

Communities Scotland
Inspection report

**Blue Triangle (Glasgow)
Housing Association Ltd**

March 2006

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1. Introduction

About this inspection

1.1 This inspection was carried out by Communities Scotland under section 69 of the Housing (Scotland) Act 2001 on behalf of Scottish Ministers. Our purpose in inspection is to provide an independent external assessment of the effectiveness of housing service delivery and make recommendations to help improvement. Inspections are conducted within a published framework of Performance Standards*.

How we assessed performance

1.2 Our inspectors asked two key questions:

- How good are the services we have inspected?
- How well are these services being managed for improvement?

1.3 In order to answer these questions the inspector:

- spoke to staff and the Chairperson of the governing body;
- consulted partner organisations;
- visited two housing projects and spoke to staff and residents;
- observed a service users' working party;
- examined key policies, publications, information and the organisation's self-assessment submitted for this inspection; and
- analysed published performance and financial information.

The inspection team

1.4 The Blue Triangle inspection was carried out by Jacqui Angus, supported by Josephine McAloon (Inspection Officer) and Murray Smith (Financial Analyst). We were on site on 13 October 2005. We would like to thank everyone involved in the inspection, particularly the Management Committee, staff and service users for their time and co-operation.

Responding to this inspection

1.5 We expect all inspected bodies to make this report available to anyone who wants it, report our findings to service users and other stakeholders, and respond to the issues

* See Glossary

raised in this report. We require that the summary of this report is issued to all service users.

2. Context

About the organisation

- 2.1 Blue Triangle (Glasgow) Housing Association was registered with the Housing Corporation in Scotland (now Communities Scotland) in 1975, and is an Industrial and Provident Society* with charitable status. Its office is located in central Glasgow. It provides temporary supported accommodation for single homeless people within nine local authority areas across Scotland. Much of the Association's activity is focussed upon the provision of care, support and wider action services to its residents. This is an area which is not covered by our inspection process.
- 2.2 Blue Triangle's stock consists of a mixture of hostel and flatted accommodation. It owns 11 housing projects, 2 of which are managed by Glasgow City Council. The Association also manages 20 housing projects on behalf of other housing providers.
- 2.3 Blue Triangle is governed by a voluntary management committee elected from its membership at its Annual General Meeting (AGM). The Association has four sub-committees: Finance and General Purposes; Development and Maintenance; Housing Management; and Human Resources. The Association presently has a membership of 29, of whom 12 are committee members. At the time of the inspection the Association had 270 employees with 25 staff based at its office in Glasgow. The table below shows some key facts about Blue Triangle.

Key Facts	2002-2003	2003-2004	2004-2005
Projects owned	7	11	11
Number of bedspaces	83	102	102
Employees	174	251	270
Annual turnover (£000's)	3,464	5,539	6,697
Total possible rental income (£000's)	3,599	5,788	6,813
Total Arrears (£'s)	367,111	424,236	701,941
Average weekly rent (£'s)	121.07	139.23	144.10
Bedspaces re-let*	544	700	644
Reactive repairs carried out	644	689	Not provided

Source: Annual Performance & Statistical Returns* (APSR) & annual accounts

* See Glossary

3. How good are the services?

Accessible Services

Social landlords should provide open, fair and equal access to their houses and services.

