

Housing Association Inspection Report

February 2007



# Housing Management Services

**Mosscafe Housing Limited**

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For further information on the work of the Commission please contact:

Audit Commission, 1st Floor, Millbank Tower, Millbank, London SW1P 4HQ

Tel: 020 7828 1212 Fax: 020 7976 6187 Textphone (minicom): 020 7630 0421

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## Housing Association Inspections

The Audit Commission is an independent body responsible for ensuring that public money is spent economically, efficiently and effectively and delivers high-quality local services for the public.

Within the Audit Commission, the Housing Inspectorate inspects and monitors the performance of a number of bodies and services. These include local authority housing departments, local authorities administering Supporting People programmes, arms length management organisations and housing associations. Our key lines of enquiry (KLOEs) set out the main issues which we consider when forming our judgements on the quality of services. The KLOEs can be found on the Audit Commission's website at [www.audit-commission.gov.uk/housing](http://www.audit-commission.gov.uk/housing).

For housing associations our inspection role and remit is set out in sections 41(A) and 41(B) of the Audit Commission Act 1998 (as amended by section 109 of the Local Government Act 2003), and is in line with the Audit Commission's strategic regulation principles. In broad terms, these principles look to minimise the burden of regulation while maximising its impact. To meet these principles this inspection:

- is proportionate to risk and the performance of the association;
- judges the quality of the service for service users and the value for money of the service;
- promotes further improvements in the service; and
- has cost no more than is necessary to safeguard the public interest.

We are committed to working in partnership with other regulators, and the Audit Commission and the Housing Corporation are working together to improve the performance and efficiency of housing associations. Our shared objectives are to ensure that associations provide services for the diverse range of customers in their areas of operation, high standards of customer services and access, and value for money for both customers and the taxpayer.

The Housing Corporation is the statutory body which regulates housing associations to ensure that they are well governed, well managed and financially viable, as set out in its Regulatory Code. Its lead regulation staff work with housing inspectors to ensure that there is adequate information provided for the inspection and that the inspected body implements recommendations in the inspection report. The overall findings of the inspection are also used to inform the Housing Corporation Assessment (HCA) which determines eligibility for further public investment and may influence the Housing Association's future business prospects.

## Summary

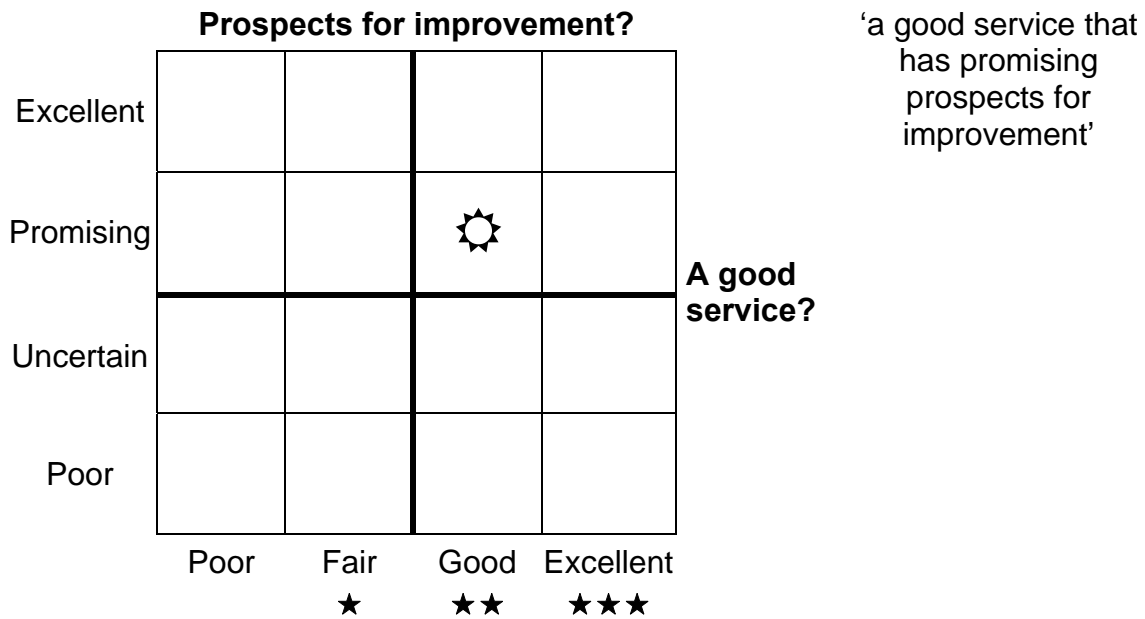
- 1 Overall, Mossclare provides a good housing service that has promising prospects for improvement.
- 2 Mossclare's purpose and mission is to provide a caring and enabling housing service, committed to communities and to individuals. These objectives sit well with national and regional agendas and their delivery is evidenced in Mossclare's creation of sustainable change in some of the country's most deprived neighbourhoods.
- 3 Customer satisfaction with the service and with opportunities for involvement are high, and compare with the top 25 per cent of housing associations. Equality and diversity is considered very positively. Challenging targets are set and achieved for Black and Minority Ethnic (BME) representation at Board level, amongst staff and for lettings.
- 4 Over 99 per cent of homes are compliant with the Decent Homes Standard and energy ratings place Mossclare among the top performing associations.
- 5 The approach to neighbourhood and to community development is a positive feature which adds to initiatives for dealing with anti-social behaviour (ASB). Preventative and diversionary measures complement support for victims and for perpetrators, and ensure that enforcement actions are appropriate. Value for money underpins Mossclare's work and there is a positive emphasis on delivering improvements for tenants and for communities within limited resources.
- 6 There are some areas where the association has not made sufficient progress. Not all offices or communal areas in schemes are compliant with the access requirements of the Disability Discrimination Act (DDA). Some service and communication standards are not monitored.
- 7 Asset Management is weak in some areas, the implications of the Housing Health and Safety Rating System (HHSRS) have not been planned for effectively; quality assurance of gas servicing and installations is not robust, and planned maintenance programmes are not effective in reducing the amount of responsive repairs. The repairs appointment system is not appropriately monitored.
- 8 Prospects for improvement are promising. Over the last three years key performance indicators show a reasonable level of performance with several areas comparing to the top performing associations. There are clear examples of learning from partners and using this to benefit tenants and communities. Several key improvements have been delivered that both maximise value and improve the experience of customers. There is an open style of leadership, staff are committed to delivering positive outcomes for tenants and are supported in their work by structured supervision, training and development. Mossclare has developed the trust and confidence of partners, tenants and communities which provides a firm platform for improvement.

- 9 Some barriers to improvement exist. Difficulties remain in re-letting properties promptly and in collecting outstanding rent and although there has been some recent improvement, this is not a sustained trend. Some gaps in strategic planning do not help the association to co-ordinate or resource activities although we noted that improvements in business planning and performance management are emerging. Modern procurement although evident has not been implemented in the area of responsive repairs. Some performance reports do not give a complete picture including outcomes for customers, trends and comparisons with others. The Corporate Risk Register and risk management arrangements are under-developed and service reviews have been too narrow in scope.

## Scoring the service

- 10 We have assessed Mosscafe Housing Limited as providing a 'good', two-star service that has promising prospects for improvement. Our judgements are based on the evidence obtained during the inspection and are outlined below.

**Figure 1 Scoring chart<sup>1</sup>**



Source: Audit Commission

- 11 We found the service to be good because it has a range of strengths including the following.
- Customer satisfaction with the service and with opportunities to participate are high and compare with the top 25 per cent of housing associations nationally and this is especially significant given the challenging nature of the areas in which the association works.
  - There is a good range of customer focussed publications including high-quality quarterly newsletters, a comprehensive tenants' handbook, and a suite of 22 leaflets offered in other formats and 13 languages.
  - Clear Service Standards which have been agreed with tenants.
  - A robust complaints procedure with compensation paid where appropriate.

<sup>1</sup> The scoring chart displays performance in two dimensions. The horizontal axis shows how good the service or function is now, on a scale ranging from no stars for a service that is poor (at the left-hand end) to three stars for an excellent service (right-hand end). The vertical axis shows the improvement prospects of the service, also on a four-point scale.

- A clear Equality and Diversity Strategy with actions reflecting a strong commitment to responding to community needs and aspirations.
  - Challenging diversity targets are set, monitored and achieved for Board and staff representation as well as for lettings.
  - The response to domestic violence is progressive and staff are supported to deal appropriately with the issue by comprehensive procedures and by training.
  - Over 99 per cent of homes are compliant with the Decent Homes standard and energy ratings equate with the national top quartile performers.
  - The response repairs service is easily accessed and repair diagnostic software is used to assist with accurate specification of work.
  - Re-letting performance is improving and there are arrangements for quick turn around of voids. The void standard is comprehensive and has been developed with tenants.
  - The adaptations service meets tenants' needs and there are constructive partnerships with other agencies to ensure that resources are sufficient and that practices are effective.
  - Tenants in arrears are assisted with relevant advice and sensitive arrangements to pay. Where necessary enforcement action is measured and appropriate.
  - The approach to dealing with anti-social behaviour (ASB) balances support and enforcement. Mosscares approach to neighbourhood and community regeneration includes preventative measures and diversionary activities. There is an evident emphasis on capacity building in communities.
  - Both victims and perpetrators can access support, such approaches are clearly focussed on long term solutions.
  - There are numerous examples of value improvements relating both to reductions in costs and to initiatives that add value for tenants and for wider communities.
- 12** However, there are some areas which require improvement. These include the following.
- Not all offices or communal areas in schemes are compliant with the requirements of the Disability Discrimination Act.
  - Not all service standards are measured, in particular communication standards are not uniformly measured, monitored and reported.
  - Several strategies are not thorough in coverage and some are used inconsistently.
  - The use of impact assessments is superficial and inconsistent.

## 10 Housing Management Services | Scoring the service

- Asset management has some weaknesses, for example, the strategy lacks reference to the implications of the Housing Health and Safety Rating System. Quality assurance of gas servicing is insufficient, and planned maintenance programmes are not effective in reducing responsive repairs.
- Mossclare has not serviced non hard-wired smoke alarms.
- The repairs appointment system is not monitored, the level of repairs variations is not known in cost terms and the number of repairs completed at the first visit is not known.
- Arrears letters are not easy to understand although the approach taken with vulnerable tenants is positive. Rent statements are not user friendly.
- Annual efficiency commitments have not been delivered fully and monitoring has been insufficient. There is little evidence of transactional costs being known and used to direct improvement.
- Some reviews of services are limited in scope and lack fundamental challenge.

### 13 The service has promising prospects for improvement due to the following reasons.

- There are numerous examples of service improvements that tenants will experience including examples where additional funding and resources have been levered in to improve neighbourhood regeneration.
- Internal audit has been used effectively to focus improvement. Follow up actions have been thorough.
- Performance indicators show reasonable performance with top quartile outcomes in several areas.
- Mossclare demonstrate continuing focus on improvement through a range of ongoing initiatives. The current Good to Excellent (G2E) programme is driving several improvements including business planning and performance management.
- There is a track record of service reviews involving customers and leading to positive improvements.
- There are positive examples of learning from and through partnerships including walkabouts at estates and schemes, data sharing with the Police and Greater Manchester Anti-Social Behaviour Team and Business Plus initiatives with numerous positive outcomes for communities and tenants.
- There is an open style of leadership and a positive record of staff and tenant engagement. Staff are valued and supported by structured training and development opportunities.
- Mossclare's neighbourhood and community regeneration activity builds the confidence of partners, tenants and communities and provides a firm basis on which to improve.

