

Thames Valley Housing Resident Auditors Service Charge Report Recommendations

Thames Valley Housing

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Traffic Lights

	12	29%	Service Charges are a difficult area in which negative feelings about TVH are often difficult to resolve. TVH to change this have re-structured the Service Team and the team are reviewing the service charge process and improving the method of listening and responding to residents. Two leaseholder events, the development of resident inspectors and 'partnering' with contractors have had a positive impact and will hopefully lead to an improved service and a more positive relationship with residents.
	19	45%	TVH are making serious steps to improve their service, the new management structure is aimed at resolving some of the problems in this critical area, the shortfall in the Sinking Fund is being examined. Another major area of concern is Quadron's performance, especially during the cold weather period, and the problem of realistic communication. To resolve some of these problems mechanism have been put in place, to an extent, but the auditors feel there is an over-reliance on cosmetic changes or the introduction of IT systems such as Cornerstone. Communication to residents is a key issue for TVH.
	11	26%	The Service Charge cycle (see 1.2) and the best guess/balancing charge scenario creates problem for residents that will be difficult to resolve because of the numerous factors built into this process; it will be interesting to see if the new changes in structure, updating methods, and listening to Leaseholders will have a positive effect. The Quadron and recharge problem has been debated a number of times with the auditors and the resolution maybe in the new contract in September this year.

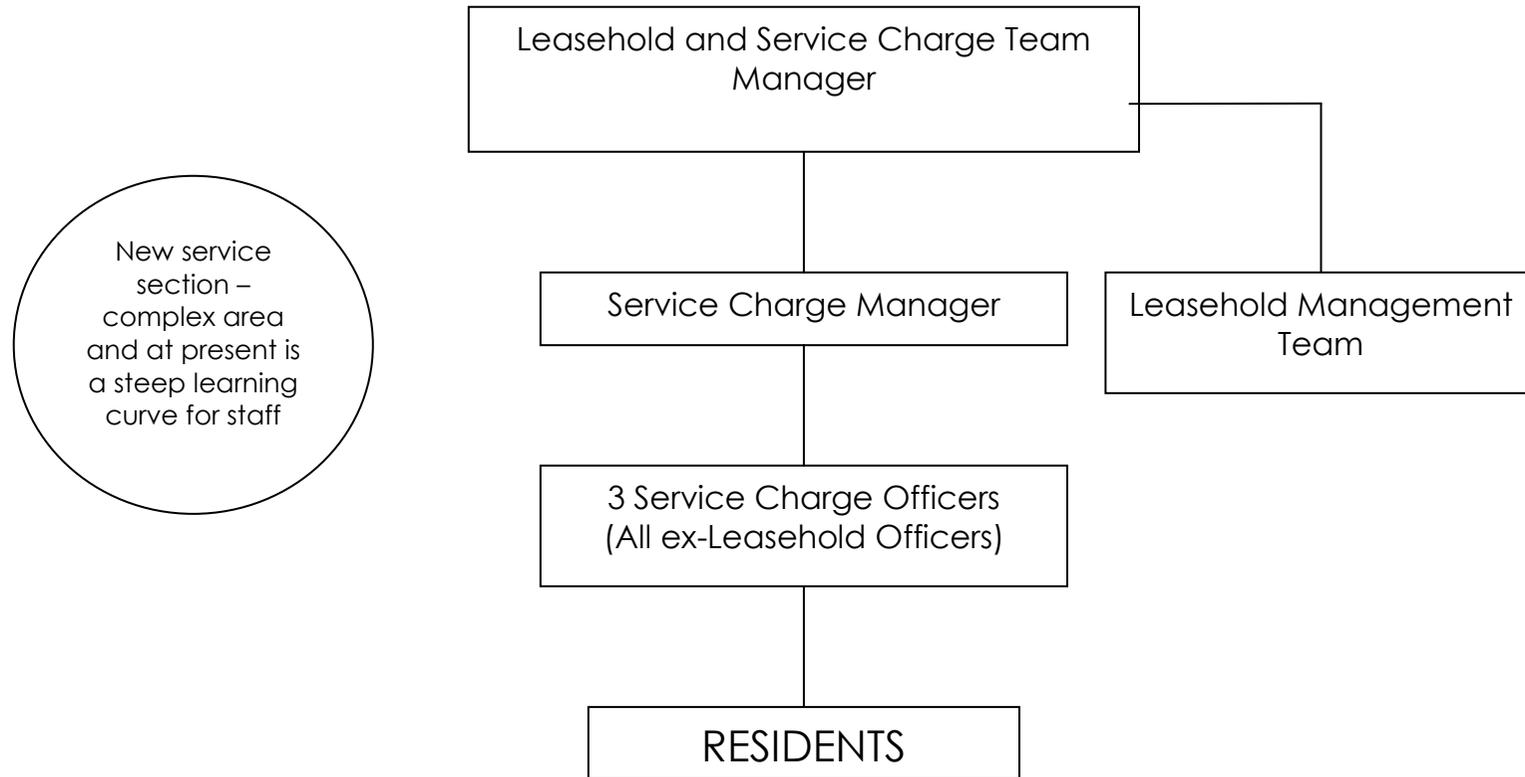
Introduction

This report looks at various areas of Service Charges from a resident's perspective and aims to look at, answer and suggest resolutions to issues that are of most concern to residents.

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1. Some Background Information about Service Charges

1.1 New Structure of Service Team



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1.2 Service Charge Cycle

Jan (yr 1)	Feb (Yr 1)	March (Yr 1)	April (yr 2)	May	June	July	Aug	Sept	Oct	Nov	Dec
Service Charge Team Best Guess service charge figure estimated £X	→	Best Guess service charge figure estimated £X sent to Residents	Finance to look at the actual expenditure for the year	→	→	→	→	Finance send actual Cost out to residents = £X + or -. This is the amount residents pay. Service Charge Bill sent out. The difference between £X and £X + or -. The difference is the Balancing Charge.	Ouch	→	→
↑	←	←	← Cycle repeats ←	←	←	←	←	←	←	←	↓

1.3 Explanation of Service Charge Cycle

In January the Service Charge Team estimate based on history and information from previous years, and looking to potential future developments; this is the Best Guess for service charges.

In March the Best Guess is sent out to residents.

In April the following year Finance will begin to evaluate the actual service charge, it will take 6 months. In Sept the actual cost/bill is sent out to residents.

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The difference between Best Guess and Actual Service Charge is the Balancing Charge. Residents have 6 months to pay (Regulation).

Tenants (social housing) do not have a balancing charge but their service charge is adjusted annually based on the expected expenditure.

