

**Pathfinder Inspection Report  
Summary  
April 2004**

# Thistle Housing Association



## Thistle Housing Association: Pathfinder Inspection Report Summary

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

### Thistle Housing Association

2. Thistle Housing Association was established in 1995, and was registered with Scottish Homes in January 2001. Thistle is a general, community based Industrial and Provident Society. Its main objective is to provide mainstream housing although it also has a sheltered housing complex with 34 units. Thistle's office is in the Gorbals area of Glasgow. Thistle is governed by a Management Committee, drawn from its membership.

### Inspection Grades

3. These are the inspection grades achieved by Thistle Housing Association:

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

4. Thistle has made significant achievements since becoming a registered social landlord in 2001. The services it provides are generally of a good standard and are accessible to tenants and other service users. Thistle acknowledges there are a number of areas where improvement is possible, and it is making good progress in addressing these, as it continues to develop as an organisation.

## **Overall Performance**

5. This section describes how good Thistle's services are overall and how well they are managed.
6. Overall, these areas are working well in Thistle:
  - ✓ Tenants and other service users find it easy to access Thistle's services.
  - ✓ Thistle is developing a good approach to customer participation and tenants have influenced the way services are delivered.
  - ✓ Thistle has made significant progress in its communications with owner occupiers, involving them in discussions about the major works programme.
  - ✓ The quality of information about services is good, and the appeals process is well publicised and effective.
  - ✓ Thistle shows a high level of awareness of its own strengths and areas where further improvements are needed.
7. Overall, these areas could be working better:
  - Thistle does not obtain regular feedback on a range of its services.
  - Thistle knows it must do more to build on its early work in promoting equal opportunities and meeting its legal obligations.
  - Strategic planning is only short term.
  - Thistle does not monitor complaints or use information to improve services.
8. These are our key recommendations. They are broadly in order of significance:
  - ❖ Thistle's strategic planning needs to be longer term and more detailed to show how objectives will be met.
  - ❖ Thistle must actively address equality and diversity issues.
  - ❖ Thistle must consult with tenants over future annual rent reviews.
  - ❖ Thistle should seek feedback on a wider range of its services.
  - ❖ Thistle should monitor complaints, report complaints to the Management Committee and use the information to improve services.

## Governance and Financial Management

9. This section describes how well Thistle's governing body of volunteer members control the organisation, and examines the wider opportunities for tenants and other members to become involved in managing Thistle. It also looks at Thistle's financial health and how it manages its finances.
10. These areas are working well in governance and financial management:
  - ✓ The Management Committee controls the organisation effectively overall.
  - ✓ There is a good awareness among Committee members of Thistle's strengths and weaknesses.
  - ✓ There is a good awareness of the risks Thistle faces and there are procedures in place to minimise and manage them.
11. These are the areas that could work better in governance and financial management:
  - Long-term financial projections need to be updated.
  - The budget setting process could be made more formal.
  - The time taken to prepare and present management accounts could be improved.
  - Records retained to support the figures presented in the annual accounts are inadequate.
  - There could be better control of the finance function by the governing body.
12. These are our key recommendations in governance and financial management:
  - ❖ Thistle should re-confirm its long-term viability by updating its long-term projections, as planned.
  - ❖ Thistle should continue to try and attract additional Management Committee members with relevant experience.
  - ❖ Thistle should expand the information provided in the budget and formalise the budget process to make it more robust, informative and transparent.
  - ❖ Management accounts should include cashflow information and be prepared and presented to the Committee more quickly.

## Housing Management

13. This section summarises how well Thistle controls access to its houses and rents levels, and deals with empty houses and rent arrears. It also describes how Thistle manages its estates and deals with antisocial behaviour.
14. These are the areas that are working well in housing management:
  - ✓ Thistle's rent arrears are very low and well managed.
  - ✓ Significant improvement during 2003 in the time taken to relet properties.
  - ✓ Good progress made in signing up tenants to the Scottish Secure Tenancy.
  - ✓ The estate Thistle manages is well kept.
  - ✓ A good range of policies and procedures in place and these are largely being followed to support good service delivery.
15. These are the areas that could work better in housing management:
  - Thistle's allocation policy is not entirely consistent with how the service is being delivered in practice.
  - Time taken to relet empty properties is longer than for similar organisations.
  - It is not clear what support is provided to help tenants to avoid eviction through antisocial behaviour.
16. These are our key recommendations on housing management:
  - ❖ Thistle's allocation policy needs to be amended to reflect what is happening in practice.
  - ❖ The current improvement in the time taken to relet empty houses should be consolidated with a move towards pre-allocating its properties.
  - ❖ Thistle should make clear its approach to providing support to help tenants avoid eviction through antisocial behaviour.

## Property Management

17. This section summarises how well Thistle 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 Thistle 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:
- ✓ Tenants receive a very good responsive repairs service, with short response times and good performance in meeting challenging targets.
  - ✓ Tenants are very satisfied with the repairs service.
  - ✓ Thistle holds comprehensive information on the condition of its housing stock.
  - ✓ Tenants are consulted to ensure that Thistle's planned maintenance programme reflects their priorities along with the organisation's.
  - ✓ Thistle has a good approach to procuring reactive and cyclical maintenance.
  - ✓ Performance and contract management in repairs is good.
19. These are the areas that could work better in property management:
- Life Cycle Costing has not been updated.
  - Thistle does not yet operate a Right to Compensation for Improvements scheme.
  - High level of post inspections carried out which may not represent value for money.
20. These are our key recommendations for property management:
- ❖ Thistle should update its Life Cycle Costing and link this with financial projections to show that it will be able to maintain and improve its houses in the long term.
  - ❖ Thistle should introduce a Right to Compensation for Improvements scheme in order to comply with the Housing (Scotland) Act 2001.
  - ❖ Thistle should review the level of post inspections it carries out so that it may make the best use of its resources.
21. Anyone can ask for a copy of the full inspection report. All reports are on the Communities Scotland website at [www.communitiesscotland.gov.uk](http://www.communitiesscotland.gov.uk).
22. 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](mailto:campbellj@communitiesscotland.gov.uk).
23. We have asked Thistle 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 Thistle in five years time.