

Housing Association Inspection Report

January 2006



# Landlord Services

**Testway Housing Limited**

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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 and national 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 Testway Housing Limited (Testway) was created in 1998 to accept the large scale voluntary transfer of stock from Test Valley Borough Council (TVBC) which took place in March 2000.
- 2 Testway Housing Limited operates almost exclusively in the Test Valley area of Hampshire with only ten homes located in two other local authority areas. Testway currently has 4,991 homes of which 232 are sheltered accommodation and 68 are shared ownership; the rest of the homes are general needs.
- 3 Testway employs 138 staff. It has its head office in Andover and an area office in Romsey.
- 4 In April 2005, Testway joined the Silbury Group (formerly Sarsen Housing Association) to form the Aster Group. At the same time, the direct labour organisations of both landlords joined together to form Aster Property Management Limited (APM).
- 5 The Aster Group is a non-charitable, non-asset holding group parent and comprises Ridgeway Community Housing Association, Sarsen Housing Association and Testway Housing Limited. It is currently awaiting approval, from the Housing Corporation, for another medium-size housing association to join the Group. APM is a wholly owned subsidiary of the Aster Group. It provides repairs and planned maintenance services to members of the Aster Group and will sell its services to other organisations.

## Scoring the service

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

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

		Prospects for improvement?				
Excellent						'a fair service that has promising prospects for improvement'  <b>A good service?</b>
Promising		☀				
Uncertain						
Poor						
		Poor	Fair ★	Good ★★	Excellent ★★★	

### *Audit Commission*

- 7 The service is fair because it demonstrates the following positive features.
- Services are provided from two offices which are in accessible locations. The offices are open from 8.30am until 5.00pm Monday to Thursday and 4.30pm on Friday and there is an effective out-of-hours service.
  - A detailed list of service standards, a range of information and advisory leaflets, a good quality newspaper and newsletters.
  - An interactive website can be used to pay rent, report repairs and make complaints.
  - A translation and interpretation service is provided through Language Line, together with the provision of documents in audio, large print and Braille. Hearing loops are also available.
  - A firm but fair approach to income management has resulted in top quartile performance for rent collection.

<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.

## 8 Landlord Services | Scoring the service

- A robust approach to asset management is supported by good stock condition information.
- There is good performance for the repairs of empty homes and gas servicing.
- A Community Enforcement Officer and a number of community initiatives are being used to address anti-social behaviour problems.
- A floating tenancy support service helps tenants maintain their tenancies.
- Estates are generally maintained in good condition and provide an attractive area in which to live.

### 8 However, there are also a number of weaknesses evident, including the following.

- Customer service standards have not always been developed in conjunction with customers.
- Customer service standards are not monitored effectively and the results are not being reported to customers. Those reported to the Association's Board are of limited value.
- Testway currently has little knowledge of its customers and their needs, and has undertaken no tenant profiling.
- Equality and diversity issues have only recently started to be effectively addressed.
- Tenant participation is not as effective as it should be and tenants have limited involvement in the running of the Association. Tenant participation revolves around a relatively small group of tenants and needs to be extended down. Those that are involved have received little training to build up and develop their skills and abilities.
- Responsive repairs targets are not being met and the repairs desk staff have not been effectively trained.
- The control of repairs through post inspections and variation orders is weak.

### 9 The service has promising prospects for improvement because of the following drivers.

- Testway has a good track record of successfully delivering its workplans and recommendations from consultants.
- The creation of the Aster Group and APM should provide opportunities and benefits that will improve performance.
- Testway has a vision of what it wants to achieve and this is supported by its key business objectives.
- It is a learning organisation and benchmarks effectively.
- It has financial strength and detailed financial plans.
- There are a number of important new strategies and initiatives that have recently been approved, but have not yet had time to bed in or deliver.

- 10 However, there are some barriers and areas where improvement is required, including the following.
- The implementation of important projects requires more effective planning and execution.
  - There should be a formal assessment of progress against service plans at the end of each year.

## Recommendations

- 11 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 Improve the planning, project management, resourcing and delivery of projects:*

- ensure that effective controls are introduced for APM, and all other contractors, as part of the already agreed consultant's review of APM;*
- ensure that staff are adequately consulted and trained to operate new systems effectively;*
- ensure that there is a formal end of year, assessment of progress against the service improvement plans, report sent to Board annually; and*
- service improvement plans to include milestones so that progress towards achieving them can be easily measured and shown.*

The expected benefits of this recommendation are:

- this will improve the current weak controls that exist in APM and similar controls should be applied to other contractors; and
- the Board will be better informed as to what has and has not been achieved from the service improvement plans.

The implementation of this recommendation will have high impact with medium costs. This should be implemented within six months.

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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 costs is over 5 per cent.

**Recommendation**

*R2 Strengthen performance management and services through a more rigorous and self critical approach to monitoring. Develop customer facing performance indicators, with customers.*

- A more rigorous and self critical approach to performance management and service provision generally would be of benefit to Testway.*
- A suite of customer facing performance indicators should be developed that address all measurable aspects of the service standards as well as other issues of customer interest. They should clearly show all aspects of performance, be monitored frequently by tenant bodies and published for all to see.*

The expected benefits of this recommendation are:

- a more rigorous and critical approach to performance management and service provision would enable Testway to pick up issues earlier and perform to a higher standard; and
- the development of customer facing performance indicators and the reporting of them on a frequent basis to residents, CMT, EMT and Board, will improve resident involvement, the performance indicators should also cover areas such as estate inspections planned and undertaken.

The implementation of this recommendation will have high impact with low costs. This should be implemented within three months.

**Recommendation**

*R3 Develop more effective resident involvement and ensure that services and information are tailored to the meet the needs of identifiable groups, for example, those with disabilities and BME communities.*

- Residents should be involved in the business of the organisation, at all levels, including in the shaping and monitoring of services, the appointment and management of contractors and the appointment of some staff.*
- Develop more effective resident involvement and ensure that services and information are tailored to the meet the needs of identifiable groups of residents, for example those with disabilities and BME communities.*
- An interested tenant should be able to take advantage of training that will develop their interest in housing and enhance their skills to contribute to the management of Testway.*
- Ensure that services and information are more effectively tailored to the meet the needs of identifiable groups of residents, for example those with disabilities and BME communities*
- Review the criteria for Board membership to ensure that it does not impose undue restrictions on tenants.*

The expected benefits of this recommendation are:

- resident involvement will improve services and the strength of the organisation in the long-term; and
- the new website, Testway Housing News, the new tenant handbook and all leaflets and publications need to be accessible to all.

The implementation of this recommendation will have high impact with medium costs. This should be implemented within six months.

**Recommendation**

*R4 Develop more effective strategic management of estates.*

- *Land ownership issues between TVBC and Testway need to be clarified so that residents know who is responsible.*
- *Review the cleaning and grounds maintenance arrangements with TVBC.*
- *Review the grounds maintenance contract with APM.*

The expected benefits of this recommendation are:

- that estates will be maintained to a higher, more consistent standard and there will be improved value for money;
- tenants will receive a better service and the environment will be improved; and
- there will be less confusion over land ownership.

The implementation of this recommendation will have high impact with medium costs. This should be implemented within six months.

- 12 We would like to thank the staff of Testway Housing Limited, particularly Sarah-Jane Brown, who made us welcome and who met our requests efficiently and courteously.

Dates of inspection: 19 to 23 September 2005.

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# Report

## Context

### The locality

- 13 Testway Housing Limited (Testway) operates almost exclusively in the Test Valley Borough Council area in Hampshire. It is an area of 245 square miles and comprises large areas of attractive countryside with many small villages and the towns of Andover and Romsey. It is an area of high house prices and very low unemployment.

### The Association

- 14 Testway Housing Limited was formed in 1998 to take the large scale voluntary transfer of housing from Test Valley Borough Council. The stock transfer of 5,262 homes took place in March 2000 and Testway provides services from its head office in Andover and an area office in Romsey.
- 15 The Association currently has approximately 4,991 homes of which 232 are sheltered, 68 are shared ownership and the rest are general needs. The main concentrations of homes are in Andover, where seven estates were built by the Greater London Council (GLC), and in Romsey.
- 16 Testway has invested in its properties and they are generally in good condition with only 11 per cent currently failing the decent homes standard (DHS) as well as a relatively high SAP rating of 66, demonstrating good levels of insulation.
- 17 The Association is managed by a board of 15 members comprising five independents, five residents and five councillors.
- 18 Testway has achieved Investors in People, Charter Mark and the Centre for Sheltered Housing Studies.
- 19 Testway formed the Aster Group, out of the Silbury Group, with Sarsen Housing Association in April 2005.
- 20 The Aster Group's vision is to:
- be recognised as a centre of excellence and innovation;
  - have a reputation for first class staff and first class service;
  - be an excellent employer;
  - build on financial strengths; and
  - develop a growing number of successful partnerships.