1.4 Service Charge Functional Breakdown to Type of Property

Function	Tenant	Shared Owner	Notes
Building Insurance		√	
Cleaning	√	√	Contract
Gardening	√	√	Contract
Sinking Fund		√	The sinking fund is a kind of savings account for your building for example, future work
Management Fee	√	√	

1.5 Breakdown of Recommendations

18	1,2,3,4,5,6,7,8,10,33,34,35,,36,37,38,39,42 43	Service Charge specific
24	9,11,12,13,14,15,16,17,18,19,20,21,22,23,24 ,25,26,27,28,29,30,31,32,40,41	Repairs, Cleaning & Grounds Maintenance issues linked to Service Charges

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1.6 Recommendations and Responses

	Questions	Auditors Comments, Notes & Recommendations	Evidence	Traffic Light	TVH Response
	Management Responsibility				
1	Who is ultimately responsible for deciding the rates at which Service Charges are set?	<p>The Service Charge Team. The difficulty is that you cannot really tell if the service charge is right until September (see Service Charge Cycle). Responsibility lies with Service Charge Team and Finance, but it also cuts across other service areas.</p> <p>The responses that we received pointed to a Best Guess scenario; obviously the service charges are being set by the correct department at the correct time.</p>	<p>Speaking to leasehold manager</p> <p>Examining service charge policy</p>		<p>We decide the rates by comparing the previous 2 years charges together with a 6 month review of spend to date. We have however experienced problems where utility companies for example have not invoiced us regularly. It is not an exact science but we have tried to increase accuracy based on resident feedback that they would prefer a more accurate estimate and we have introduced a PI to help manage this (balancing charge no more than 10% of original estimate)</p>
2	Why is there so much dissatisfaction with service charges?	<p>Lack of understanding. The service charge cycle see section 1.2, the service charge is initially estimated based on information available and set in April, but adjustments are made and actual costs are sent out in September. This often entails a difference, frequently higher, between estimated and actual costs. Residents do not understand service charge cycle, and the complexity of service charge setting. It is a costing process that crosses departments, and can be linked to external factors</p>	<p>Resident surveys</p> <p>Speaking to leasehold manager</p> <p>Speaking to neighbourhoods officers</p> <p>Speaking to partnering manager</p>		<p>We accept the current level of satisfaction with service charges needs to be improved.</p> <p>In order to improve the level of understanding, the service charge team will provide an explanation of the cycle to residents when estimates and actual charges are sent out, in addition to an explanation of the calculation. There was some positive feedback from residents this year when the information sent out with</p>

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		<p>sometimes outside TVH control due to emergency building works, the weather, the economic climate etc.</p> <p>It seems that it is accepted by TVH that there is a great deal of resident dissatisfaction with service charges. TVH state this is due to residents not understanding the process, if this is the case then more should be done to ensure this process is understood.</p>			<p>service charges was reviewed which resulted in fewer enquiries.</p> <p>We shall continue to provide extended late night opening to handle service charge enquiries when the bulk mail out occurs twice yearly.</p> <p>Action: Anita Mackie (Sept and March)</p>
3	<p>What benefits are the recent changes at TVH going to have for the residents?</p> <p>Please give a brief explanation of the proposed benefits.</p>	<p>The new structure should streamline the process. It involves an intense learning curve for the officers involved. When everything is in place and the team at full capacity the direction of the service will be more coherent and responsive. There should be standardised increase and a more analytical approach.</p> <p>This is a welcomed move that we believe may help to improve the current process. How has this been communicated to residents?</p> <p>The results of this recent change are currently not proved but the TVH vision that it will provide a more coherent responsive approach would be much needed.</p>	<p>Speaking to Leasehold manager, Speaking to neighbourhoods' officers.</p>		<p>Residents were kept informed during 2009 of the changes to the staffing structure through special integration updates by the Leasehold team – the outcome to residents would not be seen until at least 1 year after integration due to the service charge cycle.</p> <p>The new service charge team will provide a standardised approach to service charge setting. The initial results will be seen in the level of queries raised after the Service charge information has been sent in September 2010.</p>

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	Questions	Auditors Comments, Notes & Recommendations	Evidence	Traffic Light	TVH Response
	Financial				
4	Why is there so often a balancing charge for residents at the end of the year?	<p>Residents sometimes feel this is unfair. The auditors understand this is always done on a best guess scenario, but TVH are getting it wrong 50% of the time. Leaseholders having to find additional money is always difficult and it makes planning hard, for a large percentage of leaseholders the move to become a TVH leaseholder is their first step on the property ladder, often from rented accommodation.</p> <p>Having consulted briefly with a number of residents it was felt that they would prefer to know earlier.</p> <p>Our recommendation is that TVH could carry out some leaseholder survey to establish that residents would prefer to have a slightly higher bill at the beginning of the year and then a rebate at the end of the year.</p> <p>We appreciate TVH cannot predict the future, and there will always be instances where there is a balancing charge, but the residents feel this happens far to many and the calculation should be changed.</p> <p>As explained above, because of the complexity of the service charge the estimates are sent out at the beginning</p>	<p>Leasehold manager Analysing resident surveys Speaking to residents Looking at P&P data</p>		<p>For 2008/9, TVH produced a balancing charge showing we over estimated charges by 4.15% for shared ownership schemes and under estimated by 5.23% for RTB owners. We believe this is a really close estimated calculation against final costs. An actual cost up to 15% is considered reasonable and we now have a PI of delivering this within 10%.</p> <p>In 2007/8 TVH uplifted the sinking fund charge to better reflect the true cost of cyclical decoration works resulting in no residents having to pay more than what was set aside in the sinking fund during 2008/9.</p> <p>We have already had similar feedback at the two leasehold events held last year which support the finding that customers would prefer an over to an under estimate so are happy to proceed on this basis rather than carry out a separate survey. We will continue to monitor the extent of our balancing charges and whether they result in refunds or re-charges.</p>

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		of the year (April) and the actual is calculated and sent out at the end of summer (September) (see1.2). Response – This year it was 50:50 re uplift, thus good and bad.			
5	What exactly does the management fee cover? How does it compare to other HAs?	Using Housemark comparative data in this area can prove difficult; the attempted analysis of Service Charge Review from 2009 using comparative figures was not very good because like-for-like was not really possible. It was welcomed that there was a big reduction in the management fee charged by TVH this year, and the new structure should provide an enhanced service. We also feel that approaching the service with a basic level enhancement contract would be worth pursuing with residents.	Speaking to directors Speaking to managers Speaking to residents		The fee is based on what the lease states. If the lease states 'reasonable' then we use the Housemark calculation – in theory you can then benchmark fees against other HA's, that is on a time analysis basis. We have benchmarked with A2 Dominion and the private sector and our management fee was cheaper in both cases. In addition to this the current fee of around £193pa is around the benchmark figure provided by LHOg. A recent LVT decision confirmed £206pa to be a 'reasonable fee' for another HA. We are charging for additional services such as solicitor enquiries, and lease extensions thereby only charging the service element to those who use it.
6	We have been told that the sinking	Property and Asset Management have increased the amount over the last 3	Speaking to asset manager		A service quality improvement group (SQUIG) was held with residents about

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	fund is not enough to cover the major works; is this correct and why would that be it be?	<p>years so that the sinking fund can be set in a more equitable manner.</p> <p>The auditors discovered that there was historically a major shortfall with the amount of money being charged for the sinking fund and the actual monies required covering costs. Increased payments are now being made.</p> <p>The sinking fund pot has now increased. We could not find leaseholders who were aware of why the sinking fund had increased so dramatically and would question whether they were consulted/ advised as to the reason for the increase.</p> <p>We fully agree that this fund contribution needed to increase, and feel that this should be monitored to ensure that the contributions are at the correct level.</p>	<p>Speaking to directors</p> <p>Speaking with residents</p> <p>Looking at satisfaction surveys</p>		<p>the sinking fund and an increase in contributions was made as a result of this. We did not however write to all residents with the outcomes of this feedback and an explanation would only have been provided on request. Feedback to residents has been identified as an area for improvement and a monitoring group was set up after the leasehold events to address this.</p> <p>No shared owners received additional requests for payment from the 2008/9 cyclical decoration works as a result of these changes and we have informed affected residents of this.</p> <p>The RTB properties do not currently have any sinking fund in place for any works. It is proposed this is tackled during 2011.</p>
	Complaints				
7	Residents believe that complaints surrounding services go unheard and are often not escalated. What do you think about this?	<p>Residents do not always see the action taken, therefore believe nothing has happened. The IT system sounds great but does not address issues immediately.</p> <p>There are links with other service areas that lead to a lack of communication. What could be done to improve communication now?</p>	<p>Speaking to officers</p> <p>Speaking to residents</p> <p>Speaking to management</p> <p>Looking at complaints</p> <p>Call listening</p>		<p>There is a specific complaint category for service charges and these are reported monthly. All complaints are logged centrally, including any service charge complaints.</p> <p>In line with recent call listening information, 4% of calls relate to</p>

