

Meeting the challenge of Excellence in Housing Services

How do you ensure your organisation is positioned to deliver excellent services? Do you have the right structure, people and processes? How do you work with your residents to identify what needs to be changed?

Effective scrutiny and review arrangements are key to the delivery of high quality of housing services. Your review arrangements need to be well planned, prioritised and implemented. This will ensure that they make a demonstrable difference, and help you demonstrate compliance with regulatory standards.

We can assist you with: resident led scrutiny, service review and development, development audits, compliance audits, and business assurance.

Business Assurance

An objective and dispassionate review of your services and structures is sometimes needed to re-assure boards and managers that you are delivering your services in the best manner possible. Business assurance can cover risk reviews, governance reviews, organisational effectiveness reviews, stakeholder assessments as well as facilitated workshops including training courses for staff and Board members. Risk reviews can assist the business and board members to plan for different scenarios, ensuring your organisation is able to take all reasonable precautions against possible challenges. They can also help identify management actions which might reduce risks, as well as those areas requiring more intensive monitoring because of their risk profile. Undertaking advance preparation can help ensure the best result from regulatory engagements, testing your policies and actual practice against the regulatory standards, and helping your organisation to anticipate improvements in good practice. Business Assurance also seeks to test your business plan to check that the underlying assumptions are reasonable, and to clarify resource allocations to areas of the highest priority.

Policy and Procedure Development

When Boards set policy, internal communication within the organisation is key to making sure it is delivered as intended. A system of delegated authority should cascade decision making powers from the board and through the management structure. Policy development needs consistency and linkages to the underlying values of the organisation as well as to the resources available from the business plan. Policies



almost always need to be supported by procedure manuals which can act as a reference source for frontline staff and their managers. Regular reviews will be required to ensure that policies continue to be appropriate, and are updated to reflect changes in law or regulation. These important guiding documents need to be presented in a format which is readily available for all staff.

Assessing Procurement

Ensuring probity and value for money in property development, regeneration and maintenance procurement. A self assessment framework for Boards of Housing Associations



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Value for Money and Continuous Improvement

Housing organisations have always been keen to do more with the limited funds they have available. The new emphasis on Value for Money in the regulatory standards will encourage social landlords to look again at how they can improve value. This will require a fresh look at the cost basis for all the services a landlord provides. Alongside a constant drive for continuous improvement in existing systems, landlords need to ask themselves if the services they provide, and the manner in which those services are delivered still meets the needs they were originally designed to meet. We live in a changing world, and the objectives of many housing organisations have developed and changed since they were first established. Is the way in which you deliver your services the best way to meet your objectives?

Resident Scrutiny of housing maintenance services

Maintenance is a key concern for residents of social housing and an area in which effective scrutiny is especially important. The 'Home Standard' requires landlords to involve tenants in developing local housing quality standards and in the provision of an efficient repairs and maintenance service. This one area is likely to be of recurring interest to residents on scrutiny panels, and as such deserves special focus and attention.

Compliance Audits

The Homes and Communities Agency (HCA), under their Programme Partnering Agreement (PPA) framework, requires housing providers to "self assess" their procedures for grant funded development. This is usually achieved through the appointment of an independent auditor or chartered surveyor to carry out a compliance audit.

Registered Providers are required to follow closely the guidance in the Capital Funding Guide, ensuring that all documentary evidence is available at the time the compliance audit takes place. Evidence of non-compliance, or the absence of essential evidence which demonstrates compliance, could place an Registered Provider at risk.

Resident Led Scrutiny

Resident led scrutiny is central to the regulatory regime put in place by the Tenant Services Authority and the HCA's Regulation Committee. The aim is to give residents a key role in decisions which affect the management and maintenance of their homes and to allow them to hold their landlords accountable.

Successful scrutiny requires:

- ◆ Clear terms of reference and powers for tenant panels
- ◆ Provision of training for panel members
- ◆ Accountability
- ◆ Transparency
- ◆ Access to all relevant information
- ◆ Effective reporting and response arrangements

Due Diligence

The housing sector is constantly changing and that sometimes means that opportunities arise to acquire existing organisations, establish new ones, or to acquire portfolios of housing stock. In each case, the acquiring organisation will want to investigate the details of what is on offer. This will entail a process of due diligence, where assumptions are tested, information is requested and analysed, and different approaches examined. The Due Diligence process is essential to building a good understanding about how the new operation is currently managed, and the opportunities for improvements. It can also help you plan how to incorporate new services within your current operations. Every due diligence project is unique, responding to the requirements of the client and the nature of the opportunity being studied; but one feature is nearly always present – the Due Diligence process has to be completed within a tightly managed timetable to ensure that the process itself does not hinder the transaction.

What Trimmer CS has to offer you in Housing Scrutiny

Trimmer CS can work with you to review and improve your services. Our consultants (who include former Audit Commission inspectors) are experienced in supporting housing staff, residents and board members. We were authors of the Housing Federation's guide to service delivery *Making it Work* and can draw on our extensive experience of what works and what doesn't work to your benefit.