14 However, there are a number of barriers to improvement. These include the following.

- Although improving, some KPIs are in the bottom quartile; rent arrears and void turnaround have been bottom quartile nationally for the last three years.
- Strategic planning has not been comprehensive in some areas. Some strategies mix policy and process and others do not fully reflect current and intended initiatives.
- Performance evaluation is lacking in some areas for example in repairs and maintenance. Performance reports lack the use of comprehensive trend information, comparisons with other organisations and reference to national quartile performance.
- There have been gains from modern procurement/partnering but the responsive repairs service is yet to be procured in this way.
- The Corporate Risk Register is not sophisticated and does not enable comprehensive risk management. Improvement has very recently begun.
- Best value reviews are limited in scope and have yet to consider fundamental issues. They are in effect process reviews.

## Recommendations

- 15 To rise to the challenge of continuous improvement, organisations need inspection reports that offer practical pointers for improvement. Our recommendations identify the expected benefits for both local people and the organisation. In addition, we identify the approximate costs<sup>2</sup> and indicate the priority we place on each recommendation and key dates for delivering these where they are considered appropriate. In this context, the inspection team recommends that the Association shares the findings of this report with tenants and board members, and addresses all weaknesses identified in the report. Associations forming part of a group structure should share the lessons and findings of the report amongst the wider group. The inspection team makes the following recommendations.

### **Recommendation**

*R1 Strengthen focus on customers by:*

- *ensuring that compliance with the requirements of the Disability Discrimination Act is achieved in all offices and communal areas of schemes;*
- *ensuring that all service standards are monitored and reported at appropriate levels;*
- *completing the tenant profiling project, establishing arrangements for updating information over time and ensuring that tenants communication needs are pro-actively responded to; and*
- *improving the clarity of arrears letters and rent statements.*

The expected benefits of this recommendation are:

- services that are delivered to consistently high standards; and
- meeting tenants' access and communication needs more appropriately.

The implementation of this recommendation will have high impact with medium costs. This should be implemented by December 2007.

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<sup>2</sup> Low cost is defined as less than 1 per cent of the annual service cost, medium cost is between 1 and 5 per cent and high cost is over 5 per cent.

**Recommendation**

*R2 Improve Value for Money across the service by:*

- *establishing the transactional costs for key services: Response Repairs, Allocations and Letting, Housing Income Management and Customer Services. Using this information to review service provision;*
- *developing benchmarking to encompass comparisons between approaches to service provision, costs and outcomes for customers. Use this to inform fundamental reviews;*
- *improving the monitoring of annual efficiency commitments;*
- *further developing modern procurement in key areas, in particular in the delivery of response repairs; and*
- *establishing a programme of fundamental service reviews. Integrating outcomes with operational planning and resourcing.*

The expected benefits of this recommendation are:

- improved knowledge of the costs of service provision in key areas;
- increased economy, efficiency and effectiveness in key areas of service; and
- better informed and fundamental reviews of services.

The implementation of this recommendation will have high impact with medium costs. This should be implemented by September 2007.

**Recommendation**

*R3 Improve Asset Management by:*

- *evaluating the level of responsive repair variations and 'right first time' orders and acting upon findings to improve the level of customer satisfaction;*
- *ensuring that the repairs appointment system is rigorously monitored;*
- *establishing programmes of repair and renewal that pro-actively plan for the short, medium and longer terms and align the proportion of planned to responsive (revenue) repairs more closely with Audit Commission best practice guidance;*
- *ensuring that smoke detector maintenance is rigorously undertaken and included within future routine maintenance programmes; and*
- *ensuring that the implications of the Housing Health and Safety Rating System are rigorously evaluated in terms of the potential effect on compliance with the Decent Homes Standard and that suitable plans are put in place to mitigate risks.*

## 14 Housing Management Services | Recommendations

The expected benefits of this recommendation are:

- reduced failure of components and reduced inconvenience for tenants;
- ensuring that landlord obligations are met; and
- ongoing compliance with Decent Homes requirements.

The implementation of this recommendation will have high impact with medium costs. With regard to the servicing of smoke alarms this should be **implemented with immediate effect**. Other elements of this recommendation should be implemented by September 2007.

### **Recommendation**

*R4 Improve the strategic, performance reporting and planning framework by:*

- *ensuring that corporate risks are thoroughly assessed and that appropriate risk management is reflected in strategies and in operational plans and delivery;*
- *establishing a framework for strategy and policy review ensuring that these documents are well informed by sector best practice, adequately assess strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats as well as national policy requirements;*
- *ensuring that strategies are consistently used to shape and to resource actions;*
- *undertaking Impact Assessments on all new strategies, policies and procedures that are thorough and informed by tenants and where applicable community consultation; and*
- *ensuring that performance reports are comprehensive and include trend and quartile comparisons as well as monitoring of customer outcomes.*

The expected benefits of this recommendation are:

- corporate risks will be more thoroughly assessed and managed;
- thorough strategic planning, policy development and performance reporting; and
- consistent actions that accord with strategy.

The implementation of this recommendation will have high impact with low costs. This should be implemented by September 2007.

- 16 We would like to thank the staff of Mosscafe Housing Limited who made us welcome and who met our requests efficiently and courteously.

Dates of inspection: 4 to 8 December 2006

**Regional contact details**

Audit Commission

Kernel House

Killingbeck Drive

Killingbeck

Leeds, LS14 6UF

Telephone: 0113 251 7130

Fax: 0113 251 7131

[www.audit-commission.gov.uk](http://www.audit-commission.gov.uk)

# Report

## Context

### The locality

- 17 Mosscare is a charitable housing association based in Moss Side Manchester and operating in some of the most challenging wards in the country. Eighty six per cent of the stock falls within wards that score within the top 5 per cent of deprivation in the country. Over 50 per cent of Mosscare's stock is based in Mosside and Openshaw (Bradford Ward) which are ranked within the top 1 per cent in England of the Index of Multiple Deprivation by ward (2000). Stock in Trafford is located in the Clifford ward which has the highest level of deprivation in Trafford.
- 18 A significant proportion of stock falls within the Manchester and Salford Housing Market Renewal Pathfinder areas. These areas present challenges. For example in Old Trafford, Moss Side, Whalley Range and Longsight there is a high incidence of drug and gun related crime. A recent fatal shooting received national and international attention. Media coverage has resurrected a negative image of the area which Mosscare and others have worked hard to counteract.
- 19 Mosscare has grown from its roots in the Moss Side and Whalley Range wards. In the Higher Openshaw area Mosscare's community development approach has underpinned the redevelopment of a 130 unit estate. Work here led to the transfer of 119 units from another housing association and to the tenants of two Manchester City Council estates voting for the transfer of their homes to Mosscare in 2003. Improvements were completed in 2005, and the area is seen as a flagship within the East Manchester New Deal for Communities area.
- 20 In Carrbrook, Stalybridge, Mosscare work with , the Carrbrook Housing Co-operative. The transfer of 104 houses and flats took place in 2003 and improvement works were completed in 2004.
- 21 In Spring 2004 tenants of the Manchester City Council Footballers Estate in Mosside voted for the transfer of 242 homes to Mosscare. Improvement works are well advanced.

### The association

- 22 Mosscare Housing Limited was founded in 1967 by the South West Council of Churches in the Moss Side area of Manchester.
- 23 The association has a non-charitable subsidiary, Mossbank Homes, a development company, Mosscare Developments Limited and an associate, Reviva Urban Renewal Limited. The work of the group is directed by the Mosscare Housing Board and its five sub-committees.
- 24 The Board of Management comprises 15 members, three of which are tenants nominated via the association's tenants' panel.

- 25 Mosscares owns and manages over 3,300 properties in the Greater Manchester areas of:
- Manchester;
  - Salford;
  - Stockport;
  - Tameside; and
  - Trafford.
- 26 The majority (3,037 units) of stock is general needs, 131 units are sheltered and 253 bed spaces are supported. Growth has been achieved through small scale developments and five small scale stock transfers.

### **The service**

- 27 Mosscares has a staff of 92 organised into a specialist team structure which was reviewed in 2004. There are seven Housing Services Teams:
- Income Generation: focussed on reducing levels of rent arrears;
  - Asset Management/Maintenance Team;
  - Neighbourhood and Community Liaison: focussing on neighbourhoods, promoting opportunities for tenant involvement and dealing with anti-social behaviour;
  - Community Allocations: allocations and lettings;
  - Home ownerships and initiatives: leaseholder services and management agreements;
  - Supported Housing: aimed at supported housing and furnished tenancies; and
  - Continuous Improvement: developing customer care, access, involvement and diversity, promoting and encouraging new initiatives and service improvement.

These teams are supported by Finance, Information and Communication Technology (ICT), Human Resources, Marketing and secretarial teams.

- 28 Operational plans linked to the Business Plan were introduced in 2005 for each operational team. Mosscares are currently working with consultants on a 'Good to Excellent' European Foundation for Quality Management (EFQM) initiative developing the approach to performance management and improving operational and business planning.
- 29 Annual turnover is currently £11.2m with a projected surplus of £307,000:
- the budget for human resources and housing management is £4.8m;
  - the budget for repairs (revenue) £2.7m; and
  - the budget for capital repairs and maintenance is £0.56m.

## How good is the service?

### What has the service aimed to achieve?

30 Mosscare's stated purpose and mission is to:

*'lend a hand to help the homeless by the provision of a caring and enabling housing service at an affordable price'.*

Mosscare aims to be 'a high-quality housing association committed to communities and to individuals in the City of Manchester, the boroughs of Stockport, Tameside and Trafford and other surrounding areas where quality housing and housing related services can be delivered'.

31 The Business Plan 2006–2010 establishes three key challenges for Mosscare as a way of enacting this mission and purpose:

- to deliver continuously improving, high-quality, high value housing services which are sensitive to individuals and which deliver efficiency gains;
- to go for growth; and
- to focus on neighbourhood regeneration, being sensitive to communities.

### Is the service meeting the needs of the local community and users?

#### Access and customer care

32 Strengths outweigh weaknesses in this area. Mosscare demonstrates a strong commitment to customer care. Arrangements for accessing services are varied, service standards have been agreed with customers, the quality of information for tenants is high and satisfaction is routinely assessed and robustly acted upon. Complaints are dealt with within published timescales and are used as an opportunity to learn and to improve. Comprehensive resident profile information is still being collected and its use is variable at present. The area offices and some communal areas within sheltered and supported schemes are not fully compliant with Disability Discrimination Act requirements.