- 21 The Aster Group's business objectives are to:
- improve continuously and deliver high quality services;
  - provide greater choice for communities by growing the Group; and
  - perform in accordance with business plans.
- 22 Testway's objective is to 'develop and manage attractive and successful neighbourhoods where people want to live'.
- 23 This is supported by a further eight key business objectives relating to:
- customer satisfaction;
  - business performance
  - programme delivery;
  - financial strength;
  - teamwork, communication and partnership;
  - continuous improvement;
  - development and growth; and
  - strategic partnership.
- 24 Testway's tenant profile is:
- 55 per cent of tenants are aged 60 plus;
  - 60 per cent are female;
  - 50 per cent are on state pension;
  - 32 per cent are in employment;
  - 19 per cent have mobility problems within the household;
  - 5 per cent have sight problems within the household;
  - 11 per cent have hearing problems within the household;
  - 0.6 per cent are from non white ethnic groups; and
  - 98 per cent are white British; a further 1.2 per cent are from other white ethnic origins.

## **The service**

**25** The services covered by this inspection are:

- access and customer care;
- diversity;
- stock investment, asset management and repairs;
- housing income management;
- tenancy and estate management; and
- value for money.

## How good is the service?

### What has the service aimed to achieve?

- 26 In its business plan 2005/06 Testway has set out its vision and key business objectives clearly.

#### **Vision**

- 27 We want to:
- become a centre of excellence and innovation;
  - develop a reputation for first class staff and first class service;
  - be an excellent employer;
  - build on our financial strength; and
  - build a growing number of successful partnerships.

#### **Key business objectives**

- 28 To achieve:
- customer satisfaction;
  - business objectives;
  - programme delivery;
  - financial strength;
  - teamwork and communication;
  - continuous improvement and innovation;
  - development and growth; and
  - strategic partnerships.
- 29 In April 2005, Testway joined with the Silbury Group to form the Aster Group and Aster Property Management (APM). The core objectives of the Aster Group are:
- to continuously improve;
  - to provide greater choice for communities by growing the Group; and
  - to perform in accordance with the business plans.
- 30 The Aster Group core objectives are very similar to the Testway key business objectives. Testway has used the same business objectives, to concentrate its efforts on those particular themes throughout the organisation, for the last three years.

- 31 In producing their business plans each department is required to address each of the themes and this ensures that the organisation is moving forward on all the key business objectives at the same time.
- 32 Some of the objectives in Testway's 2005/06 plan are as follows.
- To develop a new tenant handbook and a new improved website, as well as appointments at the first point of contact and a customer panel to discuss specifications and service standards for improvements.
  - Improve financial reporting and control within development and refurbishment schemes, commence a rolling programme of stock condition and asbestos surveys and to continue the rolling out of the electronic document control system.
  - Successfully secure external funding to support community involvement projects and upgrade computer software.
  - Minimise the VAT liabilities for development and refurbishment works and effectively recharge for repairs works where appropriate.
  - Achieve Charter Mark re-accreditation and develop partnering approaches for planned maintenance programmes.
  - The repairs service to achieve the Housemark KPI revalidation and assist in the development of the Association's sustainability policy.
  - Explore alternative funding for provision of homes on major development areas with the use of grant, Testway property services to move into Aster Property Management and prepare the refinancing proposals in preparation for the Andover major development area.
  - Develop close working relationships with Test Valley Borough Council and Hampshire County Council regarding disabled adaptations, build on diversity initiatives and share good practice with Group members.
- 33 While Testway's plans are mainly operational, it also shares the Aster Group's strategies, which include the following.
- Ensure the smooth transition into the Aster Group, to maintain mutually support relationships across the Boards and to review the group IT strategy.
  - Implement a medium-term tax plan to minimise liabilities, develop group-wide human resources strategy, provide group-wide conferences and training for Board members and encourage greater use of partnering arrangements.
  - Harmonise central services for greater efficiency and effectiveness, ensure group commitment to the 'In Business' campaign, achieve re-accreditation of Investors in People and harmonise terms and conditions across the group.
  - Research opportunities to expand the group, increase the provision of development services, maintain links with regional housing boards, forums, assemblies and development agencies and to deliver good quality development services to subsidiaries and partners.

- 34 Testway's plans are well known and understood by staff because not only are they developed and discussed with them, but each year Testway produces a small, good quality, booklet for staff that clearly explains the organisation's mission, vision, values and business plans. The plans are fed into team and individual objectives and reviewed through one to one meetings and personal development reviews.

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

### Access and customer care

- 35 This is a service area where strengths outweigh weaknesses. Staff are customer-focused and Testway's newsletter is a useful informative document. Testway produces individual newsletters for some estates and a news sheet for leaseholders. The tenant's handbook is informative and there is an interactive website. The repairs desk is open for extended hours and telephone calls are answered quickly. However, customers are not always involved in setting service standards or shaping services. Performance standards for complaints and correspondence are not being effectively recorded.
- 36 Services for tenants provided through the local offices are satisfactory. The offices, at Andover and Romsey are bright and welcoming with good quality facilities such as toys for children. The offices are accessible to all, including the disabled, with level access and hearing loops. The Andover office has an automatic door. The offices are open 8.30am to 5.00pm Monday to Thursday and 4.30pm on Friday.
- 37 Staff throughout the Association are customer-focused and this was confirmed in the April 2005 status survey where 90 per cent of those who have contacted them in the last year found staff helpful and 88 per cent were satisfied with the overall service provided. Testway uses Language Line, audio tapes and there are hearing loops in reception at both offices. There are parking facilities for disabled people at both offices.
- 38 The Tenants Handbook is a well produced document with a wide variety of useful information. However, it does not have any offer of translation or alternative formats and is being re-written to address these issues.
- 39 The company has a long and detailed list of service standards but many of them are not easily measurable. Only performance on answering telephone calls and some basic information on complaints is reported to the company management team (CMT), executive management team (EMT) and Board. While those for dealing with telephone answering are good, no performance indicators are provided for dealing with correspondence, emails or any of the other service standards because they are not being monitored.

- 40 There is no call centre at Testway although there is a dedicated repairs desk. The majority of contacts with Testway are made by telephone and calls are answered quickly and pleasantly, although some tenants reported that staff did not always get back to them when messages were left. The out-of-hours service is effective with calls answered quickly and appropriate assistance provided. Appointments for some responsive repairs can be made until 7.00pm, for example for gas servicing.
- 41 Testway produces its own newsletter, Testway Housing News, three times per year. It is a good quality, easy to read document and includes information about community issues, local events, the improvement programmes, gas servicing and other housing management issues. They produce individual newsletters for some of the larger estates and a separate newsletter for leaseholders. These are also useful documents that concentrate on anti-social behaviour and local issues. Testway Housing News and other newsletters do not indicate if they are available in large print, although Testway Housing News does mention the availability of an audio version for those who are partially sighted, dyslexic or have a learning difficulty.
- 42 Testway has produced a wide range of good quality information leaflets for tenants dealing with issues such as asbestos, equality and diversity, complaints and property standards when moving, among others. The leaflets do not include any information about availability in alternative formats such as large print or Braille.
- 43 Testway has an interactive website that tenants can use to request repairs, pay rent, make a complaint, apply for a transfer and to order information leaflets. It also has a variety of useful information and is easy to use. However, the performance information on it is very dated (from 2002) and it does not include any Board or resident participation documents. It also contains no information about aids and adaptations, nor any information about disability. The website is in the process of being redesigned and the new one is scheduled to be available in November 2005. The specification of the new website is a significant improvement on the existing one.
- 44 Testway's current website, leaflets, Testway Housing News and its estate newsletters do not include a strap line in any BME languages offering translation. While we acknowledge that the BME community is small, this is a provision that should be made because individuals in such communities can be particularly isolated and vulnerable. The Annual Report 2005 is the only document that has translation strap lines in BME languages. However, the tenants' newsletter advertises the availability of a translation service.

- 45 There is a clear three stage complaints procedure which is designed to deal with complaints within the Housing Corporation guidelines. Complaints can be taken in writing, over the telephone or via the website. Complaints should be centrally logged by the Quality Service Manager, but this does not always happen. Basic information is reported to the CMT and EMT on a monthly basis. A specific complaints report is made to the Board every six months, but its use is limited because it lacks detail, for example it does not state performance against target times. Our reality checks showed the complaints procedures were not being followed, for example, not all were being registered with the Quality Service Manager, target times were not being achieved and cases were not being closed correctly. However, there was evidence of learning from complaints, for example, the rent arrears letters were re-written following complaints from tenants.
- 46 Testway's staff are customer-focused, have a good rapport with their clients and provide good customer services. However, customers have had little involvement in the setting and monitoring of service standards. At the time of the inspection performance information was not being routinely monitored by any tenant body.