Service review

Using a wide range of methodologies including workshops, questionnaires and benchmarking, Trimmer CS can take on the role of 'critical friend' and assist you in reviewing your services. This may be organisation-wide, or focussed on specific areas such as maintenance, development or supported housing. We can offer you the following services:

- ◆ An objective and independent assessment of your current position
- ◆ Identification of any changes required.
- ◆ Support to put in place a realistic plan to achieve these changes, which identifies the resources required and sets challenging but realistic targets and timescales.

Policy and Procedure Development

Trimmer CS has a well-established system for producing computerised procedure manuals. We use our experience of the working practices of many other organisations to identify the key differences which are most important to your own organisation. We work closely with you to collect relevant internal guidance, spotting gaps where custom and practice have evolved ahead of written policy statements. We then deliver computerised files offering ready access to corporate standards at the click of a mouse.

Development audits

Our lead consultants have previously worked in housing association development roles and have wide experience of conducting development audits for housing associations. We are recognised for our knowledge in this area. We can offer you the following services:

- ◆ Operational and structural reviews
- ◆ Benchmarking
- ◆ Procedure reviews
- ◆ Cost and risk analysis

Compliance audits

Trimmer CS has advised several major Registered Providers on compliance, as well as carrying out formal audits under joint appointment by the Homes and Communities Agency (HCA) and a provider. As Chartered Surveyors we are a company "regulated by RICS" and several of our senior consultants are RICS members, highly skilled and experienced in affordable housing development. Our team was also actively involved in preparing the joint RICS and HCA guidance on how Chartered Surveyors should undertake such audits. We are therefore ideally placed to assist clients with the compliance audit process. We can offer you the following services:

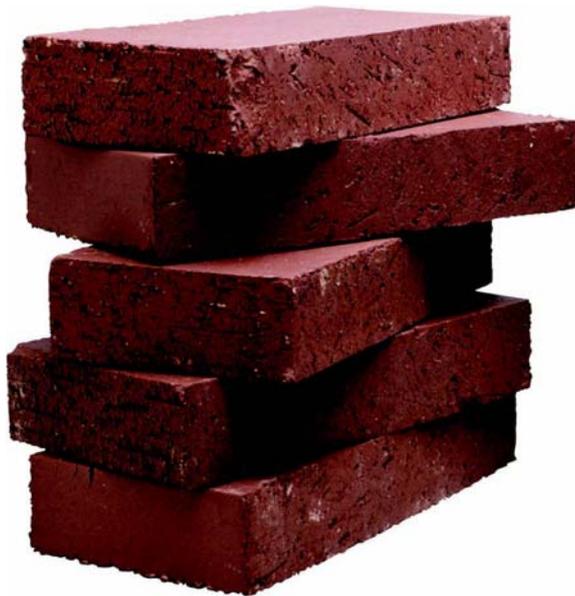
- ◆ Undertake compliance audits on your behalf
- ◆ Carry out a trial audit in advance of the main process, to identify and rectify any problems
- ◆ Carry out a full audit of your internal procedures, comment on their effectiveness and recommend improvements



Business assurance

Trimmer CS is able to act in the role of 'critical friend' to ALMOs, local authorities and housing association in reviewing the effectiveness of their operations. Our work can include reviews of business plans, reviews of internal processes, and risk management reviews. We have particular experience in working closely with organisations in developing asset management strategies and delivery plans; including working to provide client side assurance on major maintenance contracts being managed by others. We can also offer reviews of procurement arrangements for works including partnering frameworks for development and maintenance projects, for responsive and void repairs, gas and electric services and planned maintenance.

We can also advise and support local authorities in reviewing the performance of ALMOs or other agencies who manage and maintain stock on their behalf.



Due Diligence

We have undertaken many projects of Due Diligence investigations researching current operations and testing the information provided. Our reports are incisive, and have both re-assured prospective acquiring organisations, and on occasion identified disadvantages with the offer that have resulted in the withdrawal of our client. Our approach is to work collaboratively with our client teams, identifying the areas where attention is best targeted, and concentrating our resources where they are agreed to be most useful.

Improving services through resident led scrutiny

We can support all aspects of resident led scrutiny, helping you ensure that tenants have a genuine and effective role and that scrutiny leads to service improvement. We have particular experience in the scrutiny of repairs and maintenance, which are major concerns for residents. We can offer you the following services:

- ◆ Training for residents to equip them for the scrutiny role
- ◆ Training for staff and board members in resident led scrutiny
- ◆ Facilitating the establishment of resident led panels. This can include assisting you with recruiting tenants, drafting terms of reference, agreeing operating arrangements and planning the scrutiny programme.
- ◆ Supporting the operation of residents led panels. This can include evaluating training needs, providing training and support for residents, promoting effective relationships and evaluating the panel's effectiveness.

Established in 1998, **Trimmer CS** is an independent consultancy dedicated to working in the social housing sector.

We provide consultancy, training and interim management services throughout the UK to housing associations, local authorities, ALMOs as well as social housing contractors and developers.