

## Housing Inspection: How was it for you?

### Introduction

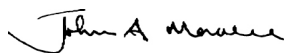
Since November 2001, the Northern Housing Consortium (previously the Northern Consortium of Housing Authorities) has undertaken a biennial research project with housing organisations in the northern regions that had been the subject of a Housing Inspection. The overall aim of the research was to provide an accurate assessment of members' perceptions of the Inspection process.

A total of 81 organisations were contacted and after reminders aimed at boosting responses, 20 questionnaires were returned, representing a 24.7% response rate.

The following report summarises the responses to the consultation, and makes some recommendations for changes to the process. As is the nature of this type of project, the Northern Housing Consortium can only report respondents' personal views and perceptions of the inspection process. Whilst the results in this survey show large improvements on previous surveys, there are some areas in which Members still feel there are issues to be resolved. As such, it is possible that the Inspectorate may feel these views contradict their knowledge of the inspection process. This year, as in previous years, the Housing Inspectorate has been given the opportunity to respond to the results of the survey and these are included throughout the report. We look forward to continuing working with the Housing Inspectorate to further improve these results and to working on the new inspection framework.

The results reported in this report are reflective across inspection scores and there is no concentration of either positive or negative responses from a particular score.

John A Moralee



**Chief Executive**  
Northern Housing Consortium

## Findings

### 1.0 Types of organisation inspected, framework for inspection and overall score

The questionnaire was devised to collect information on a number of aspects of the inspection process and outcomes. In view of the inclusion of the RSL sector, it included questions on organisation type, framework used and published score. For ease of reference, where RSL judgements made before their inclusion in the star rating system (2003 survey) have been equated to what that rating would be in the existing system.

Audit Commission respond to the findings of this survey at the end of this report.

#### 1.1 Organisation types

Responses have been broken down by the type of organisation responding, which was entered as part of the survey. The breakdown is not based on the type of service inspected. Whilst this makes no difference to responses from ALMO, LSVT and RSL organisations, it should be pointed out that Supporting People inspections are included in the following organisation types:

Stock owning authority - where the LA retains ownership and management of the stock, (one Supporting People inspection included).

Strategic authority – where the stock is owned and/or managed by ALMO or LSVT. All three responses from this group related to Supporting People inspections.

#### 1.2 Earlier Surveys

Comparisons are made where possible with the NHC surveys undertaken in 2005 and 2003.

#### 1.3 Breakdown of organisations responding and types of inspection

Responses were received from all organisation types. No responses were received from local authorities that have retained the ownership and the management function of the housing stock. Furthermore, there was only one strategic authority response received. Therefore, robust inferences cannot be drawn from these responses about stock retention authorities. These scores are included in the tables for information.

	ALMO	Strategic authority	LSVT	Traditional RSL	TOTAL
Number of responses	9	1	7	3	20
% of all responses	45%	5%	35%	15%	

The organisations had received inspections in the following areas.

	ALMO	Strategic authority	LSVT	Traditional RSL	TOTAL
Full Service	6		1	3	10
Access & Customer Care Diversity Stock Investment & Asset management			1		1
Cross cutter, ASB, Income Manage, regen, stock investment			1		1
Housing Management			1		1
Housing Management and Maintenance					1
Strategic Housing Services		1			1
N/A					4

#### 1.4 First inspection

Overall 58% said that this was their first inspection, a figure perhaps partly affected by the inclusion of new LSVTs and ALMOs.

First inspection	ALMO	Strategic authority	LSVT	Traditional RSL	Overall	2005 survey
Yes	22	100	100	67	58%	47%
No	78	0	0	33	42%	53%

For most respondents (60%), the service this survey concerns had not been inspected previously. This was particularly the case for RSLs (all of transfer associations). However, only 22% of ALMO respondents said that this was the first inspection for the service in question.

Had this service previously been inspected	ALMO	Strategic authority	LSVT	Traditional RSL	Overall
Yes	78%			33%	40%
No	22%	100%	100%	67%	60%

The 40% where this service was first inspected were asked this latest inspection was more or less effective than the previous. Respondents were evenly split in their opinion on the comparison between this and the previous inspection.