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		The general feeling amongst Residents was that they feel that they have complained about service charges but had no action or the complaint was brushed aside, and not recorded as a complaint.			<p>service charges. Out of a total of 925 complaints for the year 09/10, 25 were registered as service charge issues (2.7%)</p> <p>It is difficult to comment on lack of action without knowing the nature of the complaints in question but specific learning points have been recorded under all the complaint categories including service charges and actions have been identified. There have also been several service charge complaints escalated to the panel hearing (final stage) of the complaints process.</p> <p>We will publish a document for residents specifically about how we will investigate both service failures and complaints for service issues relating to cleaning and gardening. This should make the process transparent and give residents re-assurance that their complaint will be dealt with. Action Niall O'Rourke (Nov 2010)</p>
8	If a resident feels that they are not getting value for money; what would the complaint	There is a mechanism for residents to complain, however we felt after looking at some of these complaints that the response was a generic response not an individual justification.	<p>Looking at complaints</p> <p>Looking on the internet</p>		Agreed - The generic response is driven by the fact that we have a competitively tendered partnering contract for five years. We are however prepared to go back and re-

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	process be?				<p>negotiate on specific sites on an exceptional basis but we can only do this where the costs look out of line with other similar sites. We will however be looking at this issue as part of the re-tendering process. In the meantime we want the residents to continue to make use of the complaints procedure, if it relates to value for money, this should also be tackled within the complaint.</p> <p>Out of a total of 925 complaints inclusive of development for the year 09/10, 144 were registered as estate service issues giving a percentage of 15.5%. Out of the 144 complaints, 129 related to Quadron. A small group of management companies covered 15 complaints and we could not identify the remaining 3 complaints. Therefore 89.5% of the 144 complaints related to Quadron.</p> <p>We will look at how residents can challenge their individual scheme costs as part of the new contract arrangements.</p> <p>Action: Niall O'Rourke (March 2011)</p>

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9	<p>Residents sometimes receive refunds for service failures, after a great deal of effort, most of these are for failings by Quadron. What happens to Quadron? Are Quadron penalised for service failure? What is the incentive for them to get it right first time?</p>	<p>Quadron are penalised in line with the current partnering contract.</p> <p>In Practice this does not happen, only very infrequently.</p> <p>Refunds are not automatically applied they have to be claimed and seemingly proved</p>	<p>Attending partnering meetings Speaking with Staff</p> <p>Auditors experiences</p> <p>Resident feedback</p>		<p>Quadron do amend their monthly invoice to reflect the schemes where they failed to attend. Recent examples include failure to provide cleaning services at a number of schemes in Chelsea during April to the value of £986, and at Hollings over March and April to the value of £894. For grounds at Thorndike in May to value of £75 and at Glossop in June to the value of £65. These have all been processed as refunds for residents.</p> <p>We do accept however that there are also examples where residents have raised non-attendance which have not been reported by Quadron. In future, if a resident is able to report non-attendance within 24hrs of the visit being due, we will let them know straight away when Quadron intend to visit the site. Failure to attend at this time will then be deemed as non attendance and trigger a refund. This approach will need to be agreed with Quadron and staff resources will need to be allocated in order to deliver this.</p> <p>Action Niall O'Rourke – Jan 2011.</p>

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					<p>It is often challenging where Quadron have attended but not completed all the tasks and therefore there is a need to review the evidence and negotiation about the level of refund due. For example refunds which have recently been processed include Hanger when no hoovering took place over 12 weeks at a value of £347.76.</p> <p>In future we will publish a process and timescales for investigating a service failure to ensure residents get a quick response with a decision and any refund due.</p> <p>Action Niall O'Rourke – Jan 2011.</p>
	Staff Perception or Blue Sky Thinking				
10	If you were allowed to do anything irrespective of money or resources to improve this part of the business; what would it be?	<p><u>Comments below from various members of staff</u> Double staff to increase customer satisfaction. More staff. Tailor services better. There are currently 4 staff to 10,000 residents, thus not enough staff.</p>	<p>Speaking to staff and management</p> <p>Speaking to staff and management and leasehold officers, and neighbourhoods officers</p>		<p>The following resources are used to directly manage the service charge and contract management functions;</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 1 Contract manager • 2 contract supervisors • 3 service charge officers • 1 Service charge manager • 1 senior L/H manager • 11 Neighbourhood Officers (to

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	<p>The bills setting might be improved and be made more personal to residents.</p> <p>To have more time to deal with issues, rather than issue standard responses.</p> <p>Increased accuracy, in the billing process, would lead to more availability of time for staff to deal with individual concerns.</p> <p>More colleagues</p> <p>Be able to provide better clarity to residents,</p> <p>Being able to improve customer satisfaction.</p> <p>These are the recommendations of the staff that we have spoken too.</p> <p>Every member of staff that we had spoken too indicated to us that only by having more staff could the service become more personalised and accurate which is what the residents are asking for in all recent surveys and consultations</p> <p>.</p> <p>Our straw pole research showed</p>			<p>carry out inspections)</p> <p>The integration of the Housing and Leasehold services since October 2009 has focussed service charge work into one team.</p> <p>We acknowledge there is work to be done particularly around accuracy and clear information being sent to residents, the new IT system - project cornerstone will also improve efficiency. Site inspections are now also completed using mobile technology which has greatly increased the efficiency of this task.</p> <p>There is no intention to increase headcount in this area of work. As the team experience grows, and the measures above are put into place, we expect to see improvements in this area.</p>

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	<p>Residents often do not mind paying more for a service providing they are getting what they are paying for. All recent surveys and consultations pointed overwhelmingly to the fact that to the fact that although residents want to pay as little as possible obviously, however they would rather pay a little bit more and get the service that they are actually paying for.</p> <p>The auditors are confused in the fact that the management fee has been reduced substantially yet the quality of service is still not there which is ultimately what leaseholders are crying out for, this is surely only a short term fix?</p> <p>In relation to extra staff Surely this would increase customer satisfaction; the extra facilities would enable more personalised responses to residents, and the ability to investigate issues.</p> <p>In the long run with the efficiency savings that could be obtained through better clarity, more investigation work into costings etc better opportunities to procure deals with gas/electric, more dedicated time to work with</p>			

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		management companies this would lead to leaseholders paying less over time, whilst receiving an enhanced service.			
	Cleaning & Grounds Maintenance & Service Charges				
11	Leaseholders generally feel that too much of the work is self-certified by people that have a vested interest in the scheme not failing. What do you think?	<p>For resident inspectors this is not the case. Inspections are undertaken by TVH, Quadron, and residents.</p> <p>Maybe, lack of understanding between residents and staff.</p> <p>The auditors felt that this still exists, technically even if a resident fails a task providing TVH or quadron have said it has passed it will not fail, because of the scoring system.</p> <p>For the contractor to fail the average has to be a fail on two or more tasks, As an example theoretically this could mean if they never collected any litter on a scheme but did everything else really well they would never fail or be penalised?</p>	Partnering manager TVH Staff		<p>We reviewed our inspection process in 2008/9 and increased the numbers of resident inspectors, increased support for the resident inspector scheme, carried out staff training, changed the scoring mechanism, improved the monitoring and introduced mobile working. 70% of the inspections are 'independent' and we believe this is the right balance.</p> <p>Quadron undertake approximately 30% of the inspections which is the standard approach to a partnering contract where responsibilities are shared and trust should be built over time rather than adopting an adversarial approach.. Both the Estate Inspectors and TVHA however are completely independent. All estate inspectors and staff receive training on how to assess the</p>

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					<p>standards against the specification.</p> <p>The contract states that for a fail 2 or more tasks need to fail but we have agreed with quadron to move to a % score for each site with a 70% score to pass which does not allow them to fail significantly in one area. The Estates Services Team does monitor and report on failed tasks on a traffic light system which is communicated to Quadron on a weekly basis. This allows trends to be identified early, evidence, monitored and addressed.</p> <p>Quadron operatives have been asked to leave a calling card when they have been on site to help resident inspectors but we have found that this has not been happening consistently and Quadron have been told to improve this. As a result we will add a box to the resident inspectors form to tick if Quadron have left a calling card and this will be monitored.</p> <p>Action Niall O'Rourke</p>
12	Who sets the standards for inspection?	We did not find any real evidence that residents had an input into the original standards set in the partnering contract.	Partnering manager		Agreed – we are planning an event for the resident inspectors to feed into the standards for the new contract.