- 3.1 Blue Triangle has recently reviewed its Allocations Policy. The new policy was approved by the Management Committee in September 2005 and will be put into operation once the relevant staff training has been carried out.
- 3.2 Blue Triangle does not have a housing list*, but still provides good access to its accommodation for those people in housing need. The Association receives referrals for the majority of its bedspaces from local authorities. The councils involved prioritise the referrals in accordance with their own allocation policies. While Blue Triangle carries out a housing needs assessment for each applicant using its own Allocation Policy, it generally accepts all referrals made by the councils. It is rare for people to present directly to the Association, and where this occurs this is generally an individual who has been housed previously by Blue Triangle. In these circumstances the applicant is assessed using the Association's Allocation Policy. The Association places posters advertising its accommodation and services in the offices of local authority housing and social work departments and other relevant local organisations.
- 3.3 When a bedspace is available, Blue Triangle aims to house an applicant on the day of the referral. The organisation measures the number of leavers, the number of referrals and the number of people accepted by each project every month, and reports this information to committee. This allows the Association to effectively monitor the level of empty bedspaces for each project on a monthly basis.
- 3.4 Occasionally Blue Triangle refuses to house an applicant. Where a housing project manager wishes to exclude an applicant from gaining access to their accommodation, they need to obtain approval from the Association's area manager.
- 3.5 Due to the specialist nature of its accommodation, Blue Triangle does not take part in a common housing register* in any of the areas in which it operates.
- 3.6 Blue Triangle provides good access to its responsive repairs service. Residents who wish to report a repair do so easily by speaking directly to the local housing project staff. The majority of Blue Triangle's housing projects are staffed 24 hours a day, and

* See Glossary

repairs are generally reported to the head office by project staff, who then instruct the contractor.

- 3.7 Blue Triangle has a head office which is located in the centre of Glasgow. The building is not wheelchair accessible, although a lift is available once the building is entered. Blue Triangle has not ensured that its office allows it to comply with its duties under the Disability Discrimination Act 1995. Staff are able to use the National Interpreting Service, and Braille and signing are also available on request.
- 3.8 Only one of the projects owned by the Association is wheelchair accessible. However, where possible, the Association provides adaptations to meet individual residents' needs, for example, by installing flashing lights to the fire alarm system where a service user has hearing difficulties.
- 3.9 Blue Triangle collects information on the ethnicity and disability of people allocated a bedspace in its accommodation. This information is not routinely considered by committee.

Service Quality

Social landlords should deliver high quality services and maintain high quality houses.

Housing Management

- 3.10 All of the Association's accommodation is provided on a temporary basis, with the lengths of stay determined by the needs of individual residents. Blue Triangle does not provide any of its residents with a Scottish Secure Tenancy* (SST) or Short SST* (SSST) and uses Occupancy Agreements* in all its accommodation. All service users in both self-contained flats and hostel accommodation sign occupancy agreements. The Association revised the form and content of its Occupancy Agreement in April 2005, but did not use the Scottish Federation of Housing Association Model Occupancy Agreement for short term shared accommodation, despite this being a recommendation of its previous performance audit report* in 2001. Nor does its Occupancy Agreements formally confer any additional rights to its residents such as consultation and participation, data protection and right to repair*.
- 3.11 New occupants are provided with a good information pack, which includes:
- resident's guide for hostels, or support agreement for self-contained flats;

* See Glossary

- complaints procedures; and
- eviction procedures

However, the pack does not include information on service users' rights regarding maintenance response times and minimum standards for repairs.

Blue Triangle also provides each new occupant with a welcome pack containing toothbrush, towels, and a basic food package.

3.12 Blue Triangle reviewed its policy and procedures for evictions in June 2004. The Association operates a series of verbal and written warnings, and views termination of occupancy as the final resort. It only summarily terminates occupation in the following circumstances:

- a serious act of violence against another person;
- an act of serious vandalism or arson; or
- supplying controlled drugs.

All evictions are approved by the Association's Chief Executive, or her delegated representative. The Association evicted 100 residents from projects in 2004/05, which is a decrease of 36.7% from the previous year; 6% of evictions in 2004/05 were for rent arrears.

3.13 Blue Triangle provides support according to each resident's individual needs. Each resident has a support plan and meets weekly with the assigned key worker to discuss support requirements and, where appropriate, progress to move-on accommodation or a tenancy. The key worker will offer support to manage income, and provides information on other sources of welfare advice.