If yes was this inspection more or less effective than the previous	ALMO	Strategic authority	LSVT	Traditional RSL	Overall
More effective	57%			100%	50%
No change	43%				50%

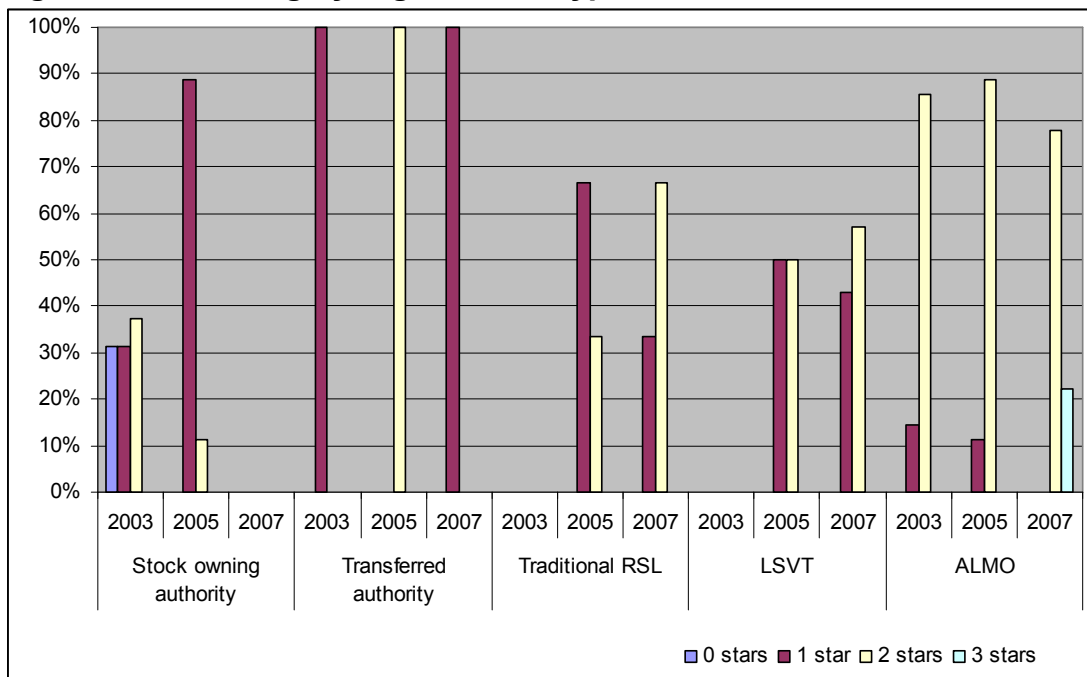
## 1.5 Inspection scores

### How good is the service?

Star ratings were split more widely in this survey between one, two and for the first survey, three star organisations. It is worthy of note that ALMOs, with a direct correlation between performance and funding, were the only organisation type to achieve the three star status. Star ratings have improved in each survey since 2003.

Inspection rating	ALMO	Strategic authority	LSVT	Traditional RSL	Overall	2005 survey	2003 survey
0 stars					0%	0%	19%
1 star		100%	43%	33%	25%	48%	37%
2 stars	78%		57%	67%	65%	52%	44%
3 stars	22%				10%	0%	0%