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		<p>There is currently resident involvement in meetings with contractors and residents are involved as resident inspectors and feedback has been received via lots of different consultations.</p> <p>It seems that TVH cannot make major changes to the standards as they are pre-set, however some small changes have taken place.</p> <p>With the contract up for review we would hope and welcome the opportunity for residents to be involved in this process.</p>			<p>The Cleaning and Grounds Services were tendered in 2005 under a partnering arrangement with a resident on the selection panel. Quadron were awarded the contract. The tender allowed for a base specification detailing the tasks and frequencies. There was some resident consultation as shared owners opted for a fortnightly frequency.</p> <p>Residents have been involved in the monitoring and management of the contract and with reviewing and developing the service. The development of site specific specifications is encouraged however on 2 scheme consultations carried out the 2 residents attended the consultation which was far less than 10% representation. We also had a limited response to a letter sent to all residents asking if they were interested in a different specification for their site.</p> <p>Action Niall O'Rourke (Oct 2010)</p>
13	What input if any do you have in setting and monitoring of the services the	<p>Could there be an online notice board? Can there be an online scheme specific specification, which has been requested through various consultation events.</p>	Speaking to service charge manager		<p>The service charge team are not responsible for enforcing the contract standards as this is done by the contract manager and his team. The standards will be driven by residents</p>

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	residents receive? Question put to Service charge Manager.	The service charge manager felt that the service charge team should be involved/consulted on the service standards as part of the review as they are the people who have to justify it to residents			<p>when we re-tender the contract however all stakeholders will be involved in the re-procurement process including the Service Charge Team</p> <p>Notice boards are available on most sites with the specification and attendance sheets displayed. We are currently reviewing the information we display to make improvements. At present there is no intention to have an online notice board but we are happy to look at how we can put scheme specific information on line in the future.</p> <p>Action: Alex Noonoo (Dec 2010)</p>
14	With special reference to the period of severe weather, winter 09-10.	<p>TVH stated that Quadron sites have received additional visits and these were managed by using extended hours and utilising supervisory staff.</p> <p>The auditor took a straw poll and 8 out of 10 said that Quadron was not on site during the bad weather period.</p> <p>There is disagreement re Quadron's</p>	<p>Statement from Quadron</p> <p>Partnering manager</p> <p>Speaking to auditors</p> <p>Speaking to Quadron</p> <p>Speaking Assistant Director of PAM</p>		<p>We fully acknowledge that the severe weather meant that services were not delivered. Some of our sites were completely in-accessible or under snow. Quadron carried out limited tasks during this period including litter picking and some clearing of paths, and they supplied us with a list of sites which they were not able to attend. Refunds were made on all of these</p>

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		<p>actions during this period.</p> <p>The bad weather = less time on schemes = catch up = more schemes attended = less work per scheme</p> <p>The auditors tried very hard to gain actual evidence for this which was never available. TVH sided with Quadron in terms of attendance despite compelling evidence that this was not the case. When pushed further on this Quadron were not able to provide tracker information as it was only held for three months</p>	<p>Feedback from auditors</p> <p>Feedback from estate inspectors</p> <p>Site visits to inspect cleaning records</p>		<p>sites.</p> <p>We accept however that the problem of attendance was likely to have affected more than the 12 sites on Quadrons list and the evidence from estate inspectors supports this. Quadron also failed to provide the tracker information on request.</p> <p>Having spoken to the resident inspectors however, they mostly understood the difficulties caused by the exceptional weather and were not expecting refunds. Similarly we were not contacted by customers generally in relation to the non delivery of services during this period.</p> <p>We have therefore agreed to draw a line under this and proceed with the new approach to investigations and refunds (described under No.9 above) to deal with future issues.</p>
15	Bad weather Dec & Jan affected the cleaning and grounds maintenance in	Extra time on schemes; We believe that the operatives approached were not aware of the procedures introduced across the contract, as the schemes within their remit are not always	<p>Speaking to operatives</p> <p>Speaking to Management</p>		TVHA were informed that some schemes required additional resources over and above what would be required under normal situations. However this will have varied on a

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	Questions	Auditors Comments, Notes & Recommendations	Evidence	Traffic Light	TVH Response
	various areas?	<p>affected. The information provided by Quadron management states the site that received additional visits and these were managed by using extended hours and utilising supervisory staff.</p> <p>In terms of catching up, several auditors have spoken with a number of operatives, who confirm that they have not been given any instructions to spend extra time on site thus far, and indeed feel that they would not have the ability to spend extra time on site (to catch up) as the resources are limited, so to spend extra time on one site would be at the expense of another site.</p>			<p>scheme by scheme basis and day to day management of resources is Quadron's responsibility.</p> <p>Quadron will be asked to improve communication with operatives. However again this was a severe and very infrequent weather event.</p> <p>Action: Niall O'Rourke (July 2010)</p>
16	What do you understand extra time cleaning to be?	<p>Extra time cleaning; Quadron and G&G have confirmed that by using off road type vehicles, utilising supervisory staff to clean and by re-arranging schedules, no sites missed weekly visits during the adverse weather conditions. Tracker information is allegedly available for the majority of vehicles if proof of attendance is required. If tracker information is not available then timesheets can be obtained.</p> <p>In terms of cleaning the feedback from the residents that has been passed</p>	<p>Speaking to Quadron</p> <p>Speaking to TVH</p> <p>Speaking to residents</p>		<p>Agreed – in future where non attendance has been established, we will refund the full amount, even if it means more cleaning is required on the next visit.</p>

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	Questions	Auditors Comments, Notes & Recommendations	Evidence	Traffic Light	TVH Response
		back to the auditors is that extra time on site would not counteract the non-attendance i.e. if a cleaner vacuums the carpets properly in the first place it does not take any extra time as one clean should be a proper clean.			
17	What is the effect of extra cleaning on Quadron operatives?	<p>Quadron shut down for 2 weeks; this statement is not true, any operative who have stated this are misleading residents and may face disciplinary actions. Quadron management have confirmed that systems were put in place throughout this period to manage the contract. Staff will be advised that in future, they should not pass on inaccurate information and that management information should be referred to Quadron management who will in turn discuss with TVHA management so that accurate information is communicated to a wider audience (Quadron Quote).</p> <p>Some operatives have confirmed that effectively Quadron shut down for two weeks and operatives had to utilise their holidays.</p>	Speaking to operatives		TVHA staff were also affected and it is clear that adverse weather resulted in reduced monitoring however the cleaning scores did not dip significantly during this month for the sites which were inspected. We have no information to suggest that the service closed for any period, and our evidence supports Quadrons views that they were carrying out at least some tasks on sites which were accessible.
18	In terms of refunds it has been mentioned that you have adopted a policy	Refunds; The claim that we will only provide refunds if a resident complains is not true. You will be aware that we have requested information from	<p>Speaking with residents</p> <p>Speaking to management</p>		Quadron deduct costs associated with missed visits. In cases where sites are attended but not to the required standard there is a discussion and

