

**Pathfinder Inspection Report
Summary
February 2004**

Dunedin Housing Association



Dunedin: Pathfinder Inspection Report Summary

1. Communities Scotland is responsible for the regulation and inspection of all Registered Social Landlords (RSLs). We inspected Dunedin in October 2003. This summary report sets out the main findings from our inspection.

Dunedin

2. Established in 1998, Dunedin was created as a result of a Transfer of Engagements to Fountainbridge Housing Association by Noredin and Findlay Housing Associations. It was registered with the Housing Corporation in Scotland in June 1976. Dunedin is an Industrial and Provident society with charitable status. It is governed by a voluntary Management Committee which is elected annually at its Annual General Meeting. The Association owns 1242 houses in Edinburgh. It is part of a group structure with its non-charitable subsidiary New Horizons Edinburgh.

Inspection Grades

3. These are the inspection grades achieved by Dunedin:

Overall Performance	B	Dunedin is a good performer with many strengths and some areas where improvement is needed. The prospects for improvement overall are promising.
Governance and Financial Management	B	Dunedin is a good performer in governance and financial management with many strengths and some areas where improvement is needed. The prospects for improvement in governance and financial management are promising.
Housing Management	B	Dunedin delivers a good housing management service with many strengths, but with some areas where improvement is needed. The prospects for improvement in housing management are uncertain.

Property Management	B	<p>Dunedin delivers a good property management service with many strengths and some areas where improvement is needed.</p> <p>The prospects for improvement in property management are promising.</p>
Property Development	B	<p>Dunedin delivers a good property development service with many strengths and some areas where improvement is needed.</p> <p>The prospects for improvement in property development are promising.</p>

4. Dunedin is a good landlord. It has continued to develop its core services and has also diversified its business into new areas, such as running a hostel for homeless people. The Association is aware of the impacts external changes can have on its business and uses strategic planning to manage these effectively. Dunedin has a good understanding of its strengths and areas where it needs to improve further. These factors have all contributed to the grades that we have awarded.

Overall Performance

5. This section describes how good Dunedin's services are overall and how well they are managed.
6. These areas are working well overall:
 - ✓ Dunedin works hard to ensure that its services are accessible to people with a wide range of needs.
 - ✓ The Association uses good practice in promoting equality and embracing diversity throughout its business.
 - ✓ The Association has an effective approach to strategic planning and performance management.
 - ✓ The Association considers procurement methods appropriate to each case and implements a value for money approach.
7. These areas could be working better overall:
 - Dunedin is progressing towards its targets on tenant consultation and participation but there remains work to be done in this area.

- The Association provides service users with some performance information but this could be expanded.
- The Association does not always handle complaints and appeals in line with its procedures.
- The Association has agreed a business-wide sustainability policy but in some areas there are no plans to achieve this.

8. These are our key overall recommendations:

- ❖ Dunedin should ensure that appropriate training is accessible to all Committee members.
- ❖ Dunedin should improve the performance monitoring information it provides to Management Committee to cover all service areas and provide better analysis of its performance.
- ❖ Dunedin should continue to develop the effectiveness of its tenant consultation.
- ❖ Dunedin should consider ways to enhance the level and quality of information being given to service users on performance to further improve accountability.
- ❖ The Association should keep service users informed of progress with their complaint and advised of the right to appeal to the Ombudsman. Committee members with interests in appeals should absent themselves from the process.

Governance and Financial Management

9. This section describes how well Dunedin's governing body of volunteer members controls the organisation, and examines the wider opportunities for tenants and other members to become involved in managing Dunedin. It also looks at Dunedin's financial health and how it manages its finances.

10. These are the areas that are working well in governance and financial management:

- ✓ The Association is forward-looking and takes a strategic approach in responding to changes in its business environment to enable it to improve and expand the delivery of its aims.
- ✓ The Management Committee controls the organisation effectively and includes members with particular skills.
- ✓ Dunedin takes an inclusive approach to considering business in detail at its committee/staff sub groups.
- ✓ Dunedin has a good awareness of the risks it faces, and takes action to minimise and manage them.

- ✓ The Association is a well-established organisation with adequate cash balances and a sound financial position. Its financial projections indicate that the organisation will remain viable in the long term.
- ✓ Dunedin has an effective financial management framework.

11. These are the areas that could work better in governance and financial management:

- The Association does not always grant benefits restricted by statute in accordance with guidance.
- Dunedin does not always record and manage potential conflicts of interest appropriately.
- There is a lack of clarity in the role and authority of its sub-groups.
- The Association could do more to promote Management Committee membership to its tenants.

12. These are our key recommendations in governance and financial management:

- ❖ Dunedin should further promote Management Committee membership to its tenants and introduce a planned programme of training for Committee members designed to complement existing skills and knowledge.
- ❖ The Management Committee should ensure that it considers all benefits in accordance with its policy and the guidance on Schedule 7 and that any benefits granted are recorded in the register kept for this purpose.
- ❖ Dunedin should clarify to staff and Committee members the status of its sub-groups and ensure that a transparent record of all discussions and recommendations is maintained.
- ❖ Management Committee members must ensure that their interests are declared and recorded, and that they follow procedures to exclude interested parties from relevant decision-making.
- ❖ Dunedin should review its membership against the local community composition and target further membership promotion accordingly.
- ❖ Dunedin should record the value of gifts and hospitality offered and/or accepted, in the register kept for this purpose.