**Figure 1: Star rating by organisation type**

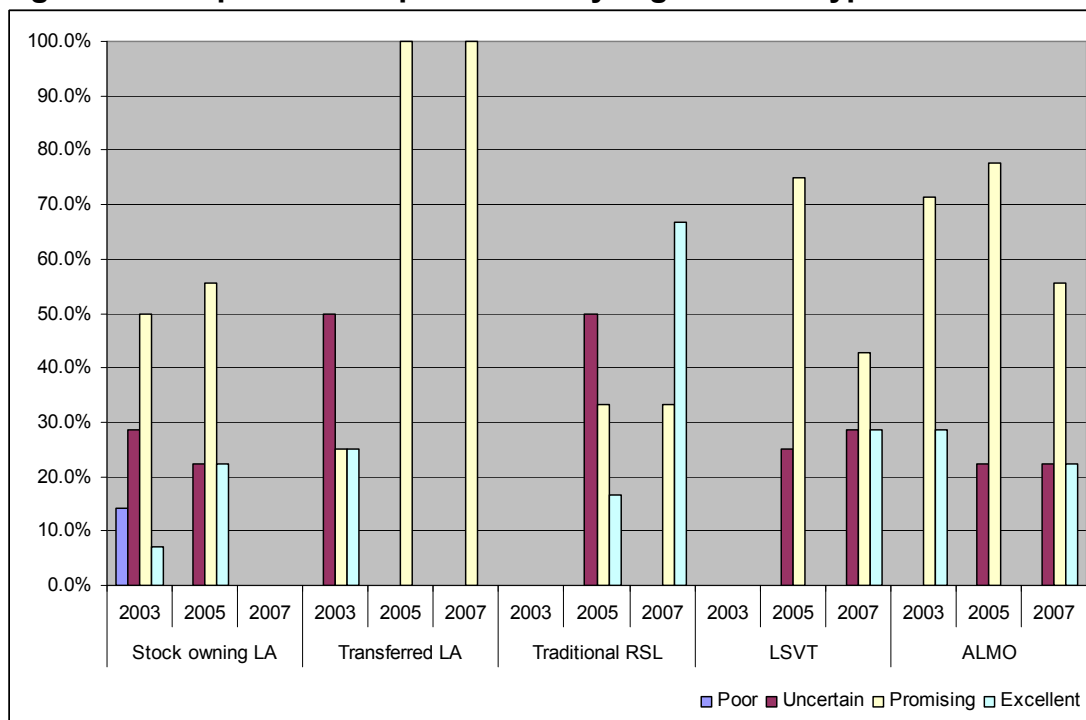


### Prospects for improvement

The prospects for improvement rating scores higher overall than the service rating, reflecting that organisations are working in the right direction toward improving services. Traditional RSLs score lowest ratings. Again, the direction of travel from the 2005 survey is positive.

Prospects for improvement	ALMO	Strategic authority	LSVT	Traditional RSL	Overall	2005 survey	2003 survey
Poor					0%	0%	15%
Uncertain	22%		29%		20%	26%	22%
Promising	56%	100%	43%	33%	50%	64%	48%
Excellent	22%		29%	67%	30%	10%	15%

**Figure 2: Prospects for improvement by organisation type**



## **2.0 Overall comments around this inspection**

### **2.1 Score change following round table meeting**

The vast majority of scores (85%) did not change after the round table meeting with the Inspectorate. However, most (85%) felt that they had received a full explanation of the reasons for the final score being determined as it was and 75% of organisations felt that they had received a full response to the key points they had raised. This is largely in line with previous surveys.

Those that thought that they had not received a full explanation were asked what the explanation lacked. The response condensed into the following two areas:

- The explanation was vague and needed more detail
- A lack of an explanation on the weighting given to different aspects of the judgement

Those that felt that a full response to the key points submitted in response to the draft report had not been received provided some reasons for saying this. A number pointed out that not all of the improvements made (evidenced to inspectors) had been recognised.

**AC response** - The inspectorate is currently considering whether a more formal response from the inspectorate to the inspected body following their comments on the draft report would present a more open dialogue at the round table meeting, enabling the concentration of effort on those areas which require detailed debate.

## **2.2 Positive Aspects of the Inspection Process**

The questionnaire attempted to bring out details of all aspects of the inspection process, not only to point out where respondents felt there was room for improvement, but also to identify some positive areas that could be built upon for future inspections.

When asked to **briefly** list the positive aspects of the inspection process, the majority of responses could be categorised into three areas. These were comments on:

- the Inspection Team
- the communication with the inspection team and the team itself
- how the inspection acts as an aid to service improvement.

Of the positive comments received, 21% made positive comments regarding the inspection team and praised the open and thorough approach to the inspection and the feedback provided. Inspectors were considered to be knowledgeable.

In terms of process, the positive aspects generally concentrated on the effects on service rather than on the inspection itself. The inspection was thought to be transparent and helps organisations focus and identify strengths, weakness and areas for improvement as well as confirming strengths already identified.

## **3.0 Pre-site**

### **3.1 Pre-site communication, meetings and scoping**

Respondents were asked to give their views on how effective the pre-site communication and meeting was and whether they had any difficulties in clarifying the areas to be covered with the Inspectorate.

Most respondents (85%) felt that the pre-site communication was effective. This overall figure is equal to that in the 2005 survey. However, those that thought the communication was very effective have more than doubled in this survey. All traditional RSLs felt that the communication was effective (67% very effective).