## **Diversity**

- 47 This is an area where performance is mixed. Testway has been late to effectively address equality and diversity issues, but has laid some good foundations in the last year. Despite the large number of elderly tenants there is no information provided on how to obtain aids and adaptations and staff have little knowledge about aids and adaptations.
- 48 In July 2004, the Housing Corporation undertook an equality and diversity review of Testway and was critical of the organisation. In response to this Testway developed an Equal Opportunity and Diversity Strategy 2004/07, together with a detailed, SMART action plan. The Housing Corporation reviewed the situation in January 2005 and was satisfied that Testway was complying with the regulatory code and good practice.
- 49 Testway has adopted the Race and Housing Enquiry Code of Practice for Housing Associations. It has an Equality and Diversity Champion on the Board and both the Board and staff have now received equality and diversity training. There is a Diversity Forum, which includes senior managers, that is charged with achieving the aims of the action plan as well as addressing any other equality and diversity issues in the organisation. An independent diversity consultant was employed to support and advise the forum.
- 50 The Board receives quarterly reports to advise of progress on the equal opportunity and diversity action plan. The action plan covers all aspects of Testway's business, including access to housing, recruitment, employment, governance, contractors and other situations. It addresses a wide range of issues including race, gender, disability, educational ability and age. The action plan is detailed and should deliver satisfactory outcomes if implemented effectively.

- 51 Testway is progressing through the action plan, for instance it now has full equality and diversity information about its workforce; it is undertaking work to achieve its targets for the employment of BME and disabled staff, and all disabled applicants will be interviewed. It has developed targets for Board membership and has increased the proportion of women members. In addition it is increasing the number of women who are members of the Association. It also requires contractors to have appropriate equality and diversity policies otherwise they will be dropped from its approved list and has invited them to joint training sessions. It now provides lever taps as standard when kitchens are refurbished. It has recognised that there has been no BME involvement in the tenant action groups (TAGs) and tenant forum in the last year. BME tenants have attended the tenant's conference and community events and Testway is addressing how it can get them involved in the business of the organisation.
- 52 The current website has no facilities to make access easier for disabled people; nor does it include any information about disability issues or the provision of aids and adaptations. However, the new website has been developed with customers and is due to go live in November 2005. It has features to assist those with sight impairment and will have translation options in a variety of languages on the home page. The RNIB will test the website for accessibility prior to launch. The tenants' handbook is also being rewritten and will address equality and diversity more effectively.
- 53 Within the Test Valley area there are some locations of educational deprivation and Testway has worked with agencies, for example, the Andover Family Learning to deliver educational programmes to its tenants.
- 54 Testway has made a point of specifically addressing the needs of youths and children in the community. It has operated some effective projects, such as Clean and Safe Educate and theatrical projects, to involve youths and children in their local environment and give them a sense of community awareness.
- 55 Testway developed a domestic violence policy and procedures in June 2005 and has run articles in Testway Housing News promoting its stance on the issue.
- 56 Testway recently hosted a special conference for women in housing, the first of its kind, utilising funding from the Housing Corporation.
- 57 While progress has been made in some areas, there are other issues that have not yet been resolved, for instance although Testway has a wide range of good quality leaflets, few of them include an offer of translation. Testway's main housing management IT system does not hold information about disabilities, vulnerabilities or language requirements in a format that can be easily interrogated and the records that do exist are inconsistent. Testway's satisfaction questionnaires for repairs and maintenance do not include ethnic origin.
- 58 Testway has a high proportion of elderly tenants but it has not profiled their specific needs and tailored services to meet them. There is a best value review of aids and adaptations that will be completed in the very near future and the draft recommendations that we have seen will improve service provision to tenants. Already simple works such as installing hand rails are being undertaken without the approval of an occupational therapist.

## Stock investment and asset management including repairs

- 59 Testway Housing Limited is effectively managing its assets and is well on track to achieve the decent homes standard (DHS), but it is only working to a basic DHS standard. Gas servicing and the repair of empty properties are both areas of strength. Testway Housing Limited does not use partnering contracts with external contractors to provide any of its maintenance services. The response repairs service is not performing to target and a new IT system is not being used effectively. The company is customer-focused and residents are happy with the works, but residents are not effectively involved in shaping the services provided. Overall, this is an area where performance is mixed.

### Asset management

- 60 Testway's asset management is an area of strength. It has good quality information about its properties and investment in them is well managed, however, tenants do not have an input into planning the service provision.
- 61 The Association has good information about the condition of its homes from a stock condition survey undertaken between 2001 and 2003. The survey included whether or not asbestos was present in the properties. The stock condition survey was validated in 2004 and found to be robust. The stock data gives accurate information about when key internal and external building elements will need to be replaced, and this has enabled Testway to ensure its resources are targeted to the most important areas.
- 62 An additional 10 per cent survey of homes was undertaken by external consultants in 2005, to clarify some issues regarding DHS compliance. At present, only 11 per cent of Testway's homes fail the DHS. Testway is clear about which homes need works to be carried out. The stock survey has been analysed and there are two detailed five-year plans to ensure that investment programmes are targeted on works to achieve the DHS.
- 63 Testway has been effectively managing its assets since it was created in 2000, but it has only recently formalised this in an asset management strategy. Through its asset management strategy all homes are categorised into three groups to determine whether or not they are suitable for further investment. Those properties that fall into the lowest group are automatically considered for disposal, but, disposal is not mandatory. Testway's policy on disposal is that it can dispose of any property that it feels appropriate and it has used this to sell high value properties in isolated locations in order to purchase a greater number of properties in lower priced areas. The criteria used to group the properties include condition, size, population profiling, ease of letting and housing management issues.
- 64 Tenants have had little involvement in determining future investment plans or the approach to asset management. However, an asset management focus group, which includes residents, has recently been formed. For the last five years the asset management plans have mainly been developed to fulfil the transfer promises.

### Planned and cyclical maintenance

- 65 Testway's planned and cyclical maintenance programme is an area of mixed performance. Works are carried out to a good standard and tenants are very satisfied. Testway does not use partnering contracts with its external planned maintenance contractors, but it has a service level agreement for planned maintenance, with APM, which has a partnering ethos. There has been relatively little tenant involvement in shaping the service.
- 66 Planned maintenance is undertaken by external contractors and APM. There are annual programmes for the upgrading of kitchens, bathrooms, external doors and roofs. There is a five-year painting cycle and a six-year electrical testing programme. There is no planned maintenance programme to service cold water storage systems although consultants are in the process of carrying out surveys prior to making recommendations.
- 67 Testway took a decision not to use partnering contracts until it had delivered on its transfer promises. These have now been delivered and it is now starting to look at partnering contracts using the guidance in the Aster Group financial regulations, but none are in place for planned maintenance.
- 68 Testway has achieved low costs for its planned maintenance contracts because they are tendered annually and awarded to the lowest quotation. However, the fact that the external contractors do not have partnering contracts does mean that opportunities to improve services to customers have been limited. One contractor has a direct IT link to Testway and updates the completion of jobs online. The same contractor will shortly have appointments made for customers, at the point of contact, by Testway staff.
- 69 Planned maintenance works are undertaken to a good standard and since the stock transfer Testway has spent £35 million on improvements to its properties, mostly on kitchens, central heating, double glazed windows and external doors. Tenants are very happy with the improvement works carried out.
- 70 The annual programmes are well managed and have been consistently delivered on time and within budget. A number of the contractors have worked for Testway for many years and there is a strong relationship with them. Contract management is effective with monthly meetings, for all contracts of over three months, at which performance issues, health and safety, asbestos and any problems are discussed. The monthly meetings are supplemented by site visits and meetings on a more frequent basis.
- 71 During reality checks we found instances where kitchens units had been replaced, but tenants were having to wait up to a further three weeks for the floor to be replaced. However, tenants were very happy with the works.

- 72 In order to assess the performance of the planned maintenance contractors on a standard basis, Testway has recently introduced an evaluation process. The process evaluates performance on 13 criteria which are scored on a range from one to five. The evaluation is undertaken following the completion of the contract and those contractors that score 35 or lower will be individually reviewed to determine whether they stay on the list of approved contractors. Using this system one contractor has been removed from kitchen replacement work.
- 73 An annual contractor reward scheme is linked to the evaluation scheme, but the evaluation process is new and the reward scheme has not yet come into effect.
- 74 Tenants are given adequate notice of work and are particularly positive about the conduct of operatives. However, the letters sent by Testway do not explain the disruption that tenants can expect and nor do they confirm how long the works will actually take.
- 75 Tenants are not involved in any contract management meetings with planned maintenance contractors and they are not involved in their appointment.
- 76 Following a best value review of planned maintenance in January 2004 Testway realised that its practice of offering a choice of only two kitchen styles was substantially less than the majority of other housing associations. In consultation with tenants it increased the specification of the kitchens and bathrooms and increased the choice of kitchen styles. However, once a kitchen style is chosen, Testway limits the tenant's choice of work tops.
- 77 As part of the same best value review the target for tenant satisfaction was raised from 90 per cent to 95 per cent with a target of 30 per cent for the return of satisfaction survey cards. Customer satisfaction from April to August 2005 was 93.8 per cent with a satisfaction card return rate of 38.4 per cent.

### **Responsive repairs**

- 78 Customer satisfaction with the responsive repairs service is high and the repairs desk staff are customer-focused, but overall this is an area of weakness because the IT system was not implemented effectively, targets for the completion of works are not being met, post inspections have not been happening and general control is weak.
- 79 In 2004, Testway's performance indicators for responsive repairs were externally validated and found to be incorrectly calculated - although upper quartile performance being reported, this was not justified. The incorrect performance indicators were for appointments made and kept, and the completion of emergency, urgent and response repairs within target times.
- 80 A new IT system for dealing with responsive repairs was introduced in March 2005 that should provide a number of improvements, including better cost information, appointments and accurate performance information on the completion of works to target. Testway acknowledges that the implementation of this system has not gone smoothly.