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	<p>that means if a resident complains they will receive a refund but if they do not they will not, is this correct?</p>	<p>Quadron regarding schemes that did not receive services and those residents who did not receive a service would receive a service charge refund. Making a complaint does not automatically result in a refund.</p> <p>Residents should be made aware of this and if this is the adopted method for TVH then surely it is encouraging complaints.</p> <p>We have asked that a statement on the affected services is placed on the website and we are awaiting confirmation when these will appear.</p> <p>Information provided by Quadron states that 19 sites have had additional catch-up visits and 12 sites that were missed will get a refund.</p> <p>Obviously this is concerning to the Auditors who during their staff interviews were told by three separate members of staff that if there was non-service the refund process was automatic once TVH were aware.</p> <p>Some residents have been told that as it is out of TVH's control there is nothing you can do.</p>	<p>Speaking to PAM director</p> <p>Speaking to Quadron</p> <p>Monthly partnering meeting</p>		<p>agreement on the missed tasks and level of reduction required. Where residents or TVHA staff report a failed or poor service these are investigated and the evidence reviewed and a judgement made.</p> <p>In relation to the bad weather period, please refer to comments above re automatic refunds. Alerts were placed on our website at the time of the poor weather to keep residents informed, however we did not receive significant rise in reported service failures for this period.</p> <p>As part of our complaints process, where we have made a refund for services not delivered to a resident, we extend this refund to everyone affected by the lack of service. We have not however said to residents that they need to complain in order to get a refund and we are happy to investigate all service failures in addition to the automatic refunds without using our complaints process. We are happy to make this process more transparent by agreeing something with the resident auditors which can go on our website.</p>

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	Questions	Auditors Comments, Notes & Recommendations	Evidence	Traffic Light	TVH Response
		<p>These mixed messages from TVH are very confusing going out to residents, We would welcome clarity as soon as possible on this for residents and as you have indicated that the actual decisions you make will be advertised to residents.</p> <p>So far this has not happened</p>			Action: Niall O'Rourke (Sept 2010)
19	If standards improve with an estate inspector and resources of the contractors are not being increased. Surely you are moving the problem from one area to another?	<p>Data measured across all schemes. A dip in grounds maintenance during the summer (2009). Cleaning and grounds maintenance have new supervisor. A hit squad has been created to provide a quick response for things such as, vomit and graffiti.</p> <p>The aim is to have a resident inspector on every scheme, but this is with TVH senior management. At present there are approximately 57 inspectors.</p> <p>The introduction of extra resources to the contract is a very welcome development, and shows that TVH is monitoring the contract and making recommendations for improvement as and when required.</p> <p>The comment about standards improving if there is an estate inspector</p>	<p>Speaking to resident involvement officers</p> <p>Speaking to contracts manager</p> <p>Speaking to contract compliance manager</p> <p>Speaking to director</p>		<p>We believe the Resident Inspectors scheme is very popular and a good way for residents to get involved with improving the services in their area. The information that standards have improved on these sites is based on a higher increase in satisfaction with cleaning on sites where there is an inspector and the fact that residents have recently been scoring their schemes higher for inspections. There is no evidence however which shows that sites without an inspector have got any worse. Quadron have put in extra resources across the entire contract in the last 12 months but we are not aware that they are spending more time on sites with resident inspectors, although this may be the case. We also believe that this scheme adds value as the sites are often inspected soon after the</p>

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		<p>was refuted which contradicts previous answers given.</p> <p>Therefore we feel that TVH need to decide if the estate inspector scheme is adding value or not.</p> <p>On the final point we have been told that with nearly 400 schemes it was not possible or likely that estate inspectors would be on every scheme. TVH intention this year is to improve the amount of inspectors from 57 to 85 this financial year, which we feel is not a great commitment to get one on every scheme.</p>			<p>operative has attended.</p> <p>Our overall objective is to have resident inspectors on all sites where there is a willing volunteer, but because of the resources required to support this properly (in both the resident involvement team and the contract team) we are taking an incremental approach. Roles have had to be changed in the RI team to accommodate this and the aim is to support 150 volunteers by the end of 2012/13. This is a large number of people to support and we will need to look again at resources in order to be able to deliver this.</p>
20	<p>What input, if any do you have in setting and monitoring of the services the residents receive? Question put to service charge manager</p>	<p>The auditors feel that with the contract up for review, it will give everybody the ideal opportunity to contribute to setting the new standards.</p> <p>We felt that TVH are very good at monitoring the standards achieved, with many checks on service, apart from attendance.</p> <p>The biggest issue we found in relation to monitoring was that there was confusion</p>	<p>Speaking to P&AM</p> <p>Speaking to Service charge manager</p>		<p>Agreed – there is some confusion on sites where the boundaries are not clear and sometimes we need to confer with Quadron on what is included in their visits. We are however in the process of mapping all of our sites which will include investigation of land ownership where necessary which will deal with this issue.</p>

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	Questions	Auditors Comments, Notes & Recommendations	Evidence	Traffic Light	TVH Response
		<p>on a lot of schemes between TVH, Quadron and Residents as to exactly what should and should not be carried out.</p> <p>This when reported to TVH is also very confusing because the response generally is they will ask Quadron, surely TVH should know this is another sign of the contractor self regulating.</p> <p>Could there be an online notice board? Can the individual specifications be put on line in the 'my services area' of the website?</p>			<p>The level of service delivered should be clear as this is set out in the specification and has been used to train everyone carrying out inspections. It is also on the notice board for residents. There will also be resident consultation on the standard when we re-tender the contract as stated above.</p> <p>When investigating queries we do communicate with Quadron and seek additional information to investigate and reach an informed and fair decision.</p> <p>Action: Niall O'Rourke (March 2011)</p>
21	Is this refund/credit procedure effective, as many residents are dissatisfied, yet it seems that very few ever get any rebates?	<p>The whole scheme should be credited as and when applicable, it should not be down to residents to have to chase. Often when a resident contacts TVH to report non attendance it is raised as a service failure and Quadron is asked to re-attend, sometimes this happens sometimes it does not.</p> <p>Quadron's response to this in a number of cases is - we will catch up with extra time next week.</p>	<p>Speaking to residents</p> <p>Speaking to estate inspectors</p> <p>Speaking to management</p> <p>Mystery shopping</p>		<p>We often receive complaints of work not completed based on the following situations:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Operatives taking a break in the van (they have been told to do this off site) • Quadron carrying out inspections before attending (this is part of the contract specification for the gardening) • A separation of tasks between

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	Questions	Auditors Comments, Notes & Recommendations	Evidence	Traffic Light	TVH Response
		<p>The auditors feel that this is not acceptable.</p> <p>Residents pay for a weekly visit, this is not a time based visit but based on works required, therefore sometimes they spend very little time on site and other times it is longer.</p> <p>If the weekly visit does not happen then residents should not pay regardless of whether extra time is required at the next visit.</p> <p>We feel that the current system is not fair and effective and requires looking at</p>			<p>operatives (the litter pickers for example do not do the grass cutting)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Quadron are not required to complete all the tasks on every visit e.g. grass cutting happens at specific frequencies. <p>We do therefore need to investigate these cases and will deliver the actions described in No. 9 to ensure this is more transparent and timely.</p> <p>Where an inspector has a service failure, we will also agree with the inspectors that they need to report this through to us within 24 hours of the visit rather than just on the inspection form.</p> <p>Action: Niall O'Rourke (Sept 2010)</p>
22	Is the cleaning specification adhered to?	<p>Utilising the current specification no check is made to ensure the contractor turned up. In theory the contractor could attend sites once per year if Quadron felt the specification was being adhered to.</p> <p>Providing it stays within standard</p>	<p>Speaking to Quadron</p> <p>Speaking to estate inspectors</p> <p>Looking at scores</p> <p>Speaking to management</p>		<p>The contract states the frequency of cleaning and cleaners have to demonstrate their attendance by updating the cleaning attendance sheet and dropping a calling card through the Resident Inspectors door. The Resident Inspector then carries out the survey of the works carried out to ensure to standard. On all schemes,</p>