- 33 Customers can access Mosscares services in a range of ways. Offices are conveniently located near to housing, and services can be accessed via telephone, internet, and by personal visit to the office. Some communication is innovative, for example, there is a webcam linked directly to Manchester Advice enabling tenants to access free benefit and other advice. Information kiosks have been installed at the head office, one of which is accessible 24 hours a day, seven days a week. For tenants who live more remotely, Mosscares use an exhibition trailer with mobile office facilities. Saturday morning appointments are offered for all repairs and for inspections. The range of options available for tenants to access services reflects a keen focus on customers needs.
- 34 Offices are welcoming and include a good range of information, together with facilities for personal interviews. There is a comprehensive range of well-presented and informative information. These include 22 leaflets in 13 different languages, with some already translated into the most commonly requested languages. Information is displayed to signpost customers to other agencies who can provide practical help and advice on a range of situations. Interview rooms are available for private discussions with staff. They were clean and well decorated, contain IT facilities and are spacious enough for wheelchair or pushchair access.
- 35 However, not all offices are fully compliant with the access requirements of the Disability Discrimination Act (DDA). The offices at Carrbrook and Openshaw have steps to the entrance which could hinder access. There are arrangements in place at the Openshaw office for use of a community house next door as a temporary measure for interviews. Compliance with the legislation has been required for two years and it is a significant weakness that tenants or staff with limited mobility experience access difficulties.
- 36 Comprehensive service standards are in place. These are promoted in a variety of ways; through posters and leaflets and within the tenants' handbook. It is a weakness however, that not all standards are routinely monitored and reported upon, for example the answering of telephones within five rings. In the main tenants are aware of the level of service they can expect.
- 37 Tenants have contributed to the development of standards and priorities. Both within the consultation structure and as members of the tenants' panel and the Board and sub-committees, tenants are able to influence the way in which Mosscares operates. Communication standards, agreed with tenants are publicised widely. This ensures that standards and priorities accord with the needs and wishes of customers.
- 38 Mosscares use a pool of approximately 50 mystery shoppers and tenant inspectors on a regular basis to evaluate their service provision. Shoppers' reports are evaluated and actions and targets planned. This is an effective way of testing service provision. The rigorous follow up of actions demonstrates Mosscares' commitment to good customer service.

- 39 A wide range of methods are used to ensure that information about rights and responsibilities is available to all tenants. The tenancy agreements and handbook are offered in translated and other formats. New tenants receive information at sign up and at an initial visit after four weeks. This approach reduces any possibility of misunderstandings and enables assistance at an early stage.
- 40 Complaints are dealt with effectively. Complaints and comments leaflets are a visible part of the suite of information leaflets displayed in each office. They contain information about making a complaint and how Mosscares will respond within set timescales. Monitoring against stated standards is routinely undertaken. An annual survey is carried out among tenants who have made a complaint to assess their satisfaction with the process. This is reported to the Housing Services sub-committee. Mosscares take complaints about the service seriously and seek both to resolve dissatisfaction and to learn from experience.
- 41 Compensation is paid where a complaint warrants it. Staff have discretion to make payments where appropriate within clear guidelines. This underlines the importance of resolving issues appropriately and ensures that tenants are not disadvantaged because of the way that their service has been provided.
- 42 Tenants are effectively engaged and contribute to service development. Tenants appreciate Mosscares' efforts to involve them and comment positively about the helpfulness of staff. Feedback for tenants is provided in a variety of ways; by newsletter, notices in offices, leaflet drops, residents meetings, and the annual tenants meeting. Tenants are aware of the contributions they make to the service.
- 43 Resident profiling is incomplete. An intensive exercise was carried out early in 2006 to obtain key information from tenants. This is currently 56 per cent complete with a target date for completion of December 2007. Although there are some examples where knowledge of individuals' needs informs communication, this is not consistently the case. For example, rent arrears letters are not automatically produced in a large font even where this is a known requirement. This is a missed opportunity to use information as it is being gathered and tenants may not receive communications in their preferred manner.
- 44 However, some use is being made of the profile information as it emerges. Information has been used, to identify young people or people from particular Black and Minority Ethnic (BME) populations and in several cases they have been asked to contribute their views through surveys or by participating in a group discussion or focus group. By using the profile information in this way Mosscares remains well informed of the needs of all tenants.
- 45 Staff are able to identify both vulnerable and potentially dangerous residents. The IT system generates a 'pop up' where appropriate, providing immediate information that can assist officers to tailor their approach based on the characteristics of the tenant. In the example of the repairs system this information is relayed to contractors as appropriate. Services can be delivered more sensitively and risks minimised.

- 46 All staff have been formally trained in customer care. The course which is compulsory for staff involved tenants in both the selection of the training agency and in the detail of the course. Tailored training assists staff to provide the services that tenants require.
- 47 Some sheltered and supported housing schemes have communal areas that are not compliant with the access requirements of the Disability Discrimination Act. Although these schemes involve managing agents whose prime responsibility this is, Mosscares has failed to demonstrate sufficient urgency in encouraging a resolution of these issues. As a result, these communal areas remain non compliant some two years after the statutory requirement came into force and tenants and their visitors with restricted mobility may experience difficulties accessing services.

## Diversity

- 48 This is an area of strength. Mosscares understands diverse communities and knows that responding to them is essential in regenerating neighbourhoods. The association has developed schemes that meet acute needs; for women fleeing violence, for asylum seekers and schemes aimed at particular sections of the BME community. Staff and Board diversity reflects that present in the community. There is a strong response to domestic violence evidenced by policy and by close partnership working with specialist agencies. Contractors are assisted to understand the needs of communities and the service is culturally sensitive. The use of impact assessments is not yet consistent or thorough, and the Equality and Diversity Action Plan does not reflect the wide range of diversity work being undertaken.
- 49 Mosscares is seen by many as a leader in the area of diversity. Several other providers and the Housing Corporation have visited to learn about their approaches. Positive examples are numerous. For over 20 years they have promoted local labour schemes giving employment opportunities for young people. In 2005 they worked with other local associations on the 'Business Plus' initiative to encourage new businesses in BME communities. As an employer Mosscares has a very diverse workforce. Thirty six per cent are from BME backgrounds against a target of 35 per cent. Thirty three per cent of the Board are BME against a target of 35 per cent. This diversity helps them to relate to and better understand their customers.
- 50 Mosscares has a progressive approach to diversity. The Cultural and Diversity Awareness Theme of the 2004 AGM is an example of this. The opportunity was taken to raise the profile of diversity issues, to consider further improvements and to celebrate the organisation's rich diversity. Such initiatives send a positive message to staff, tenants and other stakeholders.
- 51 The association has maintained a diversity officer post since August 2005. This improves the co-ordination of diversity and equalities work. The post is focussed to deliver benefits for customers, staff, contractors and other stakeholders as well as the Board. Recent in-house training for all staff and the Board was delivered by the officer. This investment reflects the importance of diversity for Mosscares and has helped them respond appropriately to the needs of diverse client groups.

- 52 Innovative and tailored solutions have been provided for vulnerable people. Over 100 refugee and asylum seeker households have been re-housed through a partnership project with Manchester City Council. Mosscares identified a need and developed a floating support scheme for Somali women because of their awareness of the difficulties faced in asylum seeker households. Mosscares has developed several schemes aimed at meeting the needs of very vulnerable communities including a scheme aimed at assisting people fleeing the 1997 volcano in Montserrat. Working in partnership with local community groups, Mosscares developed two refuges for black and Asian women and their children who are fleeing domestic violence. There is no doubt about the positive benefits that such schemes bring to vulnerable and traditionally excluded people.
- 53 Translation services are available at Mosscares offices and are used by staff to communicate with tenants. Mosscares maintain a list of staff who speak languages other than English and these skills are routinely used. Staff also use Language Line for immediate translations by telephone, and staff who might use this infrequently can access an aide-memoir. People whose first language is not English are assisted to access Mosscares's services.
- 54 There is an up to date Equality and Diversity Strategy which states the objectives, commitments and priorities for Mosscares. The strategy was formulated in consultation with the Equality and Diversity working group as well as with tenants. The Equality and Diversity working group has existed since 1994 and is chaired by the Chief Executive. This high level involvement helps to co-ordinate the strategy with the action plan and current initiatives and put in place effective resources and progress monitoring.
- 55 The outcomes from the Equality and Diversity working party show the considerable difference that has been made. Some examples are:
- promoting innovative letting arrangements for Asylum Seekers;
  - encouraging membership of 'Building Positive Action' (BPA). BPA is a database of BME, women and disabled person led businesses. Mosscares has worked with some of these businesses and assisted their further development;
  - using Mosscares's charitable fund to support involvement in Black History Month including involvement in a radio programme supporting it; and
  - supporting 'Business Plus' an organisation that supports BME, women and disabled led businesses. Mosscares's tenants have benefited from take up of business support more than tenants from any other association involved.
- 56 However, Mosscares's Equality and Diversity Action plan is not comprehensive. This is very much a case of planning lagging behind practices as current initiatives extend beyond those identified in the action plan. Some areas could have benefited from a structured approach to forward planning. For example, the Disability Discrimination Act (DDA) adjustments at area offices may well have been more effectively progressed had they been part of the strategy, owned and monitored by the Equality and Diversity working group.

- 57 The Racial Harassment Policy has been recently updated but does not demonstrate sufficient attention to timely responses. The policy mixes both policy and procedure. This does not assist officers in dealing with acute emergency situations. Timescales are not clearly identified for each stage of the process in a way that reflects the urgency with which harassment cases should be dealt with. There is the potential for cases of harassment to be responded to inappropriately.
- 58 MossCare ensures all tenants, including those who do not have English as a first language, understand their rights and responsibilities as a tenant. Where appropriate they audio-record details of sign-up interviews, conduct the interview with the help of a translator and reinforce this by giving the tenant both the tape and the paperwork. Tenants can then choose the best way to access information about their tenancy.
- 59 MossCare responds appropriately to cultural requirements in the communities it serves. Overshoes have recently been issued to contractors to use where they are requested to remove shoes when entering a house. Appointments are offered where necessary to coincide with the presence of a male family member or relative. Some contractors have female operatives and in some circumstances are advised to allocate the job to them. Culturally sensitive services ensure that all tenants can benefit from MossCare's services.
- 60 MossCare takes a progressive stance in setting standards for their contractors. In conjunction with Salford University they have developed a comprehensive guide, 'Mix Matters'. This is an area that can pose challenges for landlords and MossCare's approach goes beyond setting minimum contractual requirements and provides practical examples of better practice and a toolkit for contractors to gauge their own service provision. This work is recently completed and not yet monitored but is a thorough and focussed approach aimed at raising Equality and Diversity awareness and practice amongst contractors.
- 61 MossCare appreciate that diversity extends beyond Black and Minority Ethnic (BME) communities. Given the ethnic diversity in Moss Side a keen focus on BME issues is inevitable, however, MossCare has worked with different sectors of the community which is progressive. Their Young Persons Strategy is wide ranging and recognises the importance of engaging with and through young people. They successfully engage young people through schools on a variety of projects and have involved young people in the production of CD recordings of their newsletters. Disabled residents are actively encouraged to be members of their disabled persons' forum. A key element of the Equality and Diversity officer's role in the following year is to consider how wider issues of diversity will be reflected in MossCare's practices. This approach aims to respond to all needs in the communities served.
- 62 The policy and response to domestic violence is a clear strength. The policy is comprehensive and procedures signpost how to access assistance. MossCare staff are aware of, access and publicise available support and assistance. Additionally, MossCare has developed women's refuges. Those who suffer from domestic violence are likely to be aware that MossCare can assist them.

- 63 Mosscare has started to consider impact assessments but these are not yet comprehensive or consistently applied. There has been considerable activity in renewing strategies and policies in recent months. Some have failed to properly establish the likely impacts of changes on communities. Although mitigated by the extensive knowledge that staff have about communities, there is the possibility that some changes may adversely affect some groups more than others in the community.