- 81 From 1 April 2005, the management of the repairs service, including operatives, surveyors and repairs desk staff, transferred from Testway to APM. An APM report dated September 2005 confirms that there have been a number of issues that have resulted in poor administration and delays in securing reliable and prompt management information about the repairs service. None of the operational managers in APM has a full understanding of the system. In addition, the training for staff was not well delivered and they felt that they had not been effectively consulted which may have contributed to a high sickness absence rate.
- 82 There has been a high turn round of repairs desk staff at APM. Out of the five staff members, one started in May, two in July and one in September. These new staff have received little training except for a week or so shadowing another member of the team. The staff are customer-focused but their lack of training has resulted in a disproportionately high number of jobs being classified as emergency repairs as well as a high number of pre-inspection requests. Inadequate descriptions on works orders, due to lack of repairs desk staff training, have been an issue for some contractors and must lead to higher costs.
- 83 A high-level of pre-inspection appointments are requested because the repairs desk staff are not able to deal with the calls at the first point of contact. In many cases the surveyors telephone the tenant back and resolve the situation without having to visit. If this is the case they do not then record it as a pre-inspection because they have not had to visit the property. Therefore, although the number of pre-inspections requested is high the actual number shown is within target at below 10 per cent.
- 84 Post inspections should be carried out for all works orders of £500 or more, one in fifty orders of between £100 and £499 and one in five hundred of orders up to £100. However, the new IT system has not been providing the post inspection reports and the number of inspections that have taken place since April is very low. In August, only 0.9 per cent of works orders raised were post inspected. In the week before the inspection, staff started to manually select 20 works orders per day for post inspection.
- 85 The current performance indicators for the completion of works are as shown in the following table.

**Table 2 Performance against targets for completion of works**

	Target	June	July	August
<b>Emergencies APM</b>	99%	77.85%	86.84%	86.61%
<b>Urgent APM</b>	97%	78.05%	75.73%	83.91%
<b>Routine APM</b>	97%	89.15%	79.76%	80.38%
<b>Emergencies others</b>	99%	79.31%	80.43%	74.29%
<b>Urgent others</b>	97%	88.43%	79.65%	82.07%
<b>Routine others</b>	97%	98.25%	77.97%	85.23%

*Note: APM = Aster Property Management, others = other contractors.*

- 86 These performance figures are poor, although Testway staff believe that performance is better than that shown and the true figures are masked by issues relating to the poor administration of the system. Whatever the situation, the system is not being used, or working effectively because of poor project management in the implementation of the system. The system is not yet producing all of the reports required by management.
- 87 The split between emergency, urgent and routine works is as shown in Table 3.

**Table 3 Split between emergency, urgent and routine works**

	Target	June	July	August
<b>Emergencies</b>	10%	11.58%	15.87%	18.40%
<b>Urgent</b>	20%	23.59%	23.67%	23.47%
<b>Routine</b>	70%	64.83%	60.46%	58.14%

- 88 The control of variation orders is weak because there are no guidelines as to how much a works order may be varied by. Operatives normally undertake any necessary additional work and the extra cost is included on the ticket. A variation check has been undertaken and it shows that 38 per cent of works orders are varied, but Testway do not regard this as significant. This is poor control.
- 89 The September 2005 report also acknowledges that the number of customers being given an appointment at the first point of contact is low - on 19 September it was 76.43 per cent. This figure only relates to works allocated to APM and since no appointments are made for any other contractors, the overall figure for those given appointments at the first point of contact will be even lower.

- 90 The September 2005 report has a detailed and SMART action plan that includes the provision of extra resources, a re-arrangement of the management structure, more performance monitoring and individual training needs assessment for maintenance staff. Approval has been given to employ a consultant to undertake a major review of APM and their initial report will be made to the Boards in December 2005.
- 91 The poor implementation of the IT system has meant the responsive repairs system has not been effectively controlled and that quality control for customers through post inspections has been poor. Testway is unable to measure how many jobs are completed right first time and customers are not getting an effective and efficient responsive repairs service. This is an area of significant weakness.

### **Gas servicing**

- 92 Testway's performance on gas servicing is an area of strength, with more than 99 per cent of properties with valid gas safety certificates. This represents a considerable improvement on a year ago.
- 93 In October 2004 the gas servicing processes were inspected by Testway's auditors and found to be poor with over 200 properties without valid safety certificates, and one property not serviced for four years.
- 94 Testway reviewed its systems, rewrote its procedures and made a concerted effort to service all gas appliances. As at 16 September 2005 a total of 20 properties did not have valid gas safety certificates, of which 7 had appointments for servicing and 13 were going through the no access procedures.
- 95 The new procedures start the process for gas servicing two months before the expiry of the old safety certificate and include a sequence of letters, telephone calls and cold calling by gas servicing engineers. Appointments can be made for gas servicing between 8.30am and 7.00pm each day.
- 96 If tenants do not respond then the case is handed to housing management who undertake the no access procedures which culminate in the service of an injunction.
- 97 While we were on-site Testway implemented a flag on their IT system to indicate where a tenant did not have a current gas certificate. The flag automatically came up when the tenant telephoned in for a normal repair and this enabled the repairs desk staff to make an appointment to get the gas servicing completed at the same time as the other repair.
- 98 All tenants who have their gas appliances serviced are sent Testway's standard customer satisfaction questionnaire.
- 99 Testway uses an external contractor to test the flues of all its properties that use solid fuel heating to ensure that they are operating effectively and safely.
- 100 A weakness of the current gas servicing system is that there is no external audit. The gas foreman is required to undertake an audit of the gas servicing, but no one external to the service monitors this.

### **Repairs to empty properties (voids)**

- 101 Testway's performance in repairing empty properties (voids) is an area of strength, but all homes are not being post-inspected.
- 102 There is a clear void standard that is published for tenants and applicants as a leaflet. Empty homes are all professionally cleaned, to a high standard, when works are completed. This includes the installation of plug in air fresheners in the hall and the provision of a supply of energy saving light bulbs and cleaning materials.
- 103 One surveyor deals with all voids and they are completed to a high and consistent standard. They use their own multi-skilled operatives to work on voids ensuring they are dealt with quickly. The average time for the completion of works on all voids in the first quarter of 2005/06 was 19 days, which is top quartile performance.
- 104 One weakness is that voids are not being post inspected and there are jobs being missed in almost every property visited. These were mostly relatively minor issues, but in one it was the removal and replacement of asbestos floor tiles.

### **Asbestos**

- 105 Testway's handling of asbestos is an area of strength. The company included a specific survey for the presence of asbestos as part of the stock condition survey and as a result they have detailed information about asbestos.
- 106 There is an asbestos register which is held on an IT database. The register includes a risk assessment and any high risk asbestos is removed.
- 107 An asbestos policy, which is in keeping with best practice, was agreed in January 2005. There is an asbestos policy management group, comprising senior management, an external health and safety consultant and a union representative, that meets to ensure that Testway is dealing effectively with asbestos in its properties.
- 108 Contractors undertaking planned or cyclical maintenance receive an extract from the asbestos register giving them details of the location and type of asbestos product, as part of their works order. Contractors undertaking responsive repairs only receive a general notification that asbestos is present in the property. The reason for this difference is because works orders for planned and cyclical maintenance are produced from the IT system which holds the asbestos database, while works orders for responsive repairs are produced from another system.
- 109 Since September 2005, all tenants have been informed of the presence of asbestos in their homes by letter. This includes the location of the asbestos and advice about what they should and should not do as well as contact telephone numbers if they have any further questions. Testway has also produced an informative guidance leaflet about asbestos.

### **Aids and adaptations**

- 110 The performance in dealing with aids and adaptations is weak overall. Despite the fact that over 55 per cent of tenants are 60 years old or more and that 19 per cent of households include someone with a mobility problem, there is no information leaflet about how to access aids and adaptations. There is no information about them on the website and staff lack knowledge about these works. There is currently a best value review of aids and adaptations which is due to be completed shortly.
- 111 Testway undertakes aids and adaptation works up to the value of £1,000 per property and for 2005/06 it has a budget of £121,000. Works in excess of £1,000 are dealt with through the disabled facilities grant which is administered by TVBC.
- 112 Occupational therapists (OTs) prioritise works according to risk into critical (seven days), substantial (four weeks), moderate (eight weeks) and low (twelve weeks) categories. Aids and adaptation works for tenants are undertaken by APM. Critical works would be dealt with as urgent, but most are dealt with as routine with a 28-day target.
- 113 As 55 per cent of Testway's tenants are over 60, and 19 per cent of households have a mobility problem, it is surprising that the Association has not undertaken customer profiling to determine the demand for aids and adaptations. There are no leaflets about aids and adaptations and no mention of them on the existing website. The aids and adaptations budget for 2003/04 was £114,886 and that for 2004/05 was £118,332. However, expenditure for each year was £103,182 and £99,058 respectively. These are surprising underspends given the numbers of tenants with mobility problems and leads one to query how many know of the service. There has been no training for Testway staff on aids and adaptations.
- 114 Testway is currently undertaking a comprehensive best value review of disabled adaptations which involves staff from TVBC, occupational therapists, tenants who have had adaptations completed and Testway staff. The review team has established that there is little knowledge about aids and adaptations among staff in Testway and that there is a need for information to be provided to residents about aids and adaptations.
- 115 The best value review should be completed shortly and although the recommendations and implementation plan are not finished, Testway has already started undertaking simple works without requiring an OTs specification, such as fitting handrails. The best value review will address many of the issues that are currently not dealt with effectively, but it is seven months late in being completed.
- 116 Taking into account the tenant profile of Testway's customers, issues around aids and adaptations have been poorly handled.

