



7 April 2005

Wishing upon a star

Whitefriars Housing Group has reached for the stars and grabbed two following an inspection from the independent government watchdog.

Inspectors from the Audit Commission visited Whitefriars during November and December 2004 to look at the service provided to tenants. The results issued today (April 7) show that the not-for-profit housing association's services are 'good' with 'promising' prospects for improvement.

The Commission, which exists to ensure taxpayers get good value for money, can award councils and housing associations from zero to three stars for the quality of service. Zero is poor and three is excellent.

When Whitefriars took over 20,000 council homes back in 2000, the quality of the housing stock was considered poor. Coventry was the biggest authority at the time to transfer all its homes to a housing association.

According to Chairman Peter Lacy one of the reasons for today's terrific results is the council's foresight in giving the transfer the thumbs up. Their decision put 'tenants first'.

He said: "This result is fantastic news. Our job has been to deliver the quality of service our tenants deserve. This result proves that we are well on track and are going from strength to strength.

“As housing stock transfers go, Coventry was the largest at the time and our success has put the city on the housing map. In 2000 Coventry City Council made a brave decision which, as today’s report shows, has paid off.

“This result is a real team effort and I would like to thank the council, our board members, staff and tenants -especially the Voices of Whitefriars Residents - for moving the organisation forward and helping us obtain such a fantastic result. To achieve this level in four years is exceptional.

“We know there is work still to be done and our customers, now and in the future, can rest assured that we will not be taking a breather. We intend to build on our existing partnership arrangement to do even better.”

In its report the commission gave particular praise to Whitefriars’ work to reduce anti-social behaviour and its pioneering mediation service asb4, which works to resolve neighbourhood disputes.

Other areas which gained positive recognition included Whitefriars’ policy and achievements on gas servicing and its work to make the lettings service more flexible to ensure it meets the needs of tenants. The policy means the way people can access a new home has improved so anyone with specific needs such as a spare bedroom for a carer, disabled access or a large family will find it easier to get the type of home they need.

Tenant board member Colin Young said: “The inspection results are good news for tenants. It shows that things have improved since 2000 and that the needs of tenants are being addressed. The fact Whitefriars has been praised for its work on anti-social behaviour is a key point as this is something that affects a lot of tenants.”

John Bolton, director of social services and housing at Coventry City Council, said: “This is a richly deserved recognition of the hard work that Whitefriars management and staff have put into the creation of the new organisations whilst continuing to improve the standards of socially rented housing across the city.

“This recognition gives us a growing confidence that our joint partnership with Whitefriars, along with other housing associations and developers, will enable us to deliver the ambitious housing strategy that we all share for the city.”

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