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					<p>Quadron, Neighbourhood Officer and Estates Services Team carry out inspections at least monthly.</p> <p>The specification is used to check the standard of work. All persons monitoring receive appropriate training.</p>
	Resident Involvement				
23	What level of resident involvement is there in new or extended cleaning and grounds maintenance contracts?	We would welcome the utilisation of resident input into the new specifications/contract setting; we would also like TVH to make use of the vast amounts of previous feedback and data that is in existence to develop this new contract.	Speaking to management and directors		<p>Agreed - We are in the early stages of re-tendering, but we have already agreed to hold an event with resident inspectors to get some baseline information before beginning to put anything together. Residents are also involved in the decision around the appointment of the consultant and will be fully involved throughout the process. We would be happy to involve the auditors in this process and want to use this opportunity to procure a contract which meets residents needs as far as is possible.</p> <p>Action – Niall O’Rourke</p>
24	What actions to do with service charges have come from the leaseholder	We have seen evidence of some of these recommendations actually taking effect, but this fact has not been communicated to the wider body of service charge payers.	<p>Leaseholder consultation documents</p> <p>Speaking to residents</p>		<p>Good progress has been made and there will be articles in Link Up and on website to demonstrate progress made. These are some of the actions taken:</p>

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	Questions	Auditors Comments, Notes & Recommendations	Evidence	Traffic Light	TVH Response
	consultations that took place have actually been implemented?				<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • We adapted the service charge statement in 2007/8 • We increased sinking fund provisions following resident feedback • We provide a separate service charge explanation sheet twice yearly. • We held a homeowner update meeting in March and another planned for July. • A number of website articles have gone on website in June on cyclical, planned and responsive repairs. <p>Action; Howard Dawson / Niall O'Rourke</p>
25	Do you feel that estate standards improve if there is a resident estate inspector	<p>The auditors feel that this is a great sign that the resident inspector's scheme, a good involvement method that actually brings results.</p> <p>However what is concerning is that standards improve if there is an estate inspector, standards should be the same whether an inspector or not. We understand that it is TVH's intention to increase the amount of resident inspectors in 2010 but only by a small number, so what happens to the schemes that do not have inspectors, do these schemes standards go unchallenged.</p>	<p>Speaking to estate inspectors</p> <p>Speaking to PAM team</p> <p>Looking at estate satisfaction spreadsheet</p> <p>Speaking with contract compliance manager</p>		<p>We believe the Resident Inspectors scheme is very popular and a good way for residents to get involved with improving the services in their area. The information that standards have improved on these sites is based on a higher increase in satisfaction with cleaning on sites where there is an inspector and the fact that residents have recently been scoring their schemes higher for inspections.</p> <p>There is no evidence however which shows that sites without an inspector have got any worse. Quadron have put in extra resources across the entire</p>

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					<p>contract in the last 12 months but we are not aware that they are spending more time on sites with resident inspectors, although this may be the case. We also believe that this scheme adds value as the sites are often inspected soon after the operative has attended.</p> <p>Our overall objective is to have resident inspectors on all sites where there is a willing volunteer, but because of the resources required to support this properly (in both the resident involvement team and the contract team) we are taking an incremental approach. Roles have had to be changed in the RI team to accommodate this and the aim is to support 150 volunteers by the end of 2012/13. This is a large number of people to support and we will need to look again at resources in order to be able to deliver this.</p>
26	Some Residents Inspectors have told us that some Estate Inspections scoring is marked lower by resident estate inspectors is	<p>We have seen evidence that what TVH say is actually the case.</p> <p>We have seen that often the scores given by residents is higher than that given by TVH, this can be partly because often the resident sees the site</p>	<p>Looking at estate inspector feedback sheets</p> <p>Speaking to management</p>		No, in fact the scoring often compares very similarly, in fact recently inspectors have been scoring higher than TVH.

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	this correct? When the average score is worked out it gets a 'pass'. Is this true?	when it is completed where as TVH may not see it until a few days later.			
27	Could you not hold a leaseholder consultation on each scheme and come to common ground on what is and what is not included, and tailor a more specific service that residents are happy to pay for and can be monitored.	This would be the ultimate solution to increasing customer satisfaction, and we feel what residents would really like to see, however our concerns would be how this would ever be attained and monitored.	Neighbourhoods manager Speaking to director		This was our desired approach, and we started with a survey to all residents asking them if they wanted a different specification for their scheme. There was a very poor response to this, but we followed this up by identifying 10 schemes to carry out further consultation based on regular service issues. It has still proved difficult to engage with residents around this issue, but we would like to pursue this and are considering having specification levels to choose from in the new contract.
28	Can we have a look the Service Charge Policy? What is the resident involvement in this policy?	Draft Policy passed to auditors for comments and suggestions.	Looking at service charge policy		The auditors have read and commented on the draft policy. These comments are now included and incorporated into the new policy that is now in place for staff on the Intranet
29	Do residents have any input into the Service Charge procedures?	The service charge procedures are under review, and we have an assurance that residents will be consulted where necessary.	Looking at TVH current service charge procedures		These are currently under review and will be reviewed by residents.
30	Residents want a better choice	We have seen some evidence of this.	Attending partnering meetings		This is being tackled as part of the wider review of cleaning and

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	about the services they pay for; what is being done to give the residents a choice of options on the actual level of service they receive?	Sam Johnson (PAM) is working on this. Big dissatisfaction with cleaning and ground maintenance.	Speaking with PAM		<p>gardening contracts where we hope to be able to offer a range of service levels.</p> <p>We do provide the option for residents to carry out their own cleaning and gardening</p>
	Management Companies				
31	From your experience are there more problems on schemes that are managed by a third party management company?	<p>Not enough information. These companies are not regulated. The feeling is that the quality of their staff is not good. Yes, often down to communication. Sometimes there are legal implications linked to these companies on the estates. Residents are not aware of what is being paid for. They are not regulated, therefore billing can be erratic.</p> <p>The general feeling is that the service delivery of these companies is poor and expensive. The Service Review 2009 confirmed this.</p> <p>We would welcome TVH taking a more direct approach with these companies to get a better deal for their residents.</p> <p>Perhaps helping to get their residents</p>	<p>Speaking to residents</p> <p>Looking at TVH satisfaction surveys</p> <p>Attending the leaseholder road shows</p>		<p>Where there is a separate management company (who employ the managing agent to deliver the services) it is difficult for TVHA to influence the outcome. We find this very frustrating and have spent considerable time on some sites trying to sort out these issues. This area of expertise now sits in the leasehold team and they have just finished a review of management companies which has made a number of recommendations.</p> <p>The 2008 survey noted 30% satisfaction levels with management companies.</p> <p>Action: Anita Mackie (March 2011)</p>