### **Income management**

- 117 This is an area where Testway's performance is strong. There are high levels of income recovery for rent, rechargeable works and leasehold service charges. Testway's performance for income management is in the upper quartile nationally.

- 118** Testway has a good corporate approach to income management with a dedicated income recovery team in place since 2002. In 2004/05, the level of rent arrears was 0.87 per cent. There is a wide range of payment methods available including at local shops, the post office, banks, direct debit, and standing orders and by internet.
- 119** The income management policies and procedures are firm, fair and customer-focused. Testway staff pick up rent arrears when they are low, help to maximise income and provide effective debt management support and advice. They are sensitive to individual's needs and liaise effectively with a wide range of agencies including TVBC, housing benefit and the CAB.
- 120** Tenants in arrears are referred to Testway's floating support team for good quality benefit and debt advice. However, if a tenant has legal action commenced against them they are then referred to Testway's own REACH (Resolution by Enabling and Assisting will make Change Happen) service to help them maintain their tenancy. REACH is an innovative service that Testway has developed from concepts used in the police force for changing behaviour such as speeding. The difference being that in Testway it is used to help tenants keep to the terms of their tenancy. The REACH initiative has been successful and the number of evictions has reduced.
- 121** There is an emphasis on personal contact throughout the debt recovery process and the number of evictions for rent arrears has reduced year-on-year for the last three years. Last year, 16 tenants were evicted for rent arrears and this year the target is to evict no more than ten. At the time of the inspection in September, Testway had evicted just three and were on target.
- 122** Testway has tried to involve tenants in an arrears forum but interest was low and the project was abandoned. However, Testway did change its arrears letters in 2004 following information that tenants did not like the tone of them.
- 123** In April 2005, it introduced Testway's housing incentive scheme (THIS), a scheme based on the scheme developed at Irwell Valley, which rewards tenants for keeping to the terms of their tenancy, including keeping their rent account clear. This has proven to be very popular and is keeping low level arrears down. Tenants requested the scheme and were involved in its design and decided what incentives they wanted offered, which includes one of seven enhanced improvements to their home. Currently, almost 1,000 tenants are signed up to the scheme.
- 124** Performance management of income recovery is effective with information being considered by section heads, managers and senior management through the company management team and executive management team meetings, through to the Board. Detailed information about the number of notices of seeking possession, court cases and evictions is also gathered and reported.

- 125 The income recovery team arrange bi-monthly planning and liaison meetings with a variety of agencies including TVBC, housing benefit, CAB and their own floating support team to ensure that communication is effective and that progress on individual cases is maintained. It has developed mutually supportive working relationships with other agencies so that tenants get a good service, for example, it has worked with Basingstoke County Court to arrange for a Magistrates Court to be held at Andover. This has saved tenants time and money and means that there is a greater likelihood of tenants attending court to explain their circumstances.
- 126 One area of weakness is that although almost all of Testway's HB payments come from TVBC, they are still manually inputting HB information on to the rent accounting system. This is an inefficient use of resources and could result in errors. The IT teams of Testway and TVBC are in communication regarding this but there is currently no date by when it will be possible to download data directly from housing benefit into the Testway rent system.
- 127 The collection of FTAs is effectively managed with the current debt outstanding being low at £84,000 in August 2005. The target for FTAs is 1 per cent or less and they are currently 0.53 per cent of the rent roll. Rent written off in 2004/05, as a percentage of the rent roll, was 0.16 per cent.
- 128 The collection of rechargeable works is dealt with by the income recovery team effectively. In 2004/05 the collection rate for rechargeable works was £19,352 or 65 per cent which is high.
- 129 Testway has a relatively small number of leaseholders and the collection rate for their service charges is 99 per cent. As part of a best value review, that is due to be completed in September 2005, there has been a concerted focus on reducing leaseholder arrears from what had been a stable figure of £55,000. There was an initiative developed and led by operational staff and arrears have now been reduced to £15,000.

### **Tenancy and estate management**

- 130 This is an area where Testway's performance is mixed with a balance of strengths and weaknesses. Estates are generally kept in good condition but there is a lack of clarity over land ownership and there has been a general lack of strategic focus in managing estates. Testway has a robust stance in dealing with nuisance and anti-social behaviour (ASB), which works well. There is good working with other agencies on ASB and some very effective community initiatives.
- 131 The general appearance of Testway's estates and grounds maintenance is quite good although there were inconsistencies. Some estates are not as clean and bushes and flower bed areas were not so well maintained. It was noticeable that those estates which had more resident involvement looked better. A general issue was that the gutters in parking areas often had weeds in them, or vegetation growing across them and looked untidy.

- 132** At the stock transfer, TVBC passed the ownership of its land to Testway but ,in some places, it adopted pieces of land and is responsible for maintaining them. As a result it is not always clear who (Testway, TVBC or Hampshire County Council) is responsible for maintaining what. This is a problem for residents who have found themselves shuttled between Testway and TVBC. Although Testway has large scale, detailed maps, it has not been proactive in advising tenants as to what areas it is responsible for.
- 133** It has been recognised that the TVBC contract for cleaning estates is below market price and that it has not been undertaken to the high specification stated. This situation has existed for some years, but the contract has never been enforced and the break clause has not been activated. This is not providing value for money and in the last tenants survey they expressed dissatisfaction with the work carried out. Testway have recently contacted TVBC to re-negotiate the contract, but this is an issue which should have been addressed earlier.
- 134** The estates are managed by neighbourhood housing officers who undertake estate inspections but tenant involvement in the inspections is inconsistent. The large estates are inspected monthly, street properties every three months and villages every six months. The estate inspections are advertised in the Testway Housing News. Estate inspections are discussed at the tenant actions groups which meet every six weeks.
- 135** Testway has effective policies and procedures for dealing with graffiti and abandoned cars and there was almost no graffiti and no abandoned cars when our unscheduled reality checks were undertaken.
- 136** In 2003, Testway introduced the Clean and Safe Educate (CASE) project where they worked in partnership with TVBC, neighbourhood and dog wardens to raise children's awareness of the effects of litter on the environment. The project is highly regarded by the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister (ODPM) and National Housing Federation (NHF). There have been a number of projects to improve estates including the award winning green team an environmental programme that encouraged residents, of all ages, to look after their estate.
- 137** The 2005 status survey shows that 88 per cent of tenants are happy with their properties and 86 per cent are happy with the estates that they live on.
- 138** While Testway has undertaken a number of estate management projects, and estates are not badly maintained, it has lacked a strategic focus on estate management as a whole.
- 139** Testway has clear, comprehensive policies and procedures for dealing with, and takes a robust stance against ASB, nuisance and harassment. There is an ASB strategy 2005/07 that has been approved by the Board.

- 140 Testway takes a proactive and innovative approach to combating ASB through a wide range of community development initiatives in identified hot spots. For example Testway 7s is an estate-based community initiative that started, in 2002, as a rugby competition. It is a sports programme targeted at reducing youth crime that is resourced through local, regional and national partners. It has been highly acclaimed both nationally and internationally. Testway 7s has developed rapidly and now includes rugby, mixed cricket, fishing and other sports. Testway has also introduced other projects such as art, hip hop dancing, making rock music, and theatre activities among others. Tenants acknowledge that these initiatives have had a major effect in reducing problems with youths and children on estates.
- 141 The ASB policy is promoted in a number of ways including through partnership working with TVBC and the Police, neighbourhood officers, the website, Testway Housing News, local newspapers, estate newsletters, through the Tenant Action Groups and its own leaflets on ASB. Testway has held two ASB master classes, for tenants, to discuss ASB, how to deal with it and the consequences for perpetrators.
- 142 A robust stance on ASB is taken. On one estate that was experiencing problems neighbourhood officers working with the Police leafleted tenants to gain their confidence in reporting ASB. As a result, four acceptable behaviour contracts have been entered into and one anti-social behaviour order obtained. Neighbourhood officers and tenants have worked together to produce an estate action plan to continue to reduce ASB.
- 143 ASB cases are sensitively handled and complainants are supported effectively and kept informed of progress. Victims of ASB are automatically referred to the floating support service. Cases are individually assessed for case closure and tenants are advised, in writing. Testway has recently introduced a satisfaction survey so that it can assess how its ASB service is regarded.
- 144 Perpetrators of ASB are supported through Testway's REACH service which is designed to help tenants maintain their tenancies and to change their behaviour. However if perpetrators do not wish to adjust their behaviour they will face legal action and the possible loss of their home.
- 145 A Community Enforcement Officer was appointed by Testway in July 2005 with the specific role of addressing serious cases of ASB. Testway also works in effective close partnerships with the Police, TVBC neighbourhood wardens and the courts to provide its ASB service.
- 146 The management of ASB is effective and both complainants and perpetrators are supported. The innovative community initiatives that Testway has introduced to reduce ASB are acknowledged by tenants as significantly reducing problems on estates.