## **Stock investment and asset management**

### **Capital improvement, planned and cyclical maintenance, major repair works**

- 64 There is a balance of strengths and weaknesses in this area. The Asset Management Strategy is not robust and practice is lacking in key areas, particularly in the effectiveness of planned programmes in reducing responsive repairs. The absence of appropriate maintenance of smoke detectors in some instances presents a significant risk to tenants and to Mosscare. Mosscare have achieved high levels of decency and top quartile energy ratings alongside notable neighbourhood improvements through partnership working. Asbestos is appropriately managed as are programmes of cyclical painting and maintenance.
- 65 Medium and long term asset planning is lacking. The Asset Management Strategy sets out the intention to assess the long term sustainability of properties through the development of a neighbourhood indicator system but in reality this has not begun. Mosscare have not got a robust mechanism for assessing which properties are sustainable, for how long and how they may affect that sustainability through investment and neighbourhood initiatives.
- 66 The Asset Management Strategy does not recognise the requirements of the Housing Health and Safety Rating System (HHSRS<sup>3</sup>) or its implications for compliance with the Decent Homes standard. Potentially the HHSRS requirement may reduce the proportion of properties that meet the Decent Homes standard and require new planned programmes and investment. The absence of planning at this strategic level exposes Mosscare to an increased level of risk.
- 67 The Asset Management Strategy fails to comprehensively identify the future direction for service provision. Proposals for managing gas servicing in-house are not mentioned despite the fact that this significant shift is well advanced. Despite recent improvements, the strategy is limited and resource and other implications may not have been thoroughly considered.
- 68 Stakeholders were not consulted over the Asset Management Strategy. The new strategy was completed in April 2006 but apart from being signed off by the Board and Technical Services Sub-Committee has not benefited from partner and tenant consultation. As a result there is limited emphasis in the strategy on how Mosscare's strategy will dovetail with housing and renewal strategies of local authorities and no emphasis on customer care, customer aspirations and choice.

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<sup>3</sup> HHSRS-the new risk assessment procedure for residential properties effective from 6 April 2006

- 69 Despite the lack of a robust Asset Management Strategy, in practice Mosscares has managed its assets well. This is largely due to the extensive experience within the staff team and positive responses to the challenges of working in areas of significant deprivation. There are numerous examples of innovative approaches with partners in renewal and pathfinder areas which have strengthened the association's asset base. The approach taken to undertake whole house refurbishments and bring transferred stock up to refurbished standards promptly demonstrates the importance attached to maintaining viable assets and in improving neighbourhoods. This approach has resulted in continued high levels of demand where other landlords have experienced decline.
- 70 High levels of stock decency and thermal ratings have been achieved. Because of its strategic decision to consider property assets in the context of the wider neighbourhood, Mosscares embarked on a re-improvement programme ten years ago. Stock transfers have also benefited from significant up-grading with on average, £25,000 invested in each unit. Levels of decency are currently 99 per cent with only 31 units that do not meet the decency standard. Standard Assessment Procedure (SAP<sup>4</sup>) ratings average 83 which compares well to the national top quartile rating of 74.
- 71 Innovative solutions have been brokered where necessary. There are many examples of the leading approach that Mosscares demonstrates. The association is a trusted partner of the City Council because of its positive contribution to neighbourhood renewal. Where Mosscares found that another social landlord was better placed to manage its property in Salford it promoted and agreed a stock swap. This has improved the accessibility of management for tenants and the improved management efficiency.
- 72 Mosscares has undertaken whole house improvements as opposed to a programme of Decent Homes (DH) improvements. This approach includes some DH plus features such as the installation of burglar alarms. Additionally, Mosscares has where possible undertaken environmental - wall and fence - improvements and dovetailed these with City Council environmental works. The result is that homes and environments are fully improved wherever possible.
- 73 There are appropriate arrangements for the identification and management of asbestos. The asbestos management plan includes information on the location of the asbestos, an inspection regime and a plan for its removal or containment. A hard copy register is maintained and in addition asbestos is identified on the property attributes of the IT system which is integrated with the repairs ordering system. Contractors and tenants are informed appropriately.
- 74 Cyclical painting programmes are well planned. The programme runs on a five-year schedule with discretion to vary this where major works are planned. Prior to painting repairs are also carried out. Appropriate tenant consultation precedes any work. The work is tendered on an annual basis. Tenants' homes are maintained in a satisfactory condition.

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<sup>4</sup> SAP-the recommended system for energy rating of dwellings

- 75 Most installations are maintained in a robust manner. There a number of annual contracts in place for items such as lift maintenance, legionella, electric checks and gardening services. These are monitored by the appropriate member of staff.
- 76 Planned programmes of work are insufficiently informed by knowledge of the main reasons for responsive repairs. In the year to 31 December 2005, 12,996 repairs were undertaken which approximates to four per property. There is no evidence that the types of repair and repair frequencies are analysed and used to inform programmes of replacement. Less value can be achieved through responsive work and customers are inconvenienced by repeated call outs.
- 77 It is a weakness that servicing of smoke detectors, whether hard-wired or not, other than those in sheltered and supported housing is not carried out. This presents a significant risk to tenants.

### **Responsive repairs**

- 78 Weaknesses outweigh strengths in this area. Mosscares have not adequately managed the proportions of emergency, urgent and routine repairs. Key areas that point to the quality of the service provided are insufficiently considered. Weaker areas are the lack of monitoring of appointments, limited awareness of the cost of variations against work orders and no knowledge of the proportion of work that is completed at the first visit. The responsive repairs service is well resourced and expenditure is in line with budgets. Tenants can report repairs in a variety of ways and are assisted to specify these accurately. Out of hours services are effective. Performance for emergency repairs compares with the average for associations nationally and for urgent and routine repairs with the top 25 per cent.
- 79 Some key areas of repairs and maintenance are under-developed. Proportions of emergency, urgent and routine works have not been sufficiently managed. In May 2006 emergency work accounted for approximately a third of all work. Recent efforts have resulted in emergency work reducing to 10 per cent of all responsive repairs but the implications for costs and for customer experience have not been adequately managed over time.
- 80 The budget for responsive repairs is adequate and expenditure is well managed. The annual budget for responsive repairs is £888,000. The budget for planned repairs and re-improvements is £556,000. Expenditure in month ten of the year is in line with expectations. Budgets enable the service to meet tenants' requirements.
- 81 Mosscares staff as well as tenants who report repairs on-line have access to information to help them to accurately specify the repairs. Repair diagnostic software is available that should help to ensure that accurate orders for repairs are placed. However, the impact of the use of the diagnostic software has not been measured in terms of reductions in variations or the numbers of repairs completed at the first visit.

- 82 The cost of variations and proportion of work completed 'right first time' is not known. Although the number of variations is known, (5.6 per cent in the year to 31 December 2006) the amount in cash terms is not. Therefore, the impact on budgets cannot be accurately assessed. Taken together with the fact that Mosscares do not measure the proportion of work that is completed first time means that some elements of service which customers receive are not sufficiently controlled.
- 83 Repairs can be reported in a range of appropriate ways. A freephone number is in place. Regular estate walkabouts provide opportunities for tenants to report repairs and for inspectors to identify external works. Suitable arrangements for out of hours work are in place. The freephone number is available 24 hours a day and at 4.30 pm switches to the out of hours service via a link either to the inspector on duty or where appropriate directly to the heating contractor. Ninety per cent of tenants rate the service as good or fair. The out of hours service is effective and well regarded by tenants.
- 84 Clear targets for response repairs are set and monitored. Performance indicators demonstrate good performance in undertaking Emergency, Urgent and Routine repairs. Performance for Emergency (96.5 per cent) repairs compares with average performance in housing associations nationally. Urgent (97.6 per cent) and routine repairs (97.9 per cent) are in the top national quartile. Commitments made to tenants on responsive repairs are generally kept.
- 85 Satisfaction with the repairs service is not rigorously monitored. Tenants are asked to complete a satisfaction slip when repairs are undertaken. Although the level of satisfaction appears high at 88 per cent, this is based on a return rate of 14 per cent. It is disappointing that non-returned slips have not been followed up and that no effective ongoing measures of satisfaction are in place.
- 86 An appointment system is in place, but it is not measured. Where appointments are made Mosscares is unable to measure whether or not they have been kept. The lack of a robust appointment system may mean that some tenants receive a lesser service and that Mosscares's commitments are not being met.

### **Void repairs**

- 87 Strengths and weaknesses are balanced in this area. The turnaround of void properties has been poor for a considerable time, lower quartile for the last three years. This situation is beginning to improve through increased emphasis on void repairs and re-letting processes including tight targets and close collaborative working between teams and with contractors. The re-let standard is high and consistently applied, however, void costs are increasing steeply. Strategic information about the re-letting function is not robustly analysed or used to inform future asset planning.
- 88 Mosscares work in challenging neighbourhoods with variable demand. It is pleasing to note that turnover of properties has steadily decreased from a high of 18 per cent several years ago to a current level of 7.4 per cent. This reflects the attractiveness of Mosscares's properties and satisfaction with services as well as the contribution that their regeneration activity has made in making neighbourhoods attractive places to live.

- 89 A challenging void re-let standard is in place. This was developed in conjunction with the tenants' panel. Opportunities are taken while a property is void to carry out additional works such as the upgrading of the numbers of kitchen units. Re-let standards are high and contribute to maintaining demand for Mosscares properties.
- 90 Re-let times have improved from an average of 65 days in May 2006 to 36 days at the time of inspection. Considerable emphasis has been placed on reducing the time taken to re-let properties. Appropriate liaison meetings are held between teams involved in the void process. Progress is rigorously chased, estimates of timescales for completion agreed and monitoring of void periods scheduled. This has resulted in the reduction in the average time taken to re-let property. Although current performance only equates to median performance of similar sized associations in the region this represents a positive improvement.
- 91 Mosscares carries out repairs and safety checks to empty properties quickly and efficiently. Once keys are received the property is inspected and work orders issued usually within 24 hours. Security shutters are avoided in the majority of cases. Contractors are made aware of the target date for completion of repairs and are closely monitored. This contributes to a reduction in time taken to re-let, ensuring that homes are available sooner for those who need it.
- 92 Average costs for void repairs have increased steeply. Average costs were £1,040 in 2004/05 and currently stand at £1,464. We found that the increase has not been robustly examined and therefore, Mosscares do not know whether their demands for fast turnaround of void works are at a premium cost or where they should act to control the costs. Although high standards are achieved these costs are concerning especially as 99 per cent of homes currently meet the decency standard.
- 93 Tenants are not currently involved in monitoring the standard of empty properties. Although the overall standard was agreed with the tenants' panel, tenants do not check and comment upon a sample of ready to let properties. This is a missed opportunity to involve mystery shoppers and to learn from their insights.
- 94 Monitoring of voids at a strategic level is under-developed. There is no doubt that Mosscares work in some challenging areas where demand is variable particularly for some sheltered property types. Although processes have improved, information about refusal reasons, demand trends, marketing required and the cost of void repairs is not analysed and used to inform the Asset Management Strategy. Without this basic information, Mosscares cannot develop effective plans to address shortcomings in its void management processes.