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	Questions	Auditors Comments, Notes & Recommendations	Evidence	Traffic Light	TVH Response
		onto Management Company Boards, working more closely with the management companies to improve services, perhaps by having a dedicated officer at TVH that deals with Management Companies.			
	Leaseholder Consultation & Leaseholder Survey				
32	How were the 140 suggestions from the Leaseholder event followed through?	<p>The 140 suggestions for service improvements that came out of the 2 leaseholder events have been collated. These events were excellent and provided some brilliant feedback from TVH residents.</p> <p>Probably under topic headings, Communal repairs, Cyclical maintenance, management companies, Estate Services, New Services and Communication. There will be some duplication in the 140 suggestions as that figure is just a count of what came out of each group. Resident Involvement will be sending out this collated feedback to residents who attended, they can make any more comments on this just in case the TVH note-takers missed anything. It will be coordinating a response to all the suggestions to go back out to the residents in 2 months time.</p>	<p>Attending Leaseholder events</p> <p>Speaking with resident involvement team</p>		<p>A 3 monthly home owner monitoring group is in place to check on performance and actions carried out to date. They are looking at the complete recommendations together with actions completed.</p> <p>This is due to meet again in July 2010.</p> <p>Updates will be going in Summer Link Up and on TVHA website, some appeared on the website in June.</p>

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		<p>Alex Noonoo (Publicity & Marketing) will be looking at the communications suggestions; Housing Management Group will be looking at the rest. They will have to determine for each suggestion.</p> <p>Can it be implemented What will be the cost? What will be the timescale for implementation? If it cannot be implemented – reasons why? Will it be passed back to all residents or only those involved? This process fulfils the commitment given to Leaseholders at the events -1 month for feedback. 3 months for detailed response.</p>			
33	Examination of literal comment from the Leaseholder Survey, published March 2009.	<p>The summary results were published in 'Link up'. The result have been analysed by an external consultant, and actions have been incorporated into and internal action plan.</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Leaseholder restructuring – see section 1 of this document 2. Leaseholder event to be undertaken (see below). <p>The general theme is one of residents' not being happy with service charges in relation to the service provided and its value for money (See appendix 1).</p>	Copy of Survey comments.		<p>Accepted – the leasehold events were organised as a response to the survey results and the action plans link directly to this.</p> <p>We improved the information which went out with the statements this year and the number of enquiries we received was far less as a result. We will also be improving the statements when we have the new service charges module rolled out in the</p>

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		<p>We have seen the article in Link Up and the internal action plan and it makes good steps towards improving the service once all the actions are followed through.</p> <p>We felt that what is continually missed are the points about better clarity and evidence, satisfaction would be higher if residents fully understood exactly what they are paying for and why.</p>			second phase of our IT system (May 2011).
	Communication				
34	The majority of residents would like to have more information (proof) provided to them as part of the deal in relation to actual expenditure.	<p>This could be provided but it would increase the management fee, and increase use of staff, electronic and paper resources.</p> <p>TVH can provide copies of bills on request; they are kept electronically for 3 years and 5 years manually. It can take a while to find this information; again it would be a use of staff time that would have to come from another area.</p> <p>If TVH had a couple more staff it would be possible to provide a little more information (justification), the auditors feel that They get a certificate verifying what has been spent but feel</p>	<p>Resident satisfaction surveys</p> <p>Attending leaseholder days</p> <p>Auditors experiences</p> <p>Speaking with officers</p>		<p>Agreed, we would like to be able to provide more information on a routine basis and when the new IT system is in place we hope to be able to do this in the service charge statement. Currently we are only able to provide a breakdown of costs and copies of bills on request.</p> <p>We have worked hard to reduce the management fee and would be reluctant to increase staffing which would have a direct impact on this.</p>

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		that if they require it they should be given a clearer breakdown.			
35	Residents feel that they are only treated as an individual when you send their bill and collect money; anything else is just standard response with standard letters. What could be built into TVH's practices to make this a more interpersonal thing?	The problem with individual response is time and expense. TVH use mail merge and has approximately 11,000 units. It is therefore difficult to initiate and develop responses tailored to individual cases. There would be cost, staff time and service efficiency problems. Not enough staff to give a more personal service.	Personal experiences Looking at survey information held by TVH Attending leaseholder events		Each home owner who pays a service charge receives a letter explaining their charges, but with more information as explained above hopefully this will feel more tailored. Customers do receive an individual response to any direct contact they have with us, but we would be open to suggestions for further improvements or examples of specific feedback. We have and will continue to visit the 7 current older person schemes for consultation.
36	Opting out of contracts. Can individual estates opt out of Quadron contract?	No but Quadron work to a clear and agreed specification. We feel that residents should have more input into estate specific specifications, but feel that being given an option to opt out would become very confusing and difficult to manage	Speaking to staff and management		We have allowed some schemes to opt out of the Quadron contract and we will be building this into the new contract arrangements. We have also promoted the right to manage.
37	The bills that are sent out to residents with the breakdown of service charges –	The service charge statements reflect the amount of information available for us to give to customers. They could be clearer but constraints in our current IT system do not enable us to make the	TVHRAs Examined service charge bills. Speaking to the service charge team		The revised statement was approved by a resident panel in 2006. We will be consulting with residents over the new production of service charge statements within the new IT

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	are they understandable?	<p>changes to enhance the layout and information provided. A new IT system has been procured and our service charge requirements are currently being incorporated.</p> <p>Is there the equivalent to a 'plain English' format for billing, so the customer can understand? Has the methodology and format of the billing document been reviewed with any resident panel?</p>	Examining service charge bill from another organisation		<p>system which is due to go live in May 2011.</p> <p>There is not an equivalent of a plain English format.</p>
38	One thing that comes up from speaking to residents is that communication from TVH is poor: is this something that TVH recognises?	<p>Communication is under constant review.</p> <p>Project Cornerstone should improve this, providing a more efficient and effective service.</p> <p>The Service Charge Team feel that communication would improve if the team had more staff.</p> <p>We feel that extra staff should seriously be looked at, customer satisfaction is low and could be increased by a more personal and accurate service, for a minimal increase in service charge across 5000 + properties</p>	<p>Speaking to residents</p> <p>Auditors meetings</p> <p>Speaking to management</p> <p>Speaking to staff</p> <p>Looking at existing survey data</p>		<p>We have improved the monitoring by the introduction of 'callbacks' and e-mail logging to ensure that all enquiries are followed up where we are not able to deal with them in the first instance. During the peak times in October and March we have a dedicated phone enquiry line set up to handle service charge issues. All direct enquiries currently receive a personal response.</p> <p>We would be interested in specific examples of areas where communication is poor and can be improved.</p>
39	Regarding cleaning & gardening during	Information to be published on the website, to give people the opportunity	Looking at website		We have made greater use of the website since December 2009. There

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	Questions	Auditors Comments, Notes & Recommendations	Evidence	Traffic Light	TVH Response
	the bad weather period. How is information re the cleaning problems communicated?	to query. This is a recent and welcomed development, but we feel however that not enough promotion on the website is made. Historically the website has only been updated very infrequently; residents therefore only go onto the website when they are looking for information etc from the past. If TVH are going to use this more as a live update platform. Then this should be communicated to residents.	Speaking to the PAM team Speaking to resident inspectors		will be a significant amount of information going onto the website in June/July 2010 and from then onwards where we will be publicising monthly performance information on Mears and Quadron. We have split satisfaction results between tenants and leaseholders. We are aware that customers do not visit our site regularly and are looking at ways to address this. Action: Alex Noonoo
Partnerships					
40	Partnerships and service charges increase - are they linked? In some areas the service charge has increased by 130%. It is felt this increase is linked to 'Partnership', especially with Quadron. Is the cost of 'partnership' causing increased costs?	Increases in service charges are linked to many different factors but are only based on actual spend so if we spend or it costs more then the service charge has to reflect this. We felt that there was no evidence that anything other than actual cost was charged to residents	Looking at service charge statements Speaking to officers Speaking to auditors		