## Is the service delivering value for money?

- 147** Testway's performance on value for money (VFM) is an area where strengths are balanced by weaknesses. It has achieved cost savings, but it did not have a corporate VFM strategy which would have provided other benefits. The implementation of the repairs IT system, and the lack of training to use it effectively, was poor and as a result the system is not providing the VFM that it should.
- 148** The implementation of the new repairs system was poor. The system is not being used effectively to produce the management reports which are required to run the business effectively and provide VFM, for example, jobs for post inspection. In addition, the lack of staff consultation and skills assessment has led to a high staff turnover on the repairs desk. The new staff have not been effectively trained, which has resulted in a high level of emergency jobs, a high number of pre-inspection requests and a reduction in VFM.
- 149** Testway is a cost conscious organisation and undertakes benchmarking with Housemark and other organisations on a wide range of its services. Its costs generally compare very well with its LSVT peers in the southern area as demonstrated in the following figures.

**Table 4 Costs per general needs property 2004/05**

	<b>Housing management</b>	<b>Offices</b>	<b>IT</b>	<b>Legal</b>	<b>Finance</b>	<b>Central costs</b>
<b>Peers</b>	£245	£39	£44	£11	£54	£90
<b>Testway</b>	£195	£21	£32	£11	£51	£72

- 150** The benchmarking costs for core housing management functions, taking into account all support costs, also show Testway's costs compare favourably.

**Table 5 Total housing management and support service costs**

Housing management function	Peers	Testway
Rent arrears	£77	£44
Tenancy and estate management	£121	£92
Empty properties	£37	£22
Responsive repairs	£92	£67
Major and cyclical repairs	£94	£95
Lettings	£27	£34
Rent collection and accounting	£34	£28

- 151** The Housing Corporation undertakes its own independent assessments of costs of registered social landlords (RSLs) and calculated Testway's average general needs operating costs for 2003/04 as £39.04 while those of its peers were £49.34 and the national average was £48.09.
- 152** The Housing Corporation's operating cost index has placed Testway 35 out of 460. This means that its costs are lower than average and that it is in the top quartile for performance based on this criteria.
- 153** Testway has good knowledge of its cost base and has compared it extensively with other organisations through benchmarking. It has achieved cost savings, but has not operated a corporate VFM strategy whereby tenants were consulted about their perceptions of quality and relative value of service.
- 154** The company is cost effective, for example, all external planned maintenance contracts are retendered every year and awarded to the lowest quoting contractor. However, it took a decision not to enter into partnering contracts with its external planned maintenance contractors until it had delivered on its transfer promises. This decision reduced the potential VFM benefits that tenants could have received in respect of planned maintenance.
- 155** Testway has used cost reduction consultants for some years to reduce its building material expenses. This work has led to a partnering contract with a major builders' merchant to provide a fast track service for its APM operatives as well as price discounts. This will start in November 2005. Testway uses APM to undertake £2 million of planned maintenance works using a service level agreement that has a partnering ethos which includes profit sharing. These arrangements both bring improved repairs services to tenants, as well as lower costs.

- 156** Testway is a member of Procurement for Housing which it uses for buying stationery. It maximises the amount of external funding that it can attract for its community projects, some of its maintenance staff are trained to undertake asbestos test works and some human resources staff are able to administer and score psychometric tests. The Association ensures that its income management is very effective.
- 157** Testway makes frequent use of best value service reviews to look at a range of services; these have included planned maintenance, abandoned vehicles and the production of newsletters, among others. In all of the service reviews Testway gives detailed consideration to costs and VFM.
- 158** The annual efficiency statement has also been written from the Aster Group point of view and is looking to achieve savings in the region of £516,000 in 2005/06. These will mainly be from group procurement, increased use of APM, in house asbestos surveys, tax strategy and improved financial bargaining power.

## Summary

- 159** We have concluded that the quality of housing services provided by Testway is fair.
- 160** Performance is mixed in terms of service delivery. Frontline staff are customer-focused and so is the organisation. Tenants have high levels of satisfaction. However, the friendliness and flexibility of staff does hide the fact that residents sometimes experience problems getting hold of the correct person and feel that communication between teams is not as effective as it should be. There are issues over the monitoring of correspondence and complaints. Testway has not strategically addressed the diversity of its customers until recently, and services have not been tailored to meet their needs. Residents have not always been effectively involved in shaping the services they receive.
- 161** Testway's property is generally in good condition and tenants are happy with the services provided. Gas servicing, voids, asbestos management and planned maintenance are areas of strength. However, the implementation of the current repairs IT system, its performance statistics and lack of controls over responsive repairs are major weaknesses.
- 162** Housing management is mixed with strong performance in respect of income management and anti-social behaviour, but there are inconsistencies in estate management. The organisation has a strong focus on cost but has not achieved the wider VFM benefits. Across Testway, there have been a number of new initiatives and strategies which have not yet had time to bed in.

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

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

- 163 Testway has successfully delivered on a range of business and service improvements in keeping with its action plans and overall this is an area of strength. However, while improvements have been delivered there have been some issues over planning and implementation, for example the repairs IT system. Similarly processes are not always rigorous or being followed, for example, complaints.
- 164 In the last financial year, Testway has created the Aster Group with another housing association. It is currently addressing rationalisation and standardisation issues so the Group can capitalise on its structural and buying powers. For example, it is looking at group procurement of training, IT, financial services and the group members are exchanging best practice.
- 165 The Group established APM, a repairs and maintenance company, to undertake most of its responsive repairs and some of its planned maintenance work. This is a new project which is planned to undertake works for other organisations and profit share with Testway in due course. APM will provide an improved service to tenants because its principle focus will be the tenants of the Group. It will also reduce costs through its increased buying power, which it will reinvest in the Group.
- 166 The implementation of its new computer system has not gone smoothly and while it is providing improved financial information, and appointments at the first point of contact for APM response repairs, operational staff need further training to use the system effectively. This has been identified and an action plan, which includes individual IT skills assessment and training, has been approved. Tenants are pleased that they can make appointments for most jobs when they telephone.
- 167 Testway is a learning and innovative organisation as demonstrated by its development of services such as REACH and Testway 7s. It also actively looks at best practice to see if there are any methods of working that will suit it, such as the new procurement arrangement with a national builders' merchant, which it saw in use in a large city authority. It has also missed some important issues in the recent past, such as gas servicing, because it has relied more on trust than monitoring. Fortunately, its auditors highlighted the problem and Testway were very effective in addressing it and by the time of the inspection it was an area of strength.

- 168** In the last financial year Testway completed, on time and in budget, the delivery of property improvements, kitchens, bathrooms and heating systems, as part of its transfer promise. Testway has employed a Community Enforcement Officer who is concentrating on reducing ASB and it has continued with its very successful ASB distraction programmes with youths and children (Testway 7s). It has also worked with TVBC to introduce a choice based lettings system, as well as improving tenants' choice for kitchen and bathroom refurbishments and improving the specification of the units used. At the same time, it has maintained its high performance in respect of income management and voids, and introduced its tenants' incentive scheme to reward compliance with tenancy terms. Testway has also introduced a range of new policies, procedures and strategies; these included improving customer feedback and a programme of best value reviews.
- 169** The improvements that have been delivered to tenants are tangible. There are high satisfaction levels with the standards of property, 88 per cent and a further 88 per cent expressed satisfaction with the repairs service, despite a number of shortcomings covered earlier in the report. At focus groups tenants specifically mentioned the appointments system as an enhancement in service and that operatives were customer-focused. They were also positive about the Association's work in dealing with ASB, and the work undertaken with youths and children. The tenants' incentive scheme has proved very popular with almost a thousand tenants signing up to it. There are other benefits such as cost and administration savings that are not always apparent to tenants, however, 83 per cent of tenants do regard their rent as good VFM, which is higher than most other housing associations. Overall 88 per cent of tenants are satisfied with Testway as a landlord.
- 170** Performance indicators have generally improved or remained at high levels, with the exception of repairs where the recent introduction of the new IT system has resulted in the performance against completion targets deteriorating. However, satisfaction levels with the way Testway deals with its responsive and planned maintenance are higher than its peer group.
- 171** Testway is cost conscious and has made use of benchmarking across areas of its work. It is able to show a sustained reduction in costs over the years. Its recent creation of the Aster Group structure and the formation of APM will lead to greater economies of scale, more opportunities for cost savings and improving VFM in the future.

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

- 172** Testway's management of performance is an area where strengths outweigh weaknesses. Its priorities include customer focus and it has a record of delivering cost savings. It learns from other organisations and seeks to continuously improve. Its plans will deliver service improvements, but they are mostly incremental. The implementation of the new IT system in APM was not planned and managed effectively.
- 173** Testway has, for some years, developed its annual business plans around its eight key business objectives. These eight objectives are its priorities and each department links its improvement plans to each of them.