3.14 Blue Triangle has a good approach to antisocial behaviour. The Association provides 24 hour staff cover and closed circuit television (CCTV) in most of its projects. In flats with non-resident support staff there is generally an effective secure entry system, except where occupants have their own door, such as at Cawdor Place, Oban. The Association has evicted residents for a variety of reasons, some of which relate to antisocial behaviour. However, Blue Triangle has a good record for resolving incidents at an early stage and has never had to raise any antisocial behaviour order actions.

Property Maintenance

- 3.15 Blue Triangle has an emergency repair target of 4 hours to make safe and 12 hours to complete the repair, which is more challenging than peer and national averages. The target for urgent repairs is three working days, which is the same as the peer and national averages. Routine repairs have a target of 20 working days for completion, which is less challenging than the peer and national averages.
- 3.16 From our case reviews of reactive repairs we were unable to confirm that the Association's performance against its targets for reactive repairs is accurately recorded. The Association also accepted that the information on reactive repairs included in the organisation's 2004/05 Annual Performance and Statistical Return (APSR) was inaccurate. This weakness was acknowledged by the association, notwithstanding the previous recommendations of the performance audit report* in 2001 relating to this issue. Under the circumstances we were unable to confirm whether Blue Triangle is providing its residents with a good reactive repairs service.
- 3.17 As Blue Triangle does not provide its occupants with an SST, it does not have a statutory duty to provide its service users with Right to Repair. The Association believes that it meets all right to repair timescales through its normal reactive repairs timescale although it does not provide a contractual right to repair through its Occupancy Agreement.
- 3.18 Scottish Ministers have set a target that all social landlords' houses should meet the new Scottish Housing Quality Standard* (SHQS) by 2015. Each landlord was required to prepare a delivery plan, showing how it would achieve this. Blue Triangle submitted a plan to the Scottish Executive within the April 2005 timescale and expects that all of its properties will meet the standard by 2015. The Association has included the improvements which require to be carried out to meet the SHQS in its major repairs programme.
- 3.19 The Association has 30 year life cycle costs* for the accommodation in its ownership. These costs were prepared in 1997/98, and were updated through in-house staff inspections in 2003.
- 3.20 Two of Blue Triangle's housing projects do not have hard-wired smoke detectors. The remaining nine have hard-wired smoke detectors, which it aims to service every six

* See Glossary

months. However, the Association was not able to provide us with the number of maintenance inspections of smoke detectors carried out in 2002/03 or 2003/04. The Association does not currently have a standard for checking battery-operated smoke alarms. It proposes to set a standard for this once it has carried out fire risk assessments, which it expects to complete in 2005.

- 3.21 Blue Triangle is required to carry out safety checks every 12 months on all gas appliances and flues in properties which it owns. Of the 11 projects owned by Blue Triangle, 7 have gas installations. We found that four of the Association's housing projects had current certificates, although none of the four had continuous cover from the previous certificate. The Association did not have information on the most recent gas safety check for each of the two hostels managed by another organisation. Blue Triangle's management of gas safety in its properties is a significant weakness.
- 3.22 From May 2004 social landlords have had a statutory duty to manage asbestos in the common areas of their properties. Blue Triangle has an asbestos management plan for its properties, and is aware of its legal obligations in this matter.

Service user focus

Social landlords should place the people they serve at the heart of their work, treat them with respect and be responsive to their views and priorities.

- 3.23 Blue Triangle has a good approach to engaging with service users. Each project has regular meetings to which all residents are invited. The frequency of the meetings varies between projects, but meetings are held at least monthly. The Association informs residents of planned maintenance work through these meetings. Residents are consulted about paint colour and furniture choices when planned renewals take place.
- 3.24 The Association also has a service user forum which meets every two months. While the Association's staff are involved in organising the forum meetings, the agenda is influenced by the service users. The forum has led to working parties of residents, supported by staff, being set up to deal with specific topics, for example, reviewing the information provided to new residents and the way such information is presented in order to make it more user-friendly. The main issues discussed at the service users forum are reported to the Association's Housing Management sub-committee.