## Gas servicing

- 95** Strengths and weaknesses are balanced in this area. Gas servicing performance has up until very recently been poor. Arrangements for quality assurance of installations and servicing are not adequate and communication with tenants is not clear enough. Positively, much has improved in recent months and only four properties remain to be serviced, all of which have injunctions upon them. Arrangements are in place for the prompt servicing of sheltered and re-let properties. Filing of certificates is efficient as is joined up working between teams where there are difficulties in gaining access.
- 96** Mossclare has been slow to put in place effective gas servicing arrangements. There have been several difficulties with the existing gas contractor and at January 2006 there were 122 (5 per cent) properties that had not been serviced. The longest outstanding property had not been serviced for three years. This situation represented a significant risk to tenants and to Mossclare in terms of their landlord responsibilities.
- 97** Mossclare have sought advice and acted to improve performance. Positively a CORGI inspection of processes was carried out in January 2006. This identified a number of issues which Mossclare has addressed through its review and implementation of new procedures. Efforts to improve the service have resulted in a pleasing reduction in outstanding services from 122 in January 2006 to four at the time of inspection.
- 98** Mossclare now has clear arrangements for undertaking gas servicing and appliance checks in its properties. A policy and procedure is in place, which is being further developed in conjunction with the contractor. Positive changes have been made, for example access to the contractor's IT system, the placement of a contractor's representative in the office on a regular basis and prompt and firm action to address non performance. Evening and weekend appointments have been made available. At the time of the inspection only four properties remained where access was still not possible.
- 99** The association has effective arrangements to service communal heating in sheltered schemes. The annual servicing it is legally required to undertake is carried out on a separate contract. This ensures residents have safe heating systems.
- 100** Methods to deal with no-access have improved. By sharing information with other teams about properties where access has not been gained, information is collected that can enable contact, eg phone number of mother/relatives and contact details of support workers where applicable. The contractor is required to send an introductory letter and make two visits. If unsuccessful, Mossclare will send further letters before seeking an injunction. This mechanism is used rather than eviction proceedings, and this approach sustains the tenancy of the resident while improving the likelihood of gaining access.

- 101 There is an inadequate quality control system in place. The contractor carries out a 10 per cent sample of inspections by a senior engineer. Mosscares carry out a further 5 per cent sample of that 10 per cent by an in house trained heating engineer. This level of duplication is not helpful, the quality assurance check is not independent as it is undertaken by the same company and the checks undertaken by Mosscares staff member are of no value as he is not CORGI registered and therefore, cannot validate the work that has been done. Mosscares cannot be assured of the quality of servicing that is being undertaken on gas installations.
- 102 Written communication with tenants is not effective. Letters to tenants from both the gas contractor and Mosscares are not easy to understand. Tenants may not understand the importance of having checks carried out and this may have contributed to the previous high level of non-access situations.

### **Adaptations**

- 103 Strengths outweigh weaknesses in this area. The adaptations service is well publicised, resourced and managed. The longest current wait for a major adaptation is eight months. The partnership with the Manchester Equipment and Adaptation Partnership (MEAP) is managed through a service level agreement and significant external funding is achieved through this route. However, there is no system of prioritisation of adaptations on the basis of need.
- 104 Access to the adaptations service is generally good. There is an easy to read leaflet available, revised to reflect new procedures. The service is publicised widely. Tenants are aware of the service offered and how to apply for adaptations.
- 105 Adequate funding is available to ensure adaptations are carried out in a timely manner. Mosscares budget has been supplemented by matched funding where available from the Housing Corporation, by the use of re-cycled grant and by partnership with MEAP who undertake all Disabled Facilities Grants (DFG) work in Manchester at no cost to Mosscares. There is a clear service level agreement in place with MEAP but this is not actively monitored. For the period January to December 2006, 53 adaptations were undertaken at a total cost of £134,674. MEAP undertook £79,000 of this work. Mosscares has accessed funding from a range of sources to supplement its own budget in order to assist tenants to live independently.
- 106 Adaptations are carried out in a timely manner. The longest a tenant has currently been waiting is eight months and in this case the work is approved and about to commence. In this case MEAP are funding and undertaking the work. Tenants are enabled to remain in their homes.

- 107** Opportunities are taken to make best use of vacant properties with adaptations. The IT system can identify these and the allocations team immediately informs MEAP to enable them to identify an eligible applicant for housing. If this is not possible, adaptations will be removed into storage until they are able to be reused.
- 108** Tenant feedback is used to develop new procedures. Overall, satisfaction is high with the standards of work but residents did not always feel they were kept informed as they went through the process. As a result Mosscares now take responsibility for monitoring progress and keeping residents informed at all stages. Residents will be aware of when and whether an adaptation will be provided.
- 109** All adaptations are dealt with in date order. There is currently no prioritisation of work based upon need. Although all needs have been met within reasonable timescales to date, this is likely to change as Mosscares have taken the decision to only fund minor adaptations up to the value of £100. Previously they were directly funding adaptations up to the value of £500. This will add to burdens on MEAP and other local authorities and is likely to result in lengthier waits for adaptations.

### **Housing income management**

- 110** Strengths and weaknesses are balanced in this area. Arrears levels have been high in each of the last three years. Although operational changes introduced are starting to have an effect, it is not yet sustained. Tenants have the choice of a range of payment options, receive regular statements and are encouraged to access welfare and benefits advice. Some communication with tenants is not written in plain English and rent statements are not supported with additional information and guidance. The effectiveness of advice agencies is not monitored or managed through a service level agreement.
- 111** Arrears levels have been high in each of the last three years. Arrears as a percentage of rent collectable were 9.6 per cent in 2004, 8.4 per cent in 2005 and 8.78 per cent in the second quarter of 2006. In 2004 staff teams were re-organised from generic housing management teams to allow a specific focus on key priorities, particularly upon income generation. In the current year arrears have reduced from 8.78 per cent in July to 6.7 per cent at the time of inspection. Although this is a positive sign it is too early to be a sustained downward trend.
- 112** A range of easily accessible payment options is available to tenants. These include Allpay, standing order, post office, and on-line payments. Mosscares is aware of the volume of payments made by each method and the costs of each and has used this information to further encourage take-up of lowest cost methods through, for example, incentives for take-up of direct debit payments. Tenants can choose a method of payment that suits them.

- 113 Accessible services are offered to tenants. The use of phone texting has recently been introduced. A particular area with high arrears levels was targeted and every tenant received a visit offering rent payment and welfare benefits advice. Details of payment methods and useful telephone numbers are printed on the back of every arrears letter. On four evenings a year coinciding with the circulation of rent statements the team offer a late night surgery. The success of approaches is monitored and actions are adjusted on the basis of what works or not. Tenants are able to access services including, advice locally and conveniently.
- 114 Tenants are informed of the status of their rent account on a regular basis. Quarterly statements are sent to tenants. The approach is amended appropriately for more vulnerable tenants who may benefit from the assistance of carers or advocates. Staff ensure they are available to answer queries arising from the issue of rent statements. Tenants are provided with up to date and regular information that helps them to budget appropriately for their rent payments and increases their awareness of any difficulties with payments.
- 115 Arrears letters sent to tenants in supported housing are tailored to their needs. Following a recent review of the services offered by the income generation team to vulnerable tenants, amendments have been made to standard letters ensuring they are not misinterpreted and at the same time offer support to the tenant. Vulnerable people are advised and supported appropriately.
- 116 Although Mosscafe actively participates in benefits take up campaigns, they do not measure the success of these. As a result Mosscafe do not know which approaches are the most effective and helpful for tenants. Given the overall poor level of arrears collection this is a weakness.
- 117 Communication is tailored to meet communication needs. The initial standard arrears letter is available in the most common BME language in the community (Somali). Additional translation services are available on request. Staff are aware of how to use the translation system. Tenants will receive information in a format they can understand.
- 118 Service income and expenditure is identified and monitored. There is a robust mechanism to identify actual and projected costs for services provided, this enables service charges to reflect under and over spends. Overall service costs are reported annually and compared with recovery. Service costs are recovered appropriately.
- 119 There is effective liaison with Housing Benefit (HB) departments. In Manchester Mosscafe chairs the liaison meetings between housing associations and the HB section. These meetings have helped to improve assessment processes and the resolution of queries. Performance is routinely assessed in comparison with the Service Level Agreement (SLA). Mosscafe staff have been trained and have recently commenced HB verification. This will bring additional benefits both to tenants by making benefit applications easier and to Mosscafe, who will be able to pursue claims more easily. This level of liaison assists Mosscafe tenants to have their claims for benefit dealt with as promptly as possible.

- 120** Tenants are offered incentives to keep clear rent accounts. An incentive scheme with a quarterly prize draw was recently introduced and although it is too early to assess the effects of this, the initiative is a positive one. Further development is proposed to include tenants in receipt of HB and those keeping to an arrangement to clear arrears. Tenants are encouraged to pay their rent on a regular and timely basis.
- 121** Evictions are used as a last resort. In 2005, 48 evictions were carried out. This is 1.3 per cent of stock, compared to a national average of 0.55 per cent. The pattern for the last three years is at a similar level. These are relatively high levels which staff attribute to the areas of deprivation in which they work. Approval and authority mechanisms are appropriate to ensure that all circumstances are considered and alternative options considered prior to eviction. There is an appropriate balance between encouragement and enforcement and tenants are supported to remain in their home wherever possible.
- 122** Former tenant arrears are pursued reasonably. Against a total former tenant debt of £284,000, £81,550 was collected in the eleven months prior to inspection. Around one third of outstanding former tenant debt is collected.
- 123** The IT system supports the collection of rent. The system identifies sources of payment, prompts actions in compliance with the procedures, generates appropriate letters, allows for the overriding of actions and provides useful management and monitoring reports. All documents and correspondence are scanned for easy storage.
- 124** Arrears letters and rent statements are not clear. Although there have been recent changes to standard letters these are not easy to understand and contain jargon. Tenants were not involved in the redesign. Quarterly rent statements do not include helpful information and are difficult to follow. Tenants may not understand the communication.
- 125** The outcome of referrals to advice agencies is not systematically monitored and evaluated. Both agencies provide feedback to Mossclare about the results of their referrals. However, Mossclare have not identified success criteria or carried out systematic analysis of the results of referral. The value of advice services is not known and because of the lack of evaluation, areas for improvement in services that tenants receive have not been examined.

## **Tenancy and estate management**

- 126** This is an area of strength. Mossclare's tenancy and estate management is highly effective and an important aspect of the association's work given the high levels of deprivation in the local area. Mossclare has a comprehensive anti-social behaviour policy and procedure. Tenants are well informed about Mossclare's stance, initiatives and successes in this area. Partnerships with tenants' and community groups, the Police and other stakeholders are actively supported. Support for victims and for perpetrators is well considered, and case work and monitoring supports effective action. Tenant satisfaction with the response to anti-social behaviour is not effectively gathered and the effectiveness of particular approaches has not been evaluated.

- 127** There is a comprehensive Anti-Social Behaviour (ASB) Policy and statement in place. Policies on ASB, racial harassment (RH) and domestic violence (DV) supplemented by procedures give clear guidance to staff. All have been recently reviewed and developed in their current format. The three policies sit together and although initial reports may be of ASB, staff are encouraged to investigate further and if appropriate use the RH or DV policies. Staff are supported to provide an effective response to ASB.
- 128** Tenants are encouraged to report breaches of tenancy conditions. Mosscares routinely publishes information about their approach and their successes and tenants are encouraged to report incidents. Tenants can feel confident that Mosscares will take their queries or complaints seriously and will act positively to resolve problems.
- 129** Mosscares works closely and positively with a wide range of stakeholders to tackle ASB and to deliver neighbourhood improvements. There is extensive work with community and tenant groups. There are effective partnerships with the Police, the City Council Anti-Social Behaviour Action Team (ASBAT), and other social landlords. Staff at all levels regularly attend appropriate meetings. Mosscares considers the potential benefits of attendance at these meetings and tailors attendance appropriately. Tenants benefit from the joined up activities.
- 130** Important partnerships are actively supported. Relations with Greater Manchester Police are strong. Mosscares attends and in many cases hosts Local Action Partnerships (LAPs), Local Task Meetings (LTMs) and Area Case Work Panels (ACPs) all set up under the Crime and Disorder Act. Mosscares was the first housing association in Manchester to obtain an Anti-Social Behaviour Order (ASBO) and were the first non-statutory organisation to chair a LAP (Hulme and Moss Side). Mosscares has done a lot of work in relation to the Respect Standard including signing up to the Standard and launching a Manchester City wide Respect Charter. Mosscares's status within communities leads to partners actively seeking their involvement. The effectiveness of these partnerships is evidenced in a number of ways, ranging from Police action to close a crack house to improved ability to access support for victims and perpetrators.
- 131** Appropriate training on aspects of ASB is provided for staff. Domestic Violence awareness raising training is being undertaken on a cascade basis and ASBAT are providing Racial Harassment training. Training and coaching are also regular features of team meetings. Staff are supported to carry out their roles effectively.
- 132** Mosscares responds appropriately to diverse communities when dealing with ASB. As well as the use of diary sheets it is standard practice where the victim or witnesses' first language is not English to provide tape equipment to record incidents. Tenants are assisted to express their concerns and have fair access to services.