<b>Pre inspection communication</b>	ALMO	Strategic authority	LSVT	Traditional RSL	<b>Overall</b>	2005 survey
Very Effective	44%		57%	67%	<b>50%</b>	24%
Fairly Effective	44%	100%	14%	33%	<b>35%</b>	61%
Unsure			14%		<b>5%</b>	3%
Fairly ineffective	11%		14%		<b>10%</b>	12%

Following on from the pre-site communication, a similar pattern emerges for the pre-inspection meeting. There has been an encouraging shift in opinion on the effectiveness of the pre-site meeting. 90% of respondents found it effective (up from 85%) and only 5% ineffective (down from 9%). In this case, one-third of traditional RSL respondents felt that the pre-inspection meeting was very ineffective.

<b>Pre inspection meeting</b>	ALMO	Strategic authority	LSVT	Traditional RSL	<b>Overall</b>	2005 survey	2003 survey
Very Effective	78%	100%	57%	67%	<b>70%</b>	27%	7%
Fairly Effective	22%		29%		<b>20%</b>	58%	59%
Unsure			14%		<b>5%</b>	6%	7%
Fairly ineffective					<b>0%</b>	9%	22%
Very Ineffective				33%	<b>5%</b>	0%	4%

Some organisations expressed some issues or difficulties in clarifying the scope of the inspection. Though a large majority had no difficulties, (indeed, there is an improvement from the 2005 survey), those that did referred to problems with the main functions of the organisation not being covered and how an implemented action plan would influence the outcome.

<b>Problems with Scope</b>	ALMO	Strategic authority	LSVT	Traditional RSL	<b>Overall</b>	2005 survey	2003 survey
Yes			14%	33%	<b>10%</b>	15%	54%
No	100%	100%	86%	67%	<b>90%</b>	85%	46%

### 3.2 Self-assessment

Organisations were asked for their views on the self-assessment process and the support available around it. All respondents stated that they found the process useful, though perceptions on the guidance were more mixed. A number of ALMO and LSVT respondents found the support and guidance fairly ineffective. Comments made reference the process helping to focus minds on where the organisation was in terms of performance and how the process has been continued in service improvement plans.

**AC Response** - The self assessment process will be reviewed and streamlined to marry up with the requirements of the new regulator. At the same time, the inspectorate will work to clarify the guidance on self

assessment. In the meantime, the Inspectorate will continue to work with the NHC and its members to re run the self assessment workshop held successfully in 2007.

<b>Self-assessment process</b>	ALMO	Strategic authority	LSVT	Traditional RSL	<b>Overall</b>	2005 survey
Very Useful	78%	100%	57%	67%	<b>70%</b>	11%
Fairly Useful	22%		43%	33%	<b>30%</b>	78%
Unsure					<b>0%</b>	11%

<b>Self-assessment support</b>	ALMO	Strategic authority	LSVT	Traditional RSL	<b>Overall</b>	2005 survey
Very effective	22%		29%	33%	<b>25%</b>	
Fairly effective	67%	100%	57%	67%	<b>65%</b>	44%
Unsure					<b>0%</b>	28%
Fairly ineffective	11%		14%		<b>10%</b>	28%

### 3.3 Timing of inspection, information requested and its use

Almost nine tenths of organisations found the timing and notice period helpful – down slightly on the 2005 survey. Those that did not find it helpful referred to clashes with statutory holiday periods and that the notice was too short. Some of those that raised issues still supported the notion of short notice inspection.

**AC response** - The pre and post inspection period will inevitably include peak holiday periods. Our move to nine slots a year in 2007 (from 10 previously) has enabled some flexibility and we can now ensure that we are not on site during bank holidays. Any move to short notice inspection would ease this situation for inspected bodies. We will always be flexible and interview those absent during a holiday at another time, if necessary

<b>Timing and notice helpful</b>	ALMO	Strategic authority	LSVT	Traditional RSL	<b>Overall</b>	2005 survey
Yes	100%	100%	86%	67%	<b>89.5%</b>	91%
No			14%	33%	<b>10.5%</b>	9%

The amount of information requested, its use and instances of duplication was again an issue for respondents. There was a slight improvement in terms of the proportion of respondents that thought the amount of information requested was about right, while those that felt too much was requested was broadly comparable to those in the previous surveys. LSVTs and ALMOs found the amount of information requested more burdensome than their colleagues in other organisation types.