- 3.25 Blue Triangle has reviewed most of its policies in 2005. However, the service user's forum was only consulted about two of these new policies. The Association believes that its residents would not wish to be consulted about policy reviews generally. However, it does not consult its residents about policies relating to housing management, rents, repairs or maintenance, even where the proposal is likely to directly affect the service user.
- 3.26 In addition to the information it gives to new residents, the Association produces a service user leaflet, which was designed in partnership with residents and a regular newsletter, which is issued quarterly. The Association does not give its service users feedback on how it is performing against its targets in the newsletter.
- 3.27 Blue Triangle surveys residents within three months of their arrival at, and also on leaving, the project. The Association has recently reviewed its survey form, and has still to analyse the results.
- 3.28 Blue Triangle does not always fully record details of, and outcomes from, residents' and service users' complaints. It does not monitor or report its performance against its target timescales to committee members and residents.

4. Is the service managed for improvement?

Performance and resource management

Social landlords should have clear objectives, standards and targets, manage costs effectively, and should work to continuously improve services.

- 4.1 Blue Triangle does not always monitor its performance against its targets, and there is a variation in the quality of information presented to committee. For example, the committee receive an annual detailed report on the number of residents leaving the Association's accommodation, the most recent of which was the 2004/05 statistics presented in August 2005. However, the last report to committee on reactive repairs response times was presented in 2002/03 and related to the six month figures to September 2002. The Association accepts this weakness in its procedures and is due to introduce a computerised record-keeping system for property maintenance by the end of 2005. Blue Triangle believes this will help to develop its performance reporting procedures in future.

- 4.2 74.6% of Blue Triangle's residents received full housing benefit in 2004/05. At the end of March 2005 the Association's total current arrears were £540,135, which was 7.9% of total possible gross rental income. All of this amount was for technical arrears. This compares with 8.6% arrears in 2002/03 and 4.7% arrears in 2003/04. Blue Triangle's residents live in its accommodation for varying lengths of time and can often have left before housing benefit claims have been assessed; this presents the Association with challenges in managing arrears. The Association liaises closely with local authorities in the areas in which it operates, to ensure that it maximises income from housing benefit and that this is processed as quickly as possible.
- 4.3 Blue Triangle writes off former non-technical arrears annually. This figure has risen from £56,419 in 2002-03 to £150,518 in 2003/04 and £161,806 in 2004/05. Again the nature of the organisation's client group means that it can be difficult to trace former service users in order to recover outstanding arrears.
- 4.4 The Association's losses due to void bedspaces rose from £156,498 in 2002/03 to £248,978 in 2003/04 but fell in 2004/05 to £116,356, mainly due to the introduction of Supporting People funding, which has separated support costs from the rent. The Association does not set written target timescales for reletting rooms or flats, but believes that staff know the importance of allocating accommodation quickly in order to maximise income. The lack of a target in this area means that Blue Triangle cannot properly monitor its performance in the management of void bedspaces. This is a weakness.
- 4.5 Blue Triangle's costs for delivering its housing management services were £2,450 per bedspace in 2003/04. The cost per bedspace of the Association's maintenance service decreased from £190 in 2002-03 to £111 in 2003/04, and to £106 in 2004/05. This reduction in costs was due to an increase in bedspaces from 221 in 2002/03 to 302 in 2004/05 which resulted in further economies of scale.
- 4.6 Blue Triangle has a comprehensive range of policies, most of which have been reviewed in 2005. At the time of the inspection the Association had still to arrange staff and committee training on many of these.

5. Governance & financial management

Leadership, ethical standards and risk

Social landlords should have a clear vision, promote values that underpin good governance, and effectively manage organisational risk.