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	Questions	Auditors Comments, Notes & Recommendations	Evidence	Traffic Light	TVH Response
	Value for Money				
41	Value for Money – we would like to see the service charge costs of TVH compared to a like Housing Association.	<p>We have to estimate each year how much it is going to cost to run each property. Some costs we can estimate fairly accurately, by looking at what has been spent on similar schemes or in previous years. Other things, such as repairs, can not be predicted, so service charge estimates are virtually never going to be correct to the last penny.</p> <p>This is the way in which all providers of social housing work and shared ownership leases are drawn up to reflect the fact that there will always be a difference between what was estimated and what the actual cost was (i.e. the balancing charge) to be paid by the customer (see section 1).</p> <p>We were not able to bench mark this suitably with the information that we were able to obtain</p>	No real evidence available		<p>Comparing service charges across organisations is difficult. Our current management fee does compare favourably with other RSL's and the private sector.</p> <p>Both Housing Associations and the private sector operate the same system with their leasehold properties as this is governed by legislation.</p>
42	How does TVH revenue collection compare with other HAs?	<p>TVHA has upper quartile performance in comparison with our peers. Revenue collection irrespective of tenure is balanced between recovery of rents and service charge, against keeping people in their properties.</p> <p>Information supplied.</p>	Benchmarking		

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	Questions	Auditors Comments, Notes & Recommendations	Evidence	Traffic Light	TVH Response
		We found that TVH collection of service charges compares well with other organisations			

2.1 Additional Recommendations

Website

1. We would like TVH to investigate the opportunity for resident inspectors to be able to complete and submit inspection forms online, which is information we have gathered from existing surveys and talking to some inspectors. Agreed - we are happy to explore this possibility.
Action: Alex Noonoo
2. The auditors feel that with more and more people having access to the internet, that the Website should be promoted as more of a live update platform, it was good to see that TVH utilised it during the period of the poor weather, however if residents do not know that this is the sort of thing that TVH will use it for why would they check it. Agreed – we will explore the best way of doing this. **Action Alex Noonoo**

Communication

1. Through all the audits that have been carried out we have found that TVH is carrying out some fantastic work behind the scenes as it were, to improve things based on what residents have said, however we feel that this information is not adequately communicated to residents that are not involved in the process.
2. The answer to a lot of questions we receive from TVH is 'it was in **Link up**' from our research and straw poles that we have carried out very few residents actually read Link UP. The residents feel that the magazine is a self promotion tool for TVH, we would like to see a big relaunch of the magazine, what seems to be required is a residents magazine, but we would welcome the opportunity for TVH to carry out some further research in this area, if this is the primary source of communication it is important that residents read it. Agreed – we will look at Link Up when we have finished the work we are doing on profiling our customers so that we can tailor it better to their interests. **Action Alex Noonoo.**

Monitoring

1. The auditors feel that under the current contract TVH does not have enough control over the contract and we felt from our research that not enough is done to physically audit the information that is provided by them, therefore there is not emphasis on ensuring that value for money is being achieved and the terms of the contract being stuck too.
2. It was felt that in terms of resident complaints about non service TVH tended to side with the contractor, we feel that more emphasis should be passed back to listening to the customer, and obtaining evidence to prove that the contractor has done as they have said, as

Thames Valley Housing Resident Auditors Service Charge Report Recommendations

2.1 Additional Recommendations

often it seems that TVH do not trust the comments of estate inspectors, therefore leaving the feeling that the contractor self regulates.

Response: Whilst there is a lot of independent scrutiny of the contractors we accept that resident perception is different and we will be more transparent with customers about how we scrutinise ongoing performance and deal with service failures as described in the action points agreed with the auditors as part of this report.

Staffing

The auditors felt that a large amount of staff time is used carrying out difficult chasing exercises, especially the contract compliance officer who does not have enough time to actively monitor sites and deal with the other duties, we feel that this role should be more reactive to problems. Estates should be checked more frequently by housing officers and others visiting site rather than this being the main role of the compliance officer, we would have thought that the compliance officer role would be more about dealing with the contractor quicker and more efficiently when they do not comply. We also feel that more should be done to resolve issues with refunds to residents which at present is a long and drawn out process which takes huge amounts of time from the small team who deal with this contract. Ideally this should be the responsibility of a named person.

Response: Having a fast response to investigating service failures and agreeing refunds as outlined in the action points above will improve the service for residents and reduce staff time needed to investigate the issues at a later date. The majority of inspections are already carried out by the Neighbourhood Officers whilst the Compliance Officer concentrates his inspections on problematic sites. We will however look at responsibilities as part of the new approach to dealing with refunds.

Comments By the Chair of Auditors

This Audit was very interesting, and challenging and started off with the focus on all areas of Service Charges, This audit was carried out over a period of approximately six months, and during this time as you will see from the responses to our recommendations TVH had already made a large number of changes.

A big area of concern to residents were the value for money of the services being delivered in Cleaning and Grounds Maintenance, and although this does not from TVH's perspective come under the service charge umbrella, to residents it did and has been included within this report, however many questions asked are still without a resolution.

This audit report contain a lot of recommendations for improvement, some of which TVH are currently aware of, some perhaps they are not. However following on from the Boards decision to retender the Grounds and Cleaning Contract, This is the ideal opportunity for the recommendations and concerns of residents to be addressed in the pre-contract process.

Thames Valley Housing Resident Auditors Service Charge Report Recommendations

2.1 Additional Recommendations

The auditors feel that a lot of the concerns raised through the audit report and through other resident consultations are valid but were something that TVH were not able to address due to lack of flexibility in the existing partnership contract, despite a lot of hard work and good will by staff.

Hopefully TVH will utilise this opportunity to improve the areas and therefore provide an improved service and better value deal for all residents involved.

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Status Homeowner Satisfaction Survey 2008

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3. Appendix 1

Categorisation of Literal Comments

Note: there is a subjective element in the tables below as often the comments were very long, so it was necessary to make value judgements regarding the main thrust of the literal comment.

Q5. Increase Satisfaction with Cleaning and Gardening

Brief Description	No.
Service Charges regarded as too high for the quality of service - value for money	94
Negative comment on service	251
Request for more or a better service	35
Change Cleaning Grounds Maintenance specification	12
Very negative comment about service	47
Better Communication - Communication failure	17
Negative comment regarding to contractors	20
Parking comments	2
Negative comment about specific operatives -teams	30
ASB comments	6
Make physical changes - bin areas - fencing	4
General comments	9
Improve planting	3
Improve security	3
Improve inspection process to ensure work is done	14
Positive comment	12
Criticism of management	12
Enlist and support residents as opposed to contractors to do work	4
No response to complaints - too ineffectual and too long to act	9
Lazy residents creating problems	1
Resident undertaking work themselves	3
Not applicable	32

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Q8. Extra services

Brief Description	No.
Brief Description	No.
Improve Service	25
Provide extra service	5
Improve facilities for cyclists	4
Access to Gym	4
Communication - more info	1
Improve/install lighting, CCTV, security	3
Improve Parking	2
Provide window cleaning	5
Make physical changes	3
Not Applicable	4

Q55. General Comments

Brief Description	No.
Questioning TVHA ethos, priorities and management capability & processes	32
Service charge queries perceived as excessive for service provided	81
Very negative comment re TVHA	12
Communication problems	94
Complaints General	29
Rent considered too high	19
Contract Management problems: builder defects, snagging, poor quality service	24
Positive comments about TVHA	32
Owners paying for social welfare side of TVHA	3
Service negative comments - repairs, cleaning & grounds maintenance	43
Parking problems	11
General enquiry	4
ASB, security	4
N/a	11