The use of the information and issues of duplication continue to be areas of concern for respondents.

<b>Amount of information</b>	ALMO	Strategic authority	LSVT	Traditional RSL	<b>Overall</b>	2005 survey	2003 survey
Too much	67%		71%		<b>55%</b>	58%	55%
About right	33%	100%	29%	100%	<b>45%</b>	39%	38%
Too little					<b>0%</b>	3%	7%

This year, we asked respondents about whether electronic copies of the requested information were available or if information had to be supplemented with hard copies. In three quarters of cases, electronic copies were available. Interestingly, electronic copies were only available in ALMOs and LSVTs.

<b>Electronic copies available</b>	ALMO	Strategic authority	LSVT	Traditional RSL	<b>Overall</b>
Yes	83%		80%		<b>75%</b>
Supplemented with hard copies	17%		20%	100%	<b>25%</b>

In a change from previous surveys, the vast majority of respondents (80%) thought that inspectors had used the information they had requested.

<b>Used by inspectors</b>	ALMO	Strategic authority	LSVT	Traditional RSL	<b>Overall</b>	2005 survey	2003 survey
Yes	78%		86%	100%	<b>80%</b>	59%	65%
No	22%	100%	14%		<b>20%</b>	41%	35%

Despite this more positive change, there is still the perception of more than one request for information being received by organisations although not to the extent of two years ago.

<b>Issues of duplication</b>	ALMO	Strategic authority	LSVT	Traditional RSL	<b>Overall</b>	2005 survey	2003 survey
Yes	56%	100%	43%	33%	<b>50%</b>	66%	56%
No	44%		57%	67%	<b>50%</b>	34%	44%

### 3.4 Pre-site – NHC comments

Overall, and for the second survey running, respondents appear to be generally in favour of the pre-site experience. We have seen that the pre-site communication and meeting were well received and self-assessment seen as an opportunity to examine services and increase self-awareness.

Scores on the guidance around self-assessment has improved since 2005 after the new inspection framework had a chance to bed in.

It is disappointing that the perceptions around information requested and issues of duplication are still a problem. The Audit Commission does not seem to be persuading housing organisations of its necessity or to explain how it fits within the inspection process.

**AC response** - The Inspectorate is currently reviewing and streamlining its document request list. A KLOE review, which can address any duplication of information, is planned for 2008, and will be subject to sector-wide consultation.

## **4.0 On-site and post site**

### **4.1 Transparency of inspection**

Most respondents felt that, on-site, the inspection was clear and transparent. Of those that did not, areas of concern were to do with the clarity of the inspectors priorities. Rather than services to tenants, it was felt that the efficiency of the sector was the main concern.

**AC Response** - The focus of inspection will be on tenant services and their prospects for improvement. In each inspection, the three cross cutting KLOEs on Access, Value for Money and Diversity are used. Value for money is also an important component of the prospects for improvement and a key government priority. In 2007, the Inspectorate identified a need for more information in the sector on VFM and worked with the NHC to run a value for money workshop. We would support a further event of this kind in 2008, to raise awareness in the sector. Working with other stakeholders, the inspectorate also designed and delivered value for money and prospects for improvement training in 2007.

<b>Clear and transparent</b>	ALMO	Strategic authority	LSVT	Traditional RSL	<b>Overall</b>	2005 survey
Yes	100%	100%	86%	100%	<b>95%</b>	85%
No			14%		<b>5%</b>	15%

### **4.2 Inspectors' understanding of roles within the organisation**

The questionnaire posed the question as to how well the Inspectors understood the roles of;

- a. officers
- b. elected or board members
- c. tenants

within the organisation.

The responses were very positive with respondents feeling that Inspectors had a strong understanding of the respective roles. Officers and tenants showed an improvement from the 2005 survey with the understanding of the role of tenants showing significant improvement.

Suggestions for further improvement include inspectors seeking clarification where it is required and to appreciate the differences between larger metropolitan and smaller district councils.