- 5.1 Blue Triangle is currently in the process of reviewing its internal management plan* (IMP), which was previously updated in 2002. The current draft plan has clear aims and objectives with timescales, prioritised SMART* targets, plus an assessment of risk associated with each objective.
- 5.2 The Association carried out, and disseminated the results of, a skills analysis of committee members in spring 2005, but at the time of the inspection had yet to develop a training plan for governing body members.
- 5.3 In 2004/05 average attendance at management committee meetings was 78% and all meetings were quorate. However, it has been noted that the Association's sub-committees have been operating without the required quorum of four members (excluding co-optees) specified in its rules. This is a significant weakness in the Association's governance.
- 5.4 Blue Triangle's governing body presently has 12 committee members none of whom are present or past service users. The Association has advertised for committee members in both the national and local press on several occasions, the most recent of which was in the spring of this year. The recruitment process has resulted in 12 individuals, none of whom are members of the management committee, being co-opted to various sub-committees. However the Association's rules require sub-committees to be formed from management committee members.
- 5.5 A strong membership and good levels of participation at Annual General Meetings (AGMs) are important ways for landlords to demonstrate accountability. While their last AGM was quorate with 41% of their members attending, Blue Triangle has only 29 members at present. The Association does not publicise membership among its service users or former service users, despite a previous recommendation to do so in our performance audit report* in 2001.

* See Glossary

- 5.6 Blue Triangle recognises the importance of both staff and committee members adhering to high ethical standards. We found the Association acts in accordance with statutory requirements relating to the granting of benefits in Schedule 7 of the Housing (Scotland) Act 2001. However, contrary to good practice, the Association does not require committee members to sign a declaration of interest form.

Financial viability and management

Social landlords should be financially viable in the short and medium term and sustainable in the longer term. They should have a robust financial management framework.

- 5.7 Blue Triangle's financial projections indicate that it is viable in the medium term and has a low exposure to financial risk. For an organisation of its size, it has a fair financial management framework.
- 5.8 The Association's budget has areas of weakness. It comprises only an income and expenditure account with a brief narrative on the main assumptions. Contrary to good practice, it does not incorporate a balance sheet or cash flow projections nor does it include the previous year's figures for comparative purposes. There is no written report made available to the committee, and the full extent of any discussions taking place is not appropriately recorded.
- 5.9 Monthly financial monitoring gives the committee the opportunity to review actual performance against budget. Variances from budget are shown and although Blue Triangle feel that the limited narrative commentary is adequate, the provision of a greater level of detail would allow the figures to be put better into context.
- 5.10 Blue Triangle prepares 5 year medium term and 10 year long term financial plans. It does consider the position under alternative scenarios, but little narrative commentary is provided.

6. Areas for improvement action

These are the key areas that need to be targeted for the improvement plan. They are broadly in order of priority within each of the key service areas:

In **Access** Blue Triangle should:

- review its occupancy agreement to ensure that it is maximising security of tenure for all of its service users.

In **Service quality** Blue Triangle should:

- review its management of gas safety; and
- review how it measures and reports its performance in reactive repairs.

In **Service user focus** Blue Triangle should:

- review the way it consults its service users about policies relating to housing management and maintenance; and
- provide feedback to its service users on its performance against targets.

In **Performance and resource management** Blue Triangle should:

- provide committee with more regular reports on a range of areas of key performance; and
- review how it monitors the management of void bedspaces.

In **Governance and financial management** Blue Triangle should:

- address the issue of inquorate sub-committee meetings;
- review the use of co-optees to various sub-committees;
- review how it records members' declaration of interests;
- promote general membership of the Association more widely; and
- provide more detailed information in budget and financial reports to committee.