- 174 The planning process focuses on locating any weaknesses, or desired improvements, in the delivery of the business objectives. Ideas for service improvements come from residents through the TAGs, tenant forum, tenant conference, Talkback and surveys. Examples of ideas from tenants that have been implemented are repairs appointments, the tenants' incentive scheme and clearer rent statements. Other ideas come through from tenant complaints such as the reviews of grass cutting and window cleaning.
- 175 Staff are also encouraged to make suggestions through 'Think Big' which is a scheme to promote staff ideas for improving how the organisation works, or through suggestions to their line manager. 'Think Big' has contributed a number of good ideas such as a customer panel to deal with asset management and design issues, an annual staff award to recognise an individual's contribution to the organisation, a mutual exchange IT database and extending 'Think Big' to tenants through the new website.
- 176 Other, more strategic, issues, such as the creation of APM, have come from senior management and the Board. Proposals to address the improvements are discussed at a Board and executive team away day before approval. Managers then develop the approved plans into annual service plans, for each department, and individual staff workplans.
- 177 The annual service plans are all to a standard format and are SMART with clear actions, timescales and owners. Some of the actions are important strategic actions, such as the creation of APM. However, others are not challenging or easily measurable, for example, we will offer appointments at first point of contact for single trade repairs that do not require an inspection. This is not a challenging target. Another target is: 'we will continue to monitor the void management process while reviewing the recommendations of the best value review and undertaking a process mapping exercise'. Since void performance is in the top quartile it is not clear how much advantage will be gained from this.
- 178 Progress on service plans is discussed at company and executive meetings and reported to Board. However, there is no formal sign off of progress on plans at year end and nor is there any monitoring or reporting to tenant groups.
- 179 Testway has a learning culture. It benchmarks with a wide range of organisations and is happy to adopt or adapt policies and procedures that it has seen achieving good performance in other locations. In this way it has entered into a partnering contract with a national builders' merchant after seeing their operation in Coventry. When setting up APM they were in close contact with East Dorset HA and Pennine Housing so that they could find out more about winning external contracts and which consultants had the most appropriate skill sets and experience for them to use. They have also worked with Drum HA on costs and they are exchanging information with and learning from other members of the Aster Group, particularly in respect of partnering contracts. In 2004, it set up a local income recovery forum with 15 RSLs and LA income recovery teams to share ideas and good practice. It has also looked at how Sheffield has dealt with housing management issues including rent arrears.

- 180** The best value review (BVR) process was monitored by the Aiming Higher Group and the action plans that stemmed from the reviews were fed into the annual service plans. The BVRs effectively addressed the four Cs and had action plans. They included tenants who were often Board members and external people who were brought in for their specialist knowledge, for example, local authority staff. Five BVRs were reported as completed between December 2004 and June 2005 and a further three were in progress. The reviews include Communal area cleaning, office telephone systems and disabled adaptations. The best value reviews that have led to improved services for customers such as simplifying and speeding up the processes for the fitting of handrails for the disabled.
- 181** Testway has a culture of continuous improvement which is driven by residents and staff and includes BVRs. From July 2005, BVRs were replaced with service reviews. There is a service review handbook, issued in July 2005 that gives comprehensive information about the purpose and methodology for service reviews, as well as a new structure to control them. It is a good quality document that has built on the BVR process. There is a continuing programme of service reviews.
- 182** A further element of Testway's continuous improvement culture is its regular use of external organisations to check its services and procedures to ensure that they are effective. Such inspections have included the quality of presentation of management information to board, budgetary control arrangements and gas servicing. Testway has also had its KPIs externally validated to ensure that they were compliant with Housing Corporation requirements. In the case of gas servicing and its KPIs, significant problems existed and Testway has followed the recommendations of its consultants and changed its working practices.
- 183** There is a culture of performance management. Performance indicators are prepared by teams and presented to CMT, EMT (monthly) and Board (quarterly) in a traffic light format that clearly shows whether or not targets have been met. The performance indicators on customer facing issues are basic and need further development. For example, they state the number of complaints in each category but they do not indicate whether they have been dealt with in target and there is no information about estate inspections undertaken.
- 184** It is of concern that the implementation of an important IT system in APM was not planned and handled more effectively by senior management. That a busy operational manager was expected to implement the system shows poor planning and a lack of appreciation of the complexity of such projects and their impact on staff and the organisation as a whole. However, Testway have accepted this and taken action to address the training issues and employed a consultant to review the working and structure of APM.

## Does the service have the capacity to improve?

- 185** Testway has the desire and capacity to improve. It has a 35-year financial plan and two detailed five-year plans that clearly demonstrate that it has the resources to fulfil its ambitions. Its staff are motivated, empowered and the Association is a learning organisation. It is investing in its staff through training and its infrastructure including its IT systems. The 2005 staff survey does show that some staff have concerns about the future and they will need to be reassured. Testway has recently created the Aster Group and APM, with another housing association. The creation of these two organisations will increase Testway's capacity to improve its services and reduce its costs, but it will take a little time before significant improvements in service and capacity feed through.
- 186** Testway has detailed and costed financial plans that cover all of the investment programmes and anticipated risks for the next ten years. These will deliver the DHS and new IT systems. The plans, from 2016 until 2036, are not as detailed but are based on logical assumptions and cover loans and projected expenditure adequately. In February 2005, the Housing Corporation found that Testway had satisfactory financial conditions and that its exposures were mitigated to an acceptable degree. It is a financially aware organisation. The organisation has a very effective, embedded risk management system that it uses, in conjunction with its financial modelling software, to assess the impact of proposed strategies. Risk management appraisals are regularly considered by the Board. Testway has the financial capacity and the skills to achieve its plans and aims.
- 187** The organisation has a Board with a variety of skills as well as an effective executive management team. In 2004, the Board introduced a peer appraisal system that takes place annually to ensure they are effective. New Board members are required to meet the Board's skill criteria. Board members receive training, both internal and external, for which there is a budget of £10,000. They have received specific training in respect of mergers, risk management, diversity, finance and development to enable them to manage the organisation more effectively. The Chief Executive is subject to annual appraisal by the Board to ensure that performance is to the required standard. The executive management team has the skills and desire to take the organisation forward.
- 188** Staff are empowered and encouraged to suggest improvements and changes and to take them through to fruition. As part of the induction programme staff are asked if they have any ideas for improvement and this principle is carried on through out their employment. There is a culture of staff empowerment and a no blame environment. Testway has evolved a positive 'can do' culture where staff are given the opportunity to develop their ideas to improve services to tenants. Staff are encouraged to look at good practice in other organisations and to look critically at procedures in Testway. Examples of staff innovation and ideas are the REACH scheme that has reduced the number of evictions, the initiative that reduced the level of leaseholder service charge arrears from £55 000 to £15 000 and the Testway 7s, which has reduced the level of ASB.

- 189** Testway is investing in staff training and development for which there is a budget of £100 000. All staff have been on customer satisfaction training and there are a wide range of courses available for IT skills, management training, equality and diversity, health and safety issues. There are nine trades' apprenticeships and a PATH trainee has been appointed. There is a staff development plan and strategy 2005/06, which complements the human resource strategy 2004/07. These two documents are specifically aimed at improving skills and management abilities so that Testway can perform to a high level. The courses provided will lead to an enhancement of capacity for the organisation, but there are few staff on courses which lead to professional qualifications.
- 190** The Association has undertaken a BVR of recruitment and selection. This has resulted in a competency and performance based pay structure, which rewards high performing staff. Testway also permits flexible working hours and home working. The Association employs consultants to undertake regular staff surveys, every two years, to gauge feelings and views on the organisation.
- 191** However, there is essentially no investment in training residents to develop their skills and abilities to progress through onto the Board.
- 192** The creation of the Aster Group is an opportunity for Testway to improve its services and increase its capacity. This will mainly be through rationalisation of services such as finance, human resources and IT, which can be purchased on a Group basis, taking advantage of greater negotiating power and economies of scale. At the present time the Aster Group are in negotiation with another housing association that is interested in joining the Group and if this takes place costs will be spread further. Another reason why Testway joined with Sarsen HA to form the Aster Group is that Sarsen HA is a preferred development partner with the Housing Corporation and receives funding for new development. Testway has contracted its development out to Sarsen HA and will benefit from this arrangement.
- 193** The creation of APM is another opportunity for Testway to improve its capacity and services. Although it is a separate 'for profit entity', APM's Board is drawn from other Boards and senior staff within the Aster Group. Its business will be optimised towards those organisations through joint procurement and its partnership service level agreement. However, it will also sell its services to other organisations, which will not only further reduce costs and overheads, but it will share its profits with Testway and Sarsen HA. Such gains will be reinvested in the organisation, increasing its capacity and services.

