

Pathfinder Inspection Report
Summary
May 2004

Eildon Housing Association



Eildon Housing Association: Pathfinder Inspection Report Summary

1. Communities Scotland is responsible for the regulation and inspection of all Registered Social Landlords (RSLs). We inspected Eildon Housing Association in January 2004. This summary report sets out the main findings from our inspection.

Eildon Housing Association

2. Eildon Housing Association was set up and registered with Communities Scotland (Scottish Homes) in 1973. Eildon is governed by a Committee of Management. Its aim is to work in partnership with local communities and others to provide a wide range of affordable and secure high quality houses and related support/care services for those in need.
3. Eildon operates over a large geographical area, having over 1,800 properties in over 100 developments within the Scottish Borders. Eildon provides its services from three offices in Melrose, Galashiels and Peebles. It employs over 110 staff, with around 60% of these providing a variety of care and support to tenants and residents in Eildon's five sheltered and very sheltered housing developments and two registered care homes.

Inspection Grades

4. These are the inspection grades achieved by Eildon:

Overall Performance	A	Eildon is an excellent performer with major strengths. The prospects for improvement overall are excellent.
Governance & Financial Management	A	Eildon is an excellent performer in governance and financial management with major strengths. Its prospects for improvement in governance and financial management are excellent.
Housing Management	A	Eildon delivers an excellent housing management service with major strengths. Its prospects for improvement in housing management are excellent.

Property Management	B	Eildon delivers a good property management service with major strengths but with some areas where improvement is needed. Its prospects for improvement in property management are excellent.
Property Development	A	Eildon delivers an excellent property development service with major strengths. The prospects for improvement in property development are excellent.

SUMMARY OF PERFORMANCE

Overall Performance

5. This section describes how good Eildon's services are overall and how well they are managed.
6. These areas are working well overall:
 - ✓ Eildon's services are accessible to tenants and other service users.
 - ✓ Eildon lets its houses to applicants in greatest housing need.
 - ✓ Eildon provides a comprehensive range of support services for tenants.
 - ✓ Eildon provides a valuable welfare benefits service that has significantly increased tenants' incomes and reduced rent arrears.
 - ✓ Eildon communicates well with its service users, providing them with high quality information and advice.
 - ✓ Eildon is responsive to tenants' views and uses them to influence service delivery.
 - ✓ Eildon is working to promote equality of opportunity, both as a landlord and as an employer.
 - ✓ Eildon has helped to create popular and sustainable communities.
 - ✓ Eildon has a very effective strategic planning framework, and shows a high level of awareness of its own strengths and areas where further improvements can be made.
 - ✓ Eildon has a comprehensive range of very good policies and procedures to support staff in delivering services.
 - ✓ Eildon makes good use of its staffing resources and has achieved Investors in People status.
 - ✓ Eildon manages its financial resources and associated risks very effectively.
 - ✓ Eildon builds high quality homes.

- ✓ Eildon has a good procurement process for housing development that meets Communities Scotland's Building a Better Deal guidance.
- ✓ Eildon works effectively in partnership with other local RSLs, Scottish Borders Council and its partners in the Borders Construction Industry Forum (BCIF).

7. These areas could be working better overall:

- Eildon is not ensuring that it carries out gas safety checks every 12 months.
- Eildon is not always housing applicants who are awaiting a housing support assessment at the earliest possible opportunity.
- Eildon does not always provide early support to tenants against whom it is taking eviction action, in particular where it is dealing with vulnerable tenants.
- Although Eildon deals effectively with almost all neighbour nuisance complaints, it also needs to be able to deal effectively with more serious cases of antisocial behaviour when they arise.
- Eildon's approach to procurement of goods and services other than for new build housing is not transparent.
- Eildon has not reviewed its standing orders to reflect all current practices.
- Eildon's long term financial projections could be more detailed.

8. These are our key overall recommendations. They are broadly in order of significance:

- ❖ Eildon should ensure that it carries out all gas safety inspections within the 12 month period required by the gas safety legislation.
- ❖ Eildon should ensure that applicants who require a housing support assessment are not being disadvantaged in the time they are waiting to be housed.
- ❖ Eildon should ensure that it is taking a consistent approach to both providing early support to tenants when recovering rent arrears and liaising with other agencies when progressing eviction action. Eildon should ensure that it can deal effectively with all situations of serious antisocial behaviour.

Governance and Financial Management

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

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

- ✓ Eildon has a strong Committee of Management, which exercises effective control over the organisation.
- ✓ Eildon is a well-established organisation with significant cash balances and a sound financial position.
- ✓ Eildon has a good approach to risk management.
- ✓ Eildon's approach to budget setting, financial reporting, and performance monitoring is very good.
- ✓ Eildon prepares detailed management accounts.
- ✓ Eildon produces high quality planning documents, such as its three year Strategic Plan.
- ✓ Eildon operates an excellent Treasury Management Policy.