7. Next Steps

- 7.1 This report highlights our findings following this housing inspection. We expect Blue Triangle Housing Association to respond effectively to our recommendations using an improvement plan to be submitted to us within eight weeks of the publication of this report. The plan should show how the organisation intends to respond to our findings. The plan will be agreed with us.
- 7.2 If you would like to see Blue Triangle's improvement plan you should contact the Chairperson at:

Blue Triangle (Glasgow) Housing Association Ltd

100 Berkeley Street

Glasgow

G3 7HU

Telephone: 0141 221 8365

E-mail: admin@btha.org.uk

Sources of Evidence

Groups and third parties consulted:

- Glasgow City Council
- East Ayrshire Council
- South Ayrshire Council
- East Lothian Council
- North Lanarkshire Council
- South Lanarkshire Council
- Communities Scotland Quality and Transfer Delivery Unit
- Communities Scotland Tenant Participation Development Team
- Care Commission
- The Scottish Public Services Ombudsman

Interviews / meetings:

- Chairperson
- Chief Executive
- Facilities Manager
- Property Contracts Manager
- Services Co-ordinator
- Area Manager
- Project Manager (2)

Reality checks:

- Review of gas safety documents
- Review of complaints
- Review of reactive repairs
- Review of allocations
- Review of evictions
- Review of Schedule 7 register
- Review of declaration of interest register
- Observation of committee meeting
- Observation of a service user working party

Key documents reviewed:

- Inspection submission
- Schedule 7 register
- Declaration of interest register
- Complaints register
- New occupant pack
- Performance reports

Examples of Positive practice

These are areas we would highlight as working particularly well, taking account of the organisation's operating context:

Service Quality

Blue Triangle provides every new resident with a welcome pack containing, for example, the following:-

- Toothbrush and toothpaste;
- Shampoo, soap and shower gel;
- Comb or brush;
- Bath towel and hand towel;
- Tea towels; and
- Basic food package.

This is a practical way of helping residents to begin their occupancy.

Glossary

Annual Statistical and Performance Return (APSR)	Annual questionnaire completed by RSLs and sent to Communities Scotland. Used to keep the Register of Social Landlords up to date and to track the performance of RSLs.
Average	The arithmetic mean – the sum of all the values divided by the number of values.
Common Housing Register	A register of all applicants for social housing used by two or more landlords within an area.
Housing list	A list of applicants for housing which is used by the RSL to allocate its housing stock.
Industrial and Provident Society	Many RSLs are legally incorporated as Industrial and Provident Societies. Industrial and Provident Societies can be charitable or non-charitable or housing co-operatives. They must be non-profit making and supervised by the Registrar of Friendly Societies.
Internal Management Plan (IMP)	Strategic plan which sets out what the organisation's aims and objectives are as well as outlining how it will achieve them.
Life cycle costing	A method of calculating the cost and timing of the repairs to, and replacement of, major building components.
National median	The central value of the ordered performance of all Scottish RSLs.
Occupancy Agreements	A document used by RSLs and Local Authorities in shorter term shared housing in which two or more unrelated individuals each have their own room and share other facilities.
Performance Audit Report	Reports of RSLs' performance, carried out by Scottish Homes (now Communities Scotland) and replaced by the present Inspection Reports.
Performance indicator	A measure of how a RSL is achieving its objectives. Performance indicators can be compared with a pre-set standard (a benchmark) or with other organisations.
Performance Standards	Housing standards for all social landlords in Scotland.
Registered social landlord (RSL)	A landlord providing social rented housing that is registered and regulated by Communities Scotland.
Re-lets	Lets made to the second or subsequent tenant. Distinguished from new lets that are made when the property is first built or modernised.
Right to Repair	A scheme which gives tenants legal rights to have certain repairs in defined times.
SMART	Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Relevant and Timebound
Scottish Housing Quality Standard	All property managed by RSLs must be brought up to the specified standard by 2015.

Scottish Secure Tenancy (SST)

The Housing (Scotland) Act 2001 establishes the Scottish Secure Tenancy as the tenancy for all tenants of social landlords in Scotland.

Short Scottish Secure Tenancy (SSST)

Section 34 and Schedule 6 of the Housing (Scotland) Act 2001 established the basic conditions when a Short Scottish Secure Tenancy can apply to some tenants of social landlords in Scotland, in place of a full SST

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