- 194 The creation of APM has had an effect on Testway in that there needs to be some changes and increases in the staffing structures. Three new posts have been agreed in APM and Testway's finance team, while other staff will be undertaking new roles. Approval has also been given to employ a consultant to undertake a major review of the structure and operation of APM so that the two merged direct labour organisations can be refined into one efficient and effective commercial organisation. The increase in capacity of Testway's finance team will enable the Resources Director to concentrate on developing the business potential and capacity of APM, which will in turn benefit Testway. The Testway housing management teams will also be restructured to facilitate the management of properties from other Aster Group members. The organisation is therefore adapting to deal with its dynamic situation.
- 195 Testway is involved in procurement as a member of the Aster Group, through its interest in APM and in its own right. The first two have only been in existence since April 2005 and although joint procurement is a major benefit from them, it is too soon for significant benefits to flow. However, the Aster Group has calculated that it will make efficiency savings, including procurement, of £516,000 in the first year and this is expected to increase in subsequent years. The impact of these savings will be to improve services and enhance capacity through reinvestment.
- 196 A corporate procurement strategy was approved by Testway in September 2005. In the past it took a decision not to go into partnership contracts until it had delivered on its stock transfer promises and as a result partnership procurement is not well established. However, it has recently negotiated a partnership contract with a major builders' merchant and in October 2005 it entered into a partnering contract with its lifeline and out-of-hours telephone service provider. In both instances, Testway will benefit from closer working relationships and lower prices. While there is now a modern procurement strategy, it is extremely new. Testway has been slow to get involved in partnership procurement and the benefits that it can bring.
- 197 Testway has invested in its IT systems and continues to do so. It has recently implemented its intranet, called 'The Street', which is a good quality staff reference and support system. It has decided to purchase the upgraded version of its current asset management software and it has developed its own IT systems for dealing with estate management and gas servicing. The Association has plans to replace its main housing IT system in 2007, however, now that it is part of a group structure it will have to await a decision on a replacement that is acceptable to all members of the Group. Furthermore, APM having implemented the new repairs system in March 2005, is now considering purchasing other modules of the same system. The organisation is continuing to improve and develop the capacity of its IT systems to equip it for the future.

- 198** In its area of operation Testway has gained a reputation for being an effective and active partner to work with. It has developed close working relationships with a wide range of community groups and has very good relationships with the police, TVBC, the CAB, Housemark and other landlords. Through its contacts with other organisations and exchanging of information, Testway has been able to learn from others and develop its services more effectively. Testway does work well in its partnerships and this will help them deliver in the future.

## Summary

- 199** We have concluded that Testway Housing Limited has promising prospects for improvement.
- 200** Testway has been able to demonstrate a record of effectively implementing changes that have led to improvements in services for tenants. It has delivered improvements in both the physical condition of its properties and the services that it provides, such as the prevention of ASB and appointments for repairs. Although many of the improvements delivered are incremental, they have often come directly from tenant requests. Tenants are generally happy with service provision which is evidenced by the high levels of customer satisfaction, and performance indicators are generally good with the exception of those for repairs. Testway has always sought to keep costs down and it continues to perform well in that respect, although it has not addressed the wider issues of VFM. The recent creation of the Aster Group and APM are positive steps that should lead to better services and improved efficiencies through the economies of scale.
- 201** Testway has effective service improvement planning, but while it has some challenging plans most of them are incremental in nature. Its delivery of projects is not always successful as evidenced by the APM IT system. Testway has a culture of continuous improvement and has learnt from other organisations.
- 202** The organisation has effective financial plans and the strength to deliver on its ambitions. It has the capacity and desire to improve. The Board and executive management team have the skills to lead the organisation effectively and staffing structures are being adjusted to deal with changing situations. The organisation is investing in itself and looking towards the future. Testway has only recently agreed a corporate procurement strategy and only recently started to look at partnership contracts. The organisation's capacity to improve will be enhanced by the creation of the Aster Group and APM although it will take time to feed through. There is a great deal happening at the present time and some staff have concerns. There are also some skills issues that are being addressed.

## Appendix 1 – Performance indicators

### Testway Housing Limited

Performance indicator	2001	2002	2003	2004	Comparison group mean	National quartile position	National mean average
<b>General needs rent</b>							
Average weekly gross rent	£52.76	£57.08	£59.48	£59.88	£66.09	-	£61.28
<b>Vacant dwellings and lettings</b>							
Dwellings vacant and available to let	0.4%	0.3%	0.4%	0.2%	0.7%	1	1.2%
Dwellings vacant and not available to let	0.4%	0.8%	0.9%	0.6%	0.6%	3	1.4%
Lettings to BME households (new)	1.5%	3.0%	4.1%	3.8%	6.0%	-	14.4%
Re-let time	21 days	15 days	18 days	15 days	30 days	1	40 days
<b>Stock condition</b>							
Average SAP rating	-	53	56	66	62	2	64
Failing decent homes standard	-	10.3%	8.8%	8.0%	22.2%	2	19.7%

Performance indicator	2001	2002	2003	2004	Comparison group mean	National quartile position	National mean average
<b>Repairs performance</b>							
Appointments made and kept	99.0%	95.6%	98.7%	99.8%	96.5%	1	94.3%
Emergency repairs completed in target	90.0%	99.0%	99.1%	99.5%	97.0%	1	95.7%
Routine repairs completed in target	66.0%	96.5%	94.5%	86.0%	92.2%	4	92.2%
Urgent repairs completed in target	77.0%	95.4%	92.8%	97.1%	93.0%	1	91.7%
<b>Service to tenants</b>							
Tenant satisfaction overall	86%	86%	86%	86%	80%	1	78%
Tenant satisfaction with participation	63%	64%	64%	78%	62%	1	62%
<b>General needs financial performance</b>							
Average GN weekly operating cost	-	-	£34.37	£39.04	£49.98	1	£48.09
GN operating cost as a percentage of turnover	-	-	60.8%	71.2%	73.9%	2	78.5%
Rent arrears at year-end for GN	-	-	0.5%	1.0%	5.2%	1	7.0%

Performance indicator	2001	2002	2003	2004	Comparison group mean	National quartile position	National mean average
Rent Collected for GN	-	-	100.1%	99.6%	99.5%	2	99.2%
Rent lost due to GN Voids	-	-	0.7%	0.7%	1.3%	1	2.1%
Weekly investment per GN unit	-	-	£9.42	£17.43	£31.56	-	£31.91
<b>General needs context</b>							
Accessible general needs housing	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Association has DLO for repairs?	-	-	Yes	Yes	-	-	-
Average two-bed weekly gross rent	-	£55.82	£58.34	£58.44	£65.68	-	£60.90
Average GN stock removed from the rent debit	-	-	-	0.0%	0.3%	-	0.6%
Emergency repairs target days	-	-	1 day	1 day	-	-	-
GN rent debit written off in year	-	-	0.4%	0.3%	0.7%	-	0.9%
Managed GN stock (for FPIs)	-	-	5,329	5,255	-	-	-

<b>Performance indicator</b>	<b>2001</b>	<b>2002</b>	<b>2003</b>	<b>2004</b>	<b>Comparison group mean</b>	<b>National quartile position</b>	<b>National mean average</b>
Other repairs completed in target	-	-	-	0 days	-	-	-
Other repairs target days	-	-	-	0 days	-	-	-
Percentage of investment due to routine repairs	-	-	68.1%	60.2%	34.8%	-	38.6%
Routine repairs target days	-	-	28 days	28 days	-	-	-
Total CORE lettings	-	-	-	369	-	-	-
Total general needs dwellings owned	5,136	5,083	5,010	4,947	3,140	-	3,111
Total repairs notified	-	-	-	23,296	-	-	-
Urgent repairs target days	-	-	7 days	7 days	-	-	-
Wheelchair user standard general needs housing	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.8%	-	1.4%

## Appendix 2 – Documents reviewed

- 1 Before going on-site, and during our visit, we reviewed various documents that were provided for us. These included the following:
  - tenant STATUS survey 2005;
  - staff surveys;
  - Aster and Testway business objectives and action plans;
  - Internal Audit reports;
  - Aster risk management strategy;
  - tenant action group and forum documents;
  - Board, CMT and EMT papers and KPIs;
  - Testway Housing News, newsletters and advice leaflets;
  - annual reports and financial statements;
  - service area policies/procedures and strategies; and
  - equal opportunities and diversity strategy/action plan and policy.

## Appendix 3 – Reality checks undertaken

- 2 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:
- mystery shopping visits to estates and offices;
  - mystery shopping telephone calls to the repairs desk;
  - two focus groups with residents;
  - attendance at a residents forum meeting;
  - visits to homes that were ready for letting;
  - visits to homes that had received improvements;
  - visits to homes that had recently had responsive repairs;
  - physical checks of files and computer systems; and
  - contacts with tenants that have had recent experience of service provision from Testway.

## Appendix 4 – 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.)

### **Community involvement schemes to reduce ASB**

- 3 Testway operates a number of schemes to distract youths and children from causing ASB nuisance on estates, for example Testway 7s. Tenants acknowledge that they have proven successful in reducing ASB.

### **Income management**

- 4 Testway has effective income management that has resulted in top quartile performance.

### **Repair of empty properties**

- 5 Testway has developed methods of working that enable them to deal with the repair of empty properties efficiently and effectively that has resulted in top quartile performance.

### **Asbestos management**

- 6 Testway has effective procedures for dealing with asbestos and has complied with the requirements for its management.