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

- Eildon's internal audit planning is short-term and only covers one year.
- Eildon has developed a basic model to predict its long-term financial position but it is not yet detailed enough.

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

- ❖ Eildon should set a target date for the completion of its more detailed long-term financial forecasts and include it in its Internal Management Plan.
- ❖ A longer-term plan for the internal audit function should be developed and implemented.

Housing Management

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

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

- ✓ Eildon provides open access to its housing list and minimises suspensions.
- ✓ Eildon's allocations policy gives relevant priority to greatest housing need.

- ✓ Eildon carries out a detailed analysis of housing demand and applicants' needs.
- ✓ Eildon monitors the housing needs it meets through its housing lets.
- ✓ Eildon has made excellent progress in signing up tenants to its Scottish Secure Tenancy.
- ✓ Eildon provides new tenants with excellent information about their tenancy.
- ✓ Eildon provides very good housing support for vulnerable tenants.
- ✓ Eildon has a sound approach to setting the rents for its houses.
- ✓ Eildon gives tenants excellent benefits advice and its welfare benefits advice service is having a significant impact on both arrears and tenants' income.
- ✓ Eildon has comprehensive arrangements for the management of antisocial behaviour.
- ✓ Eildon manages and maintains its estates to a very high standard.
- ✓ Eildon recognises weaknesses in its performance and takes action to address them.

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

- Eildon is not always housing applicants who are awaiting a housing support assessment at the earliest possible opportunity.
- Eildon does not always provide early support to tenants against who it is taking eviction action, in particular where it is dealing with vulnerable tenants.
- Although Eildon deals effectively with almost all neighbour nuisance complaints it also needs to be able to deal effectively with more serious cases of antisocial behaviour when they arise.

16. These are our key recommendations for housing management:

- ❖ Eildon should ensure that applicants who require a housing support assessment are not being disadvantaged in the time they are waiting to be housed.
- ❖ Eildon should ensure that it is taking a consistent approach to both providing early support to tenants when recovering rent arrears and liaising with other agencies when progressing eviction action.
- ❖ Eildon should ensure that it can deal effectively with all situations of serious antisocial behaviour.
- ❖ Eildon should consider using alternatives to suspension for antisocial behaviour.

Property Management

17. This section summarises how well Eildon 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 Eildon 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:
- ✓ Eildon’s houses are maintained to a high standard.
 - ✓ Tenants are very satisfied with the property management service.
 - ✓ Eildon’s performance for completing responsive repairs is excellent.
 - ✓ Eildon’s staff provide good advice and information on repairs.
 - ✓ Eildon is complying with the Right to Repair.
 - ✓ Eildon uses tenant feedback to improve the quality of the responsive repairs service.
 - ✓ Eildon manages its repairs in a cost efficient way.
 - ✓ Eildon has comprehensive information on its housing stock.
 - ✓ Eildon has a 30 year costed programme for maintaining its properties and reviews these costs annually.
 - ✓ Eildon carries out medical adaptations effectively.
19. These are the areas that could work better in property management:
- Eildon does not carry out gas safety checks every 12 months for a relatively high proportion of its houses supplied with gas.
 - Eildon needs to improve the information it provides to tenants about planned maintenance.
20. These are our key recommendations for property management:
- ❖ Eildon should ensure that it carries out gas safety checks on all gas appliances every 12 months.
 - ❖ Eildon should provide tenants with information regarding the proposed timescales of future planned maintenance contracts.

Property Development

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

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

- ✓ Eildon provides high quality new housing and meets the housing needs it has identified in the Borders.
- ✓ Eildon's has high quality written policies and procedures to guide and support staff.
- ✓ Eildon has delegated authority for approving land and development proposals to the Acquisition and Development Working Group.
- ✓ Eildon has good internal consultation procedures in place at strategic, planning and operational levels to include views of Housing Management and Maintenance sections.
- ✓ Eildon consults tenants at the planning stage.
- ✓ Eildon receives good information from Tenant Satisfaction Surveys and responds by improving designs and project management.
- ✓ Eildon has shown a commitment to Building a Better Deal Policy.
- ✓ Eildon has systems in place to assess and manage risk.
- ✓ Eildon successfully develops housing for specific target groups.

Services to Owners

23. This section summarises how well Eildon is providing services to owners. It includes the arrangements for sales of houses under the right to buy and factoring services provided to owners.
24. Eildon processes on average three Right to Buys applications per year and completes the sales within the set targets.
25. Eildon organises the common repairs that affect the sharing owners and accounts to owners are sent out annually and pursued.

Wider Action

26. This section summarises how well Eildon undertakes activities over and above housing, which help to improve the economic, social and environmental conditions of individuals and communities.
27. Eildon has a strong commitment to providing additional services to its tenants and the wider community. All additional projects are well planned and managed by Eildon.

28. 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>
29. 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@communitiesscotland.gov.uk.
30. We have asked Eildon 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 Eildon in five years' time.