Housing Management

13. This section summarises how well Dunedin controls access to its houses and rents levels, and deals with empty houses and rent arrears. It also describes how Dunedin manages its estates and deals with antisocial behaviour.

14. These are the areas that are working well in housing management:

- ✓ The Association ensures it maintains a good quality environment for the people living in its houses.
- ✓ The Association actively promotes access to its houses.
- ✓ The Association manages incidences of antisocial behaviour well using a range of tools to support tenants.
- ✓ Dunedin provides new tenants with comprehensive information about the tenancy at sign-up stage.
- ✓ The Association works in partnership with City of Edinburgh Council and provides a range of good quality accommodation for people who are homeless.
- ✓ Where the Association identified areas for improvement it has made progress towards achieving this.

15. These are the areas that could work better in housing management:

- The Association is a member of a common housing register but the system is relatively new and improvements are still being made.
- The Association is meeting its statutory duty to give reasonable preference to people in housing need however the processes for verifying this are weak.
- The Association does not yet carry out meaningful consultation on rent increases.
- The Association is not always effective in its arrangements for maintaining personal contact with tenants in arrears or where legal action is ongoing.
- While the Association's re-let times have improved it still takes an average of 36 days to re-let its houses which delays access to new tenants and incurs rents loss.

16. These are our key recommendations for housing management:

- ❖ Dunedin should ensure applicants receive adequate information about their housing prospects and options.
- ❖ Dunedin should charge all tenants who receive a service fairly and appropriately, to ensure that service costs are met.
- ❖ Dunedin should implement processes that verify applicants' circumstances to ensure that its houses are allocated on the basis of accurate information.
- ❖ Dunedin should maintain clear audit trails for any decisions to suspend applicants from offers of housing to ensure that it complies with its policy on suspensions.
- ❖ Dunedin should ensure that it has consistently good management systems to support staff in the delivery of housing management services, including:
 - clear and comprehensive policies and procedures for all service areas;

- ongoing training for staff in their use to ensure consistent implementation of agreed policies and procedures; and
- comprehensive and effective quality control systems.
- ❖ When it is reviewing its allocations policy, Dunedin should:
 - ensure it is simplified to be easily understandable to applicants and staff;
 - introduce quality controls to ensure the policy is being implemented; and
 - improve reporting to ensure it can demonstrate that it is giving reasonable preference to applicants in the defined categories of need.
- ❖ Dunedin should review the effectiveness and efficiency of its arrangements for working with tenants in arrears or where legal action is ongoing to improve the level of personal contact.

Property Management

17. This section summarises how well Dunedin maintains the fabric of its houses. It describes the quality of repairs that are done when they are needed (“responsive repairs”) as well as maintenance and improvements planned in advance. It also looks at how Dunedin adapts houses so that tenants can stay in their homes when their needs change.

18. These are the areas that are working well in property management:

- ✓ Dunedin operates a repairs by appointment scheme and tenants view the service as very good.
- ✓ Performance in meeting target timescales for responsive repairs is very good.
- ✓ Dunedin has a good approach to managing the quality of its repairs works.
- ✓ It clearly understands the long term costs of maintaining and refurbishing its stock and has good plans in place to fund future maintenance.
- ✓ Dunedin provides a responsive adaptations service for tenants.
- ✓ Performance management is good.
- ✓ Dunedin procures and manages contracts effectively to ensure value for money.

19. These are the areas that could work better in property management:

- The Association is not actively promoting The Right to Repair scheme.
- The Association does not consult with tenants on lifetime maintenance issues.
- Dunedin is not always meeting its legislative duties on gas safety by ensuring that all its tenants’ gas appliances are checked annually.

20. These are our key recommendations for property management:

- ❖ Dunedin must review its management of gas safety checks to ensure that it fully complies with its legislative duties.
- ❖ Dunedin should ensure the Right to Repair scheme is implemented to fully meet its statutory responsibilities as a priority.
- ❖ The Association should put in place arrangements to consult tenants on the setting and management of its lifetime maintenance programmes.

Property Development

21. This section summarises how good Dunedin's newly built houses are. It also looks at how Dunedin managed the construction of these houses.

22. These are the areas that are working well in property development:

- ✓ The Association maintains a very good relationship with strategic development partners.
- ✓ The Association builds houses to high standards.
- ✓ Dunedin now involves tenants in making decisions on design in the early stages of the process.
- ✓ The Association manages building its houses well and uses the concepts of Building a Better Deal.

23. These are the areas that could work better in property development:

- Although tenants reported that they were generally happy with their new homes there were some areas of dissatisfaction.
- The reports on tenant satisfaction are not of a good quality and recommendations on improvement actions and design changes were not clear.

24. These are our key recommendations for property development:

- ❖ The Association should improve the analysis and reporting of tenant feedback on new houses to ensure that this is used effectively to improve future development projects.

25. Anyone can ask for a copy of the full inspection report. All reports are on the Communities Scotland website at <http://www.communitiesscotland.gov.uk>

26. This summary can also be made available on tape, in Braille, MOON, large print and community languages. For information please contact Janette Campbell on 0131 479 5162 or email campbellj@communitiescotland.gov.uk.
27. We have asked Dunedin to produce an improvement plan within eight weeks of publishing the inspection report to show how it intends to respond to all our recommendations. We will agree the plan with the organisation. We will re-inspect Dunedin in five years' time.