- 133** The use of mediation is considered appropriately. Mosscares has a Service Level Agreement with Manchester mediation whose services have been used. This is an expensive service (£1,000 a case) and staff seek to look for more cost effective solutions, such as providing support themselves and the use of Social Services mediators where appropriate. While there have been examples of successful mediation this is not a widespread solution. Efforts are made to empower tenants to seek their own solutions to ASB.
- 134** Support is offered to both victims and perpetrators. Support for perpetrators is part of the Vulnerable Persons' Strategy and this has further developed with additional support from partner agencies, referral to drug and alcohol centres, Surestart and other family support agencies. For victims, support is provided by both Mosscares staff, victim support referral, and practical solutions such as CCTV and security measures to individual houses. This approach ensures that the most effective and appropriate support is accessed, this helps to ease situations and can lead to lasting solutions.
- 135** Starter tenancies are used appropriately to assist in the reduction of ASB. Starter tenancies are used in two areas and tenants are aware of the implications of this type of tenancy. A rigorous approach is adopted to decision making if the tenancy is not to become an assured tenancy. The use of starter tenancies makes clear that Mosscares consider ASB with clear priority.
- 136** Effective use is made of community agreements to reinforce messages about expected standards of behaviour. In two areas these have been developed by community groups and are used as part of the sign up process for new tenants, outlining the community's expectations and assisting in community cohesion. Tenants are aware of the expectations relating to their behaviour.
- 137** A robust performance monitoring system is in place. Monthly update reports are provided by frontline staff to managers who in turn provide quarterly reports to the Executive Team and the Housing Services Sub-Committee. These would benefit from the inclusion of information on the closure of cases and on performance against service standards. Improvements are planned to develop an in house IT module to further support recording and monitoring of ASB and enable evaluation of responses. The overall approach ensures that cases are effectively actioned.
- 138** ASB cases are closed appropriately. A case will only be closed after consultation with the tenant and where there has been no recent incident. Recent attention has been given to the value of keeping cases open and for the period April to September 2006, 34 cases were closed. This is 18 per cent of active cases. Since 2004 there have been 181 cases and 89 or 49 per cent have been closed. Review of cases and their closure ensures that actions are completed.
- 139** Mosscares uses a wide range of appropriate options when dealing with ASB. Responses range from warning letters and interviews to noise abatement notices, referrals to specialist teams, injunctions and a crack house closure order. There is also support available on a formal or informal basis for staff to inform further actions or approaches. Tenants receive a tailored response to their complaints.

- 140 A range of preventative and diversionary activities is undertaken. There is close liaison with schools and perceived benefits are that there are very few reports of ASB carried out by that age group and little vandalism and litter. Mosscares undertake regular 'Beatsweeps' and 'Respect' walkabouts involving a range of stakeholders including residents and the Police. Physical interventions are also used to prevent ASB. A comprehensive CCTV system was introduced into a sheltered scheme resulting in savings in the cost of lift repairs and re-glazing.
- 141 Mosscares has not evaluated the most effective responses. No cost benefit analysis has been undertaken to establish the most effective ways to resolve ASB. Actions taken are tailored to suit the circumstances of the case. However, the use of Acceptable Behaviour Contracts has not been pursued as these were not felt to be effective. In the absence of consistent measurement, the most appropriate response may not be used.
- 142 Mosscares does not know measure how tenants regard the success of their response. Although satisfaction surveys have been carried out, there is a poor response and staff are currently investigating with tenants the best way to receive feedback

## Is the service delivering value for money?

- 143 There is a balance of strengths and weaknesses in this area. Mosscares understands it cannot survive in its operating environment without delivering improvements in efficiency. Operating costs are below the national average which given the demands present in the areas Mosscares operates is an achievement. There are many examples of partnership working which through the commitment and drive of Mosscares has resulted in notable gains for tenants. Benchmarking of costs has been undertaken in some areas but is not yet consistently applied. Response repairs dominate the work of the repairs and maintenance service with no clear evaluation of how programmed repairs might result in better value and increased comfort for tenants. Advantages from modern procurement though evident, have not been fully realised.

### How do costs compare?

- 144 Overall, operating costs are slightly below the national average but increasing markedly. General needs operating costs as a percentage of turnover increased from 70.5 per cent in 2005 to 77.8 per cent in 2006. This compares with a national average of 81.7 per cent. Average operating cost per general needs unit also shows an increase from £38.90 in 2005 to £46.46 in 2006. This compares to a national average of £54.49. Although costs are below the national average the rate of increase is an area for some concern.
- 145 Detailed process costs are not known. Mosscares does not monitor and analyse key transactional costs of service provision such as the cost of processing repairs requests and payments. This leaves the association in a weak position when considering Best Value type reviews of service.

- 146** Responsive repairs expenditure is disproportionately high. The proportion of revenue investment on routine general needs repairs increased slightly between 2005 and 2006 from 89.1 per cent to 91 per cent. The National Mean Average is 33.6 per cent. This high proportion of investment on responsive repairs suggests that although the level of Decent Homes compliance is high, planned programmes of maintenance and renewal are not effective in reducing the need for repairs. High levels of responsive repairs points to greater inconvenience for tenants and to reduced value for money.

### **How is value for money managed?**

- 147** There is a positive focus on value for money related to improved outcomes for customers. There are numerous examples of value improvement.
- The development of a furnished tenancy scheme part-funded through the national lottery, with over 10 per cent of Mosscares stock now let as furnished tenancies.
  - The development of caretaker schemes in Higher Openshaw and Whalley Range, funded through a combination of Welfare to Work, New Deal and grants from third parties.
  - In-house Court work. In 2002 Mosscares created a specialist post to undertake court work, significantly reducing solicitor costs and increasing efficiency.
  - Neighbourhood Renewal funded Anti-Social Behaviour Project. Manchester City Council in partnership with Mosscares obtained Neighbourhood Renewal Funds to establish a housing association liaison project. Mosscares staff and tenants benefit through extensive training for staff, joined up case management, support for difficult cases and improved liaison with Greater Manchester Police.
- 148** Mosscares has won competitive tenders to provide housing management services. At the former Maine Road site they have the contract to provide owner occupiers with a management service and in Hulme, the Homes for Change Co-operative chose Mosscares to provide a range of housing services. These contracts were won in direct competition with other housing associations and the private sector. This demonstrates both the status of Mosscares and its ability to compete in a rounded consideration of value.
- 149** The repairs and maintenance section routinely analyses processes. Since March 2006 the department has undertaken routine reviews of processes and assessed requirements for change in terms of risk and value improvement. The 'value log' is detailed and includes targets and clear ownership for process change. Several changes have resulted from this approach including improvements in adaptations monitoring which have improved the accuracy of information that can be provided for tenants and ensuring more time is scheduled to respond to customer requests for maintenance inspections. This is a detailed approach which demonstrates an improving level of awareness of value within the repairs and maintenance service.

- 150 Annual efficiencies are developed as managers consider operational plans and Business Plan objectives. This is a detailed approach which challenges managers to identify value and efficiency improvements and does not purely require reductions in budget. There are examples of increases in budget where a strong value case has been made, for example in providing CCTV on a problematic estate. Appropriate areas are identified for efficiency improvements and there is a reasonable approach to direct savings made to areas to improve outcomes for residents.
- 151 Mosscares has also been able to secure and to improve services by collaboration and sharing costs with other agencies. For example, the association has benefited from small scale transfers of stock from associations that recognise Mosscares' expertise in neighbourhood regeneration. Additionally, Greater Manchester Police were able to share some of the staff costs for evening estate 'walkabouts'. This has secured local services through economies of scale and resulted in shared benefits for other agencies and for communities.
- 152 Mosscares has disinvested where appropriate. For example, significant costs were attached to managing 27 properties in Salford which were isolated from other areas of operation. Mosscares sought and achieved a stock swap management arrangement with another housing association which is a sensible approach to reducing cost burdens whilst maintaining services and social housing availability.
- 153 Mosscares has been slow to develop a value for money strategy. This has only been agreed in the last three months. Although it is comprehensive in nature, it illustrates a more general weakness whereby strategy does not consistently shape activity. There are many elements of good practice evidenced over several years, but they have not always been strategic in their development and some areas, such as modern procurement remain relatively under developed.
- 154 Benchmarking has been slow to develop. Although there is evidence that some performance indicators were benchmarked as long ago as the early 1990s there has been little development of the concept. Comparisons with others' costs, approaches and outcomes have been patchy. Human Resources functions have been benchmarked, but in key service areas; customer access, repairs and maintenance, allocations and lettings these comparisons have not been made. Mosscares has recently joined the Housemark benchmarking club.
- 155 Service reviews are built upon organisational, staff, partner and customer priorities. There is a clear forward plan of reviews and an agreed structure and format for them. Mosscares involves residents who may have used a service or indeed may have complained about it. Review teams often include a range of stakeholders including community contacts and advocates. This approach not only involves the right people but also empowers those who feel that a service has failed them as well as building trust with a range of stakeholders.

- 156** Some reviews are limited in scope. Several reviews have focussed on elements of services rather than the whole service. For example, reviews were undertaken of the income management service solely relating to vulnerable people, and another related to the sign-up process as opposed to the allocations and lettings function. Some reviews that are labelled as Best Value are in fact process improvement mechanisms as their scope is too narrow to enable a comprehensive review. Fundamental improvements may not be considered.
- 157** Some reviews lack comprehensive challenge. The recruitment service is being reviewed by a team led by the Human Resource (HR) manager whose responsibility this service is, which makes it difficult to ensure that robust challenge takes place. This fundamental element of review may be overlooked or at least less thoroughly undertaken with the result that savings and efficiencies for tenants may be reduced.
- 158** There is limited evidence of challenge and examination of the costs of services. Key processes such as rent collection, maintenance and re-letting have not been thoroughly appraised to establish transactional costs. Although reviews have been undertaken in some of these areas they have not been informed by the costs of service provision which is an evident gap. It is difficult for MossCare to effectively deliver value for money services without detailed consideration of the costs of providing services as compared to outcomes.
- 159** Proportions of emergency, urgent and planned responsive work do not accord with good practice guidance. At the time of inspection, emergency repairs accounted for 10 per cent of all jobs, urgent 41 per cent and routine 48 per cent. There is still some way to go to reach Audit Commission best practice guidance which indicates ratios of 10; 20 and 70 per cent. Although the ratios are now being considered more closely the fact that mechanisms have not been in place to achieve an optimal balance of work points to a lack of appropriate controls.
- 160** There are no mechanisms to manage the proportions of planned and responsive work. Currently 38 per cent of non-revenue work is planned. Good practice points to 60 per cent as the target proportion for planned work. MossCare cannot be certain it achieves good value for money or that it identifies the cause of increased response repairs.
- 161** Modern methods of procurement are developing. There is a range of benefits from smaller scale procurement partnerships.
- Procurement for Housing (PfH) - Service agreement discounts are possible for fire alarms, warden call units and white goods although these have not been realised as yet. Seventeen per cent savings have been achieved through purchasing decorations vouchers via PFH.
  - Greater Manchester Procure - Replacement and re-improvement packages across stock (windows, kitchens, doors). An estimated 11 per cent saving has been made.
  - Manchester Equipment and Adaptation Partnership (MEAP) carry out all assessments and adaptations in Manchester and it is estimated that savings of 43 per cent have been made.