<b>Understood role of officers</b>	ALMO	Strategic authority	LSVT	Traditional RSL	<b>Overall</b>	2005 survey	2003 survey
Understood well	67%		57%	100%	<b>65%</b>	82%	68%
Understood partially	33%	100%	43%		<b>35%</b>	15%	29%
Did not understand					<b>0%</b>	3%	3%

<b>Understood role of members</b>	ALMO	Strategic authority	LSVT	Traditional RSL	<b>Overall</b>	2005 survey	2003 survey
Understood well	100%	100%	86%	100%	<b>95%</b>	79%	79%
Understood partially			14%		<b>5%</b>	18%	18%
Did not understand					<b>0%</b>	3%	3%

<b>Understood role of tenants</b>	ALMO	Strategic authority	LSVT	Traditional RSL	<b>Overall</b>	2005 survey	2003 survey
Understood well	100%	100%	100%	67%	<b>95%</b>	79%	70%
Understood partially				33%	<b>5%</b>	18%	19%
Did not understand					<b>0%</b>	3%	11%

### 4.3 On-site feedback sessions

During the inspection, inspectors give briefings to the inspected organisations, where queries are raised and issues discussed. This is before the round table discussion on the draft report of the inspection. This section of the survey concentrated on the organisations' opinions as to whether they can influence the inspection during these briefings and almost all (95%) felt that they had the opportunity to provide additional information to the inspectorate at this stage.

<b>Opportunity to provide additional information</b>	ALMO	Strategic authority	LSVT	Traditional RSL	<b>Overall</b>	2005 survey
Yes	100%	100%	100%	67%	<b>95%</b>	94%
No				33%	<b>5%</b>	6%

Two new questions were added to this year's survey. They concerned the length of time the opportunity to provide additional information was left open

and whether the new information provided led to the final report being changed.

The length of time allowed for organisations to provide additional information appeared to vary. Most (65%) said that a window of between two weeks and one month was left while almost one-quarter said that only one week was allowed.

<b>If yes how long was the window open</b>	ALMO	Strategic authority	LSVT	Traditional RSL	<b>Overall</b>
One week	100%	100%	33%	50%	<b>23%</b>
Between 2 weeks and a month			50%	50%	<b>65%</b>
More than 1 month			17%		<b>12%</b>

In over half of the cases, the final report had been changed in light of the new information that was provided by respondents. LSVT organisations have been most successful while traditional RSLs were least.

<b>Was the final report changed in light of new info</b>	ALMO	Strategic authority	LSVT	Traditional RSL	<b>Overall</b>
Yes	50%		71%	33%	<b>53%</b>
No	50%	100%	29%	67%	<b>47%</b>

Though organisations responded positively to the question whether they were given the opportunity to make additional information available, respondents did not feel as positively about on-site briefings as an opportunity to influence and improve the inspection.

However, the proportion that did had significantly increased on 2005 scores. Furthermore, all respondents felt that the information provided by the Inspectors at the briefings was reasonable.

<b>Opportunity to influence the inspection</b>	ALMO	Strategic authority	LSVT	Traditional RSL	<b>Overall</b>	2005 survey	2003 survey
Yes	56%	100%	86%	100%	<b>75%</b>	46%	55%
No	11%		14%		<b>10%</b>	24%	24%
Unsure	33%				<b>15%</b>	30%	21%

<b>Amount of information provided by the inspectors on-site</b>	ALMO	Strategic authority	LSVT	Traditional RSL	<b>Overall</b>	2005 survey	2003 survey
About right	100%	100%	100%	100%	<b>100%</b>	82%	72%
Too little					<b>0%</b>	12%	17%
Too much					<b>0%</b>	6%	3%

This pattern indicates that organisations feel part of the inspection process up until the point ratings are awarded, when they feel they have little chance of “arguing their case”. The Consortium has long stated the need for a mature relationship between its members and the Audit Commission.

**AC response** - The inspection will concentrate on what inspectors find before and during the on site period. On the date the inspectors leave site, arrangements are made to provide follow on information requested during the on site period. It is reasonable for inspectors to accept requested information up to a week after leaving site. At the round table meeting (approximately 4 weeks later), additional and historical evidence might be requested to back up assertions made by the inspected body.

**AC response** – On site, the inspectorate holds short, mid week and end of week feedback, where no scores are given to the inspected body, but a list of strengths and weaknesses found to date are discussed. Additional evidence is requested for any assertions by the inspected body, whilst inspectors are on site (or immediately afterwards). No score can be influenced at this time as no score has yet been determined by inspectors.

