate inspections without agreement from a tenant representative.➤ From the survey of TRAs, it was found that 14 respondents (44%) were willing to attend an inspection on a neighbouring estate if there was no TRA operating in that area.➤ The Panel felt that it is even more important that an elected member is encouraged to attend inspections on estates without TRAs to provide some check and balance for the housing officer and to represent the residents. If an elected member could not be secured to attend estate inspections, the Panel would encourage housing officers to approach neighbouring TRA representatives to request that they attend.➤ Three housing officers reported feeling unsafe when carrying out estate inspections alone. Accompanied inspections with elected members or other TRA representatives would reduce this feeling.	



Priority ranking	Recommendation
I	<p>Training and information for volunteer TRA representatives – That KNH develop a training package and/or an information pack for volunteers attending estate inspections. This should be developed in partnership with KFTRA.</p>
<p>The Evidence:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">➤ There is little information for tenants to know about what to expect from estate inspections other than a leaflet produced by Kirklees Federation of Tenants and Residents Associations.➤ Over the years, articles covering estate inspections have appeared in the KNH magazine 'Door to Door', but officers were unsure about the date of the last article. The magazine is currently published every six months. Circulation has recently been reduced to include tenants only, whereas residents and leaseholders previously received the publication too.➤ Currently there is guidance on the website and in a leaflet on how to make a complaint about KNH services, including concerns about estate inspections. The Panel felt that few concerns and suggestions for improving estate inspections would be received unless those attending knew what to expect from the process.➤ Panel members felt that there is a need for more clarity for all attendees on what estate inspections should include and how to raise concerns, particularly tenants and TRA representatives. This could be in the form of guidance or a checklist.	

The full report includes further detail of each recommendation and the related evidence, incorporating 'Panel Views' sections for ease of reading. The summary table on pages 33-35 of the report references the recommendations to the relevant text.