#### 40 Housing Management Services | How good is the service?

- New Charter reactive services for the Carrbrook Co-operative. This is a framework repair and maintenance agreement trial for one year. Costs have reduced since last year by 23 per cent.

However, Mosscares has been slow to tackle modern procurement and partnerships across the repairs and maintenance service. Currently a mixture of Schedule of Rates (SoR) and small hourly rate contractors are used. Whilst the local knowledge of the small contractors is an asset, Mosscares has not thought through how to retain this and support small contractors once new procurement methods are put in place.

## What are the prospects for improvement to the service?

### What is the service track record in delivering improvement?

- 162** Drivers and barriers to improvement are balanced. There are many examples of service improvements that positively impact upon tenants and neighbourhoods. These improvements have not been made in preparation for inspection but as a result of a continued commitment to neighbourhood regeneration. Key Performance Indicators demonstrate mixed performance. Tenant satisfaction with services and with opportunities for involvement places Mosscares in the top quartile nationally. Arrears and re-letting performance has been consistently poor in each of the last three years. There has been limited consideration of good practice guidance on proportions of repairs and maintenance activity. Efficiency gains have proved to be difficult to achieve and monitoring in this area has been lacking.
- 163** Performance trends over the last three years are mixed. Appendix One illustrates that eight indicators compare with the top 25 per cent of similar organisations regionally, five show performance to be in the average range and four show bottom quartile performance. For example:
- the percentage of homes failing the Decent Homes Standard is low. In 2003/04 this stood at 1.3 per cent and improved to 0.8 per cent in 2005 and 2006. This is top quartile performance;
  - the association has improved the energy efficiency of its homes. The SAP rating has increased from 73.1 in 2003/04 to 79 in 2005 and 83 in 2006. This is top quartile performance; and
  - responsive repairs performance is improving.

**Table 1**

Repair category	2003/04 %	2004/05 %	2005/06 %	Quartile
Emergency	96.5%	97.0%	96.5%	3
Urgent	93.1%	95.8%	97.6%	1
Routine	93.1%	96.9%	97.9%	1

- Tenant satisfaction is high and stands at 85 per cent in 2006. This represents top quartile performance; and
- 71 per cent of tenants are satisfied with opportunities for involvement. This represents top quartile performance nationally.

## 42 Housing Management Services | What are the prospects for improvement to the service?

- Overall rent loss through voids has fluctuated from 3.4 per cent in 2003/04, 4.1 per cent in 2004/05 and to 3 per cent in 2006. This represents lower quartile performance nationally; and
- rent loss as a percentage of the rent debit was 9.6 per cent in 2004/05 and has reduced to 6.5 per cent in 2006. This is lower quartile performance.

- 164** Mosscares approach to neighbourhood renewal seeks to secure additional funding or resources for regeneration activities. There are several notable examples: work undertaken in Openshaw which was fundamental in levering in £7m in additional resources to the area. Work with Manchester City Council enabled Mosscares tenants to benefit from the provision of caretakers at several sites. The association has also recently employed a fundraiser who has exceeded targets for income so enabling investment in involvement, safety, community learning and development activities. These activities help to develop strength in the communities that Mosscares operate in. This builds confidence in neighbourhoods and helps to maintain high levels of demand for Mosscares property.
- 165** Internal audit is directed to areas of key risk and business priority and there is a thorough follow up of recommendations or advice. The Executive Team consider risks over a three-year period and then develop a detailed internal audit programme on an annual basis. A previous audit report that focussed upon the income generation function helped Mosscares to shape the re-structure of the service, moving away from generic teams to specialist ones. An audit of the maintenance service was carried out in June 2006. Recommended actions are all completed and a report provided to the Technical Services sub-committee. The Audit sub-committee are responsible for the programme of internal audit and have on occasion requested Managers to attend their meetings to discuss the internal audit findings. Mosscares respond well to audit reports, using them to inform appropriate improvements.
- 166** A STATUS survey of all tenants was carried out in 2006, covering both standard and bespoke questions. Arising from this, three areas of concern were highlighted. Residents considered drug dealing and litter as significant problems in some neighbourhoods and half of residents reporting racial harassment were not satisfied with the outcome. This was followed up with resident focus groups to explore the issues and action plans developed to address these, some in conjunction with other partners. These actions are largely completed with some work still ongoing. Mosscares values feedback and acts upon it with urgency.
- 167** Complaints are robustly monitored and evaluated at a sufficiently senior level. Tenants who have made complaints are asked to comment on how they were dealt with. This is reported annually to the Housing Services sub-committee. In addition evaluation is made of complaints on an individual basis and lessons learnt are identified and fed into processes where appropriate. The service to tenants is likely to improve.

- 168** Annual efficiencies were not delivered in the previous financial year. Only £142,000 against a target of £223,000 was achieved for 2005/06. There were several reasons for this which included an increase in maintenance costs and lower than projected reductions in rent arrears. It is also the case that efficiency savings are not separately and routinely monitored except through management accounts. The limited monitoring of efficiency savings reduces the likelihood of their delivery.
- 169** Ratios of response repairs to planned and of emergency and urgent to routine have been significantly above good practice levels in recent years. In 2004 and 2005 emergency, urgent and routine repairs were in broadly similar proportions. In 2006 this has improved because a particular focus has been placed in this area and at the time of inspection emergency repairs accounted for 10 per cent, Urgent 41 per cent and routine 48 per cent. There is still some way to go to reach Audit Commission best practice guidance. Potentially repairs costs are higher and efficiencies are reduced through the lack of batching repairs and streamlining administrative processes.
- 170** Recognising that gas servicing has been weak, Mossclare has developed plans for improvement when the existing contract ends in 2007. There are plans to bring the service in house which it is considered will deliver cost savings, bring closer control and efficiencies and benefits to the community, including apprenticeships and the use of local labour. To this end recruitment of a gas officer is underway, who will work to develop the new procedures with the current contractor and staff to ensure their appropriateness and effectiveness for the future.

### **How well does the service manage performance?**

- 171** Drivers outweigh barriers to improvement. Business Planning is well established as a mechanism to establish organisational direction and priorities. Directorate, team and individual plans align well to the plan and reporting promotes appropriate accountability and challenge. Structured improvement initiatives can be evidenced over several years. Mossclare's leadership and organisational culture encourages continuing improvement which is reflected in customer feedback Analysis in several areas of costs and controls and outcomes, for example in void management and in responsive repairs has been lacking. Risk assessment has been lacking but is now improving and although much has been done to improve key strategies in recent times, there remain important gaps which indicate that strategies are not yet used as robust directional documents.
- 172** The Business Plan for Mossclare is seen as the key directional strategy for the organisation. Operational plans very clearly link to the Business Plan and progress is monitored against commitments. The plan as presently configured is basic but performs the function of identifying Mossclare's direction, key challenges, realistic opportunities and potential threats. The association's response is then more fully detailed in operational and team plans. Overall, this approach is effective in practice and actions are well aligned to the Business Plan objectives.

#### 44 Housing Management Services | What are the prospects for improvement to the service?

- 173 The Business Planning process is being reviewed as part of the Good to Excellent (G2E) initiative. The stages of planning are tightly defined and include stakeholder consultation and Board sign off. The working draft of the revised plan demonstrates how the G2E principles are being applied. The draft is both clearer and better focussed, establishing key performance measures, targets, critical success factors, actions and departmental ownership relative to each of the plan's strategic challenges/objectives. The developing Business Plan defines the improvements that are being sought and the planning process makes delivery more likely.
- 174 Delivery of the Business Plan is monitored closely and reported through operational and governance structures. There is evident accountability through delegated sub-committees of the Board who receive update reports routinely. The Board receive quarterly updates that demonstrate progress against the objectives of the plan. Directors meet with department or service managers routinely. Minutes show that discussion is focussed and challenging. This approach increases the likelihood of improvements being delivered.
- 175 Performance Management in key areas has been variable. For example void losses have fluctuated for the last three years but have always been lower quartile. However, a thorough analysis of demand, sustainability of property types and locations, of demand, reasons for refusals and customer aspirations has not been undertaken. Although there is a high level of stock decency responsive repairs still average five per property and 91 per cent of repairs investment is on responsive repairs. Planned programmes do not appear to be reducing the amount of responsive repairs and the reasons for this have not been analysed. Without such in depth consideration Mosscares will not know where it needs to improve and what measures will be most likely to result in improvement.
- 176 Performance reporting is being improved. There are plans to demonstrate how initiatives are being progressed. Recognising that performance reports can be improved in presentation and coverage, a performance scorecard is currently being defined and IT arranged to support it with appropriate measures. There is a keen awareness of the need to provide headline reporting perhaps by using traffic light indicators with the ability to 'drill down' further more detailed data where required. It is evident that weaker areas are being identified and strengthened.
- 177 Mosscares compare their performance regionally and with sector leaders, seeking improvements where possible. Benchmarking began over a decade ago through a National Housing Federation (NHF) peer group. There are examples of improvement visits between Mosscares and other social landlords. There are several examples of changes made as a result including the outsourcing of former tenant arrears collection to a three star ALMO. Recent membership of Housemark's benchmarking club will further develop work in this area. Continuous improvement is a strong element of Mosscares's work.

- 178** Mosscafe demonstrates a progressive approach to improvement and learning. They are very active in the regional NHF group and have chaired and continue to chair a variety of key groups. They are for example, shortly to chair a regional Respect agenda event. Mosscafe are very willing to share their experience, frequently hosting visits from other social landlords who wish to learn from successes in neighbourhood regeneration and in the area of diversity. This approach not only assists others but has benefits for Mosscafe's tenants through improved access to partnership working and through addressing common misconceptions about Moss Side and its communities.
- 179** There is a positive learning culture and evidence that the association can lever in additional resources to bring advantages for tenants. Staff views and skills are well used. The collaboration with the Furniture Resource Centre which provides affordable furniture for low income tenants resulted from staff suggestions and a later application for a lottery grant. Staff use the good practice network and Housemark briefings to research and to prompt improvements. A decorations voucher scheme was introduced as a result. Such initiatives bring advantages of convenience and improved tenancy sustainability for tenants and offer savings for Mosscafe.
- 180** Reviews have been undertaken in key areas of service provision that have led to improvements for customers. One review looked at the translation service which has since expanded to include Language Line translations and also led to five staff studying for British Sign Language qualifications. The review of rent arrears processes has led to a more tailored response to vulnerable tenants including specific changes to letters and the introduction of manager approval for all such cases. There has been a clear focus on value for customers and changes demonstrate Mosscafe's willingness to improve.
- 181** Risk identification and management has not been thorough. The current Business Plan is informed by a level of risk appraisal but this is very limited in detail, for example in quantifying the likelihood of potential risks and their impacts. There are examples of detailed risk appraisals linked to development projects but corporate risks have not been robustly assessed. There is the potential for risks to emerge that have not been foreseen or effectively planned for.
- 182** Recent improvements have been made in the identification of risk. The association's internal auditors were asked to assist in the identification of risks and through interviews with managers established a list of 65 significant risks. This is just a starting point but indicates that risk probability and impacts are starting to be better defined, although not yet quantified in financial terms. The Board will be informed of both the improved arrangements for risk assessment and proposals to monitor controls more closely. These very recent changes give some increased confidence that risks will be robustly assessed and managed.