#### 4.4 Quick wins

The questionnaire asked whether the on-site briefing was a source of identifying quick wins which may not end up in the final report. A majority of organisations (90%) said that this was the case, though a pattern of differing opinion between local authorities and RSLs was evident. The responses show a large improvement since the 2005 survey.

<b>On-site briefing – quick wins</b>	ALMO	Strategic authority	LSVT	Traditional RSL	<b>Overall</b>	2005 survey	2003 survey
Yes	100%	100%	86%	67%	<b>90%</b>	61%	60%
No			14%		<b>5%</b>	39%	40%
N/A				33%	<b>5%</b>	0%	0%

The large improvement since 2005 is encouraging. Inspection is about improved service delivery and if organisations can improve by taking relatively simple measures, the inspection should help identify those measures.

#### 4.5 Draft report

We asked whether the discussion on the draft report afforded a genuine opportunity to challenge the Inspectorate. In a marked improvement on 2005 scores, three quarters of respondents felt that the publication of the draft report was an opportunity to challenge the Inspectorate. Again RSLs were most positive in their responses although 29% of LSVT organisations said that the draft report stage was not a genuine opportunity to challenge the Inspectorate.

<b>Opportunity to challenge</b>	ALMO	Strategic authority	LSVT	Traditional RSL	<b>Overall</b>	2005 survey	2003 survey
Yes	67%	100%	71%	100%	<b>75%</b>	58%	41%
No			29%		<b>10%</b>	30%	48%
Unsure	33%				<b>15%</b>	12%	10%

However, the comments above re “arguing the case” still pertain. It seems that organisations feel that they can contribute to a point, but that their opportunities to influence and challenge beyond the inspection are limited.

## **5.0 Judgements and publication**

### **5.1 Judgement as expected**

While there has again been an improvement on 2005, there was a fairly mixed reaction as to whether judgements were fair. Though the majority thought they were, a sizeable minority did not. Despite the overall upward turn from the previous survey, RSL organisations’ perceptions of the judgements contribute mainly to the negative scores.

<b>Judgement fair</b>	ALMO	Strategic authority	LSVT	Traditional RSL	<b>Overall</b>	2005 survey	2003 survey
Yes	89%		71%	67%	<b>75%</b>	55%	69%
No	11%	100%	29%	33%	<b>25%</b>	26%	10%
Unsure					<b>0%</b>	19%	21%

Following the improvement on whether judgements were fair, when considering whether the judgement was consistent with their own experience, organisations again concur. Again, this was an upturn on the 2005 survey.

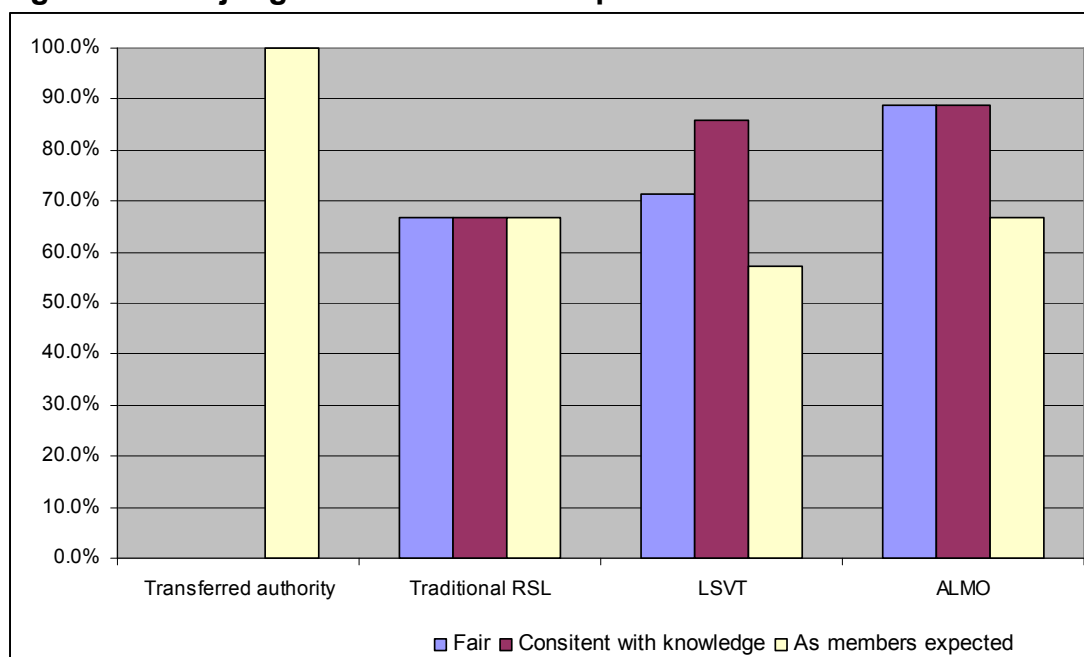
<b>Judgement consistent with experience</b>	ALMO	Strategic authority	LSVT	Traditional RSL	<b>Overall</b>	2005 survey	2003 survey
Yes	89%		86%	67%	<b>80%</b>	71%	81%
No	11%	100%	14%	33%	<b>20%</b>	23%	15%
Unsure					<b>0%</b>	6%	4%