## 46 Housing Management Services | What are the prospects for improvement to the service?

- 183** Leadership within Mosscares is clear, open in style and encourages continuous improvement. The structure of Directorate teams is clear and supported by routine reports at operational and governance levels. The Directors and Chief Executive attend regular staff meetings and regularly contribute to the work of review groups. Staff are encouraged with structured development opportunities and their comments and input into improvement are highly valued. Staff clearly respond well to the open style and they reflect this in comments and more generally in a refreshing 'can do' attitude. It was pleasing that residents and partners that we spoke to also commented about Mosscares staff in this way.
- 184** Work planning links appropriately to strategy and policy and the importance of this is well understood by staff. Staff were able to explain the linkages between the Business Plan, the operational plan, team plans and their individual plans. Staff are aware of the expectations of Mosscares and understand how they contribute to the business' objectives.
- 185** Some performance reporting is limited in scope. Performance reporting to Board is centred on nine key performance indicators. There is a helpful narrative accompanying the indicator reports but overall, the range of performance information is too narrow. Comprehensive performance information is not combined across all areas of activity together with trend and quartile comparisons, hard and soft indicators, or service standard monitoring. At present the focus on KPIs does not give sufficient insight into all areas of the association's activity.
- 186** Strategy development is variable. Key strategies have been in place for some time and many were reviewed and re-drafted in the lead up to inspection. However, the strategies are variable in clarity, quality and implementation. Some such as the Equality and Diversity Strategy and the policy on racial harassment mix strategy with policy and procedure with the effect that guidance for staff is not as easily accessed as it should be. Others, such as the Asset Strategy have important gaps, for example reference to the implications of the Housing Health and Safety Rating System and gas safeguards. Impact assessments have not been undertaken consistently where new strategies have been developed. Strategies are not directing practice as effectively and consistently as they should, with the result that some practices may be poorly resourced or have wider implications than anticipated.
- 187** The procurement of responsive repairs contracts has not been effectively reviewed. Currently a mixture of Schedule of Rates (SoR) and small hourly rate contractors are used. Whilst the local knowledge of the small contractors is an asset, Mosscares has not thought through how to retain this and support small contractors once new procurement methods are put in place. This may impact on the costs and effectiveness of the response repairs service.

## Does the service have the capacity to improve?

**188** There are strong drivers for improvement in this area. Mosscafe fully appreciates, supports and harnesses partnerships to ensure that improvements are delivered for tenants and communities. Staff are supported to undertake their roles well both by structured appraisal and training as well as by IT systems that support day to day functions. Human Resource functions compare well with peers with lower than average staff turnover, absenteeism, accidents and grievances. Business Plus initiatives are particularly positive with Mosscafe encouraging local employment and business development and thus contributing to sustainable communities.

**189** There are several positive examples of learning from and through partnership including:

- walkabouts at estates and schemes involving a range of community partners and the Police;
- data sharing with Greater Manchester Police and the Manchester Anti-Social Behaviour Action Team (ASBAT); and
- Business Plus initiatives with numerous positive outcomes for communities and tenants. These are innovative approaches to providing training, employment and capacity building opportunities within the community.

This approach reflects an association with strong commitment to the communities it serves, directly delivering upon its mission and purpose statements.

**190** There is a rigorous staff appraisal and development system. This includes annual appraisals for all staff supported by interim one to one meetings. The appraisal process ensures links to Business Plan delivery and there is a structured collation of training and development requirements, translated into a training plan submission when annual budgets are formulated. This process was positively commented upon by Investors in People<sup>5</sup> assessors. This helps to ensure that staff are well positioned, skilled and trained to deliver upon key priorities.

**191** There is a structured training and development programme. All training undertaken is linked to business objectives and recorded comprehensively. Staff are supported to attend training so long as there is an identified business need. Recently attended courses range from National Vocational Qualifications to Masters in Business Administration. Recent comparisons within a regional Human Resource (HR) benchmarking club show that Mosscafe spent £845 per person per year on average compared to an average for the others of £354 per person. Training supports the development of a skilled and able workforce.

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<sup>5</sup> The Investors in People Standard is a business improvement tool designed to advance an organisation's performance through its people

## 48 Housing Management Services | What are the prospects for improvement to the service?

- 192** Mosscares HR services compare well with a range of social housing organisations. Mosscares compare themselves with a comparator group of 13 associations in the North West. Comparisons show better than average outcomes for sickness absence, staff turnover, accidents, grievances, percentages of accidents per employee and percentage of BME staff employed. It is positive that this benchmarking takes place and is reported to the Human Resources sub-committee together with notes of further action to be taken.
- 193** The association has maintained a diversity officer post since August 2005. This enables them to improve the co-ordination of diversity and equalities work. The post is focussed to deliver benefits to customers, staff, contractors and other stakeholders as well as to the Board. Recently in-house training for all staff and the Board was delivered by the officer and HR officer. This investment reflects the importance of diversity for Mosscares and has helped them to respond appropriately to diverse client groups.
- 194** Mosscares Board members are clear about the objectives of the organisation and their role in ensuring delivery. Board members contribute a wide range of perspectives, skills and experience. Three members are tenants of Mosscares. Board minutes evidence appropriate discussion and, challenge where necessary. Several have key roles in sub-committees and develop closer involvement and detailed insights in this way.
- 195** Papers to Board demonstrate some consideration of the need to filter information and to focus discussion. Some Board papers are 'starred' and for information only. Any member can request to have them 'un-starred' to allow for detailed discussion. However, the system is used effectively to ensure Board members remain well informed and focussed upon their decision making responsibilities.
- 196** Although the structure of services was changed in 2004 with a move from generic to specialist teams there has been an effort to promote cross-team working and to emphasise shared priorities in a variety of ways. Examples are the multi-disciplinary estate walkabouts, the planned use of estate staff to do HB verification, the realisation by all staff of the importance of income generation and the reminders to tenants at all points of contact regarding rent payments and available assistance. Mosscares's approach has promoted joined up services that are well focussed on customers.
- 197** Effective use is made of IT systems. IT supports the work of the organisation and is continually assessed for improvement. This is complemented by an intranet, used both for conveying information to staff and extracting data from the main system to provide bespoke reports which again support the needs of the staff. There is a document management system which reduces the need for paper files. Staff are assisted to carry out their work in an efficient manner with necessary information made readily available.

## Appendix 1 – Performance indicators

Performance Indicator	2003/04	2004/05	2005/06	2005/06 Comparison Group Mean	2005/06 Comparison Group Median*	2005/06 Quartile Position in Comparison Group*
General needs rent						
Average GN weekly gross rent	£55.84	£58.00	£59.53	£66.61	£64.96	1
General needs voids and lettings						
GN re-let time	73 days	61 days	65 days	40 days	35 days	4
Vacant and available GN (self-cont'd) stock	-	1.1%	0.8%	0.8%	0.6%	3
Vacant and not available GN (self-cont'd) stock	-	2.0%	1.0%	1.0%	0.4%	4
GN lettings to BME tenants	-	44.9%	52.1%	13.8%	-	-
Asset condition						
Average SAP rating	73.1	79	83	68	68	1
Failing decent homes standard	1.3%	0.8%	0.8%	14.3%	10.3%	1
Repairs performance						
Emergency repairs completed in target	96.5%	97.0%	96.5%	95.4%	97.0%	3
Urgent repairs completed in target	93.1%	95.8%	97.6%	92.3%	94.4%	1
Routine repairs completed in target	93.1%	96.9%	97.9%	93.2%	95.0%	1
Appointments made that were kept	97.0%	-	-	93.2%	97.1%	3
Service to tenants						
Tenant satisfaction overall	90%	97%	85%	79%	81%	1
Tenant satisfaction with participation	85%	93%	71%	62%	62%	1

50 Housing Management Services | Appendix 1 – Performance indicators

Performance Indicator	2003/04	2004/05	2005/06	2005/06 Comparison Group Mean	2005/06 Comparison Group Median*	2005/06 Quartile Position in Comparison Group*
General needs FPI						
Weekly Operating Cost per GN unit	£39.08	£38.90	£46.46	£54.28	£51.53	1
GN Operating Cost as a percentage of Turnover	71.7%	70.5%	77.8%	81.2%	75.7%	3
Weekly investment per GN unit	£18.92	£17.23	£23.11	£38.22	-	-
Rent Collected for GN	95.5%	98.4%	96.2%	99.2%	99.5%	4
Rent lost due to GN Voids	3.4%	4.1%	3.0%	1.4%	1.1%	4
Current tenant rent arrears at year end for GN	-	9.6%	6.5%	4.9%	4.7%	3

## Appendix 2 – Reality checks undertaken

- 1 When we went on site we carried out a number of different checks, building on the work described above, in order to get a full picture of how good the service is. These on-site reality checks were designed to gather evidence about what it is like to use the service and to see how well it works. Our reality checks included:
  - observing housing management activity;
  - observing repairs call handling;
  - visits to improved homes;
  - visits to vacant properties which were ready to let;
  - file checks for rent arrears, anti-social behaviour and customer complaints;
  - telephone surveys of a small sample of tenants who had used the service;
  - focus group meetings with staff and tenants;
  - meeting with representatives of the board; and
  - interviews with staff at all levels.

## Appendix 3 – 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)

### **Business Plus**

Business Plus is an innovative project with the goal of promoting an enterprise culture in BME and inner city communities. In this venture, MossCare is in partnership with other housing associations; Tung Sing/Places for People and Arawak Walton.

There is a programme of community engagement, awareness raising sessions, enterprise training and ongoing support delivered directly to local communities, with the aim of providing linkages to mainstream business support services.

It enables people from disadvantaged backgrounds to 'bridge the gap' through a programme of customised support and confidence building.

The services include:

- Enterprise Awareness Events;
- Business Basics;
- Pre-Start Up Support; and
- Micro Business Support.

Outcomes and outputs:

- 130 people have been engaged in Enterprise Awareness events;
- 44 individuals attended 'Introduction to Enterprise' training;
- 15 businesses entered the start-up phase; and
- 58 existing businesses have been supported.

### **Young Persons' Strategy and working with schools**

MossCare has developed in partnership with young people, a comprehensive Young Persons' Strategy. This Strategy aims to give young people opportunities for involvement and influence as well as providing for diversionary activities that are aimed at preventing anti-social behaviour.

Working with primary and secondary schools in local neighbourhoods is a key part of the strategy. For many years, MossCare has worked on a range of innovative initiatives with schools and where possible linking the project to the Curriculum. An example being a furniture project linked to a Design and Technology GCSE course.

## **Mix Matters**

MossCare produced 'Mix Matters' in conjunction with Salford University. It is a good practice guide designed to assist contractors, consultants and suppliers in integrating equality and diversity within their business activities. Feedback from contractors indicates that the guide has had significant impact in terms of raising awareness.

## **Respect Charter and Respect Walkabouts**

MossCare has embraced the Government's Respect Agenda. In partnership with Manchester City Council MossCare has a key role in devising and launching a Manchester Respect Charter for all housing associations operating in Manchester.

Staff from MossCare have worked in partnership with local residents and agencies on late, evening and weekend 'Respect Walkabouts'. These walkabouts target areas with high levels of anti-social behaviour and have been positively received by local residents.