Again, a sizeable percentage of organisations stated that the judgement was not as expected by their elected/board members. These scores have hardly changed since 2003.

<b>As expected by elected members</b>	ALMO	Strategic authority	LSVT	Traditional RSL	<b>Overall</b>	2005 survey	2003 survey
Yes	67%	100%	57%	67%	<b>65%</b>	65%	67%
No	33%		43%	33%	<b>35%</b>	35%	33%

**AC response** - It is a common misconception that the judgements are made in relation to other inspected bodies. This is not the case. Judgements are made against the published KLOE, applied in a local context. It is disappointing that there is still some lack of self awareness of the likely judgement, particularly when the self assessment is signed off by senior officers and Board/Council members. On site briefings are open for the Inspected Body to determine attendance. We welcome attendance. The inspectorate will look again at this and will continue to support stakeholders who wish to run courses for members to increase their understanding of the self assessment process, building on the success of our 2007 course in partnership with the NHC.

**Figure 3: Was judgement fair and as expected?**



For organisations not happy with their judgements, the general commentary on all three questions was that organisations had expected a higher rating and that the inspectors had judged too harshly compared with other similar organisations.

How effective were Inspectors at taking service users into account	ALMO	Strategic authority	LSVT	Traditional RSL	Overall
Very effective	33%	100%	43%	67%	45%
Fairly effective	67%		43%		45%
Unsure			14%		5%
Fairly ineffective				33%	5%

## 5.2 Process/outcome

In response to the question whether Inspectors were primarily concerned with processes or outcomes in making their judgements, the majority view was that they considered a balance of process and outcomes, though a sizeable

minority thought Inspection was still outcome based. The recurring theme of different opinion between the local authority and RSL sectors was again apparent.

<b>Judgement based on</b>	ALMO	Strategic authority	LSVT	Traditional RSL	<b>Overall</b>	2005 survey	2003 survey
Process				33%	<b>5%</b>	35%	31%
Outcome	11%	100%	43%		<b>25%</b>	10%	10%
A balance of process and outcomes	89%		57%	67%	<b>70%</b>	55%	59%

This year, the questionnaire asked respondents whether they were made aware of the timing of the publication. The vast majority said that they were. The way organisations were made aware varied but the majority communicated with lead inspectors by telephone or email.

<b>Aware of the timing of the publication</b>	ALMO	Strategic authority	LSVT	Traditional RSL	<b>Overall</b>
Yes	89%	100%	100%	100%	<b>95%</b>
No	11%				<b>5%</b>

Respondents that were unaware of the timing were asked if this had caused them problems. Of those that responded to this question cited the inability to inform decision making as a consequence.

<b>If no, did this cause you problems</b>	ALMO	Strategic authority	LSVT	Traditional RSL	<b>Overall</b>
Yes	33%				<b>17%</b>
No	67%				<b>83%</b>

## Local context

The recognition of local context is one of importance to respondents and the Commission has made efforts to address this. The overall figures shown below indicate that it has at least partially been taken into account. It shows an improvement from the 2005 survey, but 10% of respondents still did not feel local context was considered.

<b>Local context taken into account</b>	ALMO	Strategic authority	LSVT	Traditional RSL	<b>Overall</b>	2005 survey	2003 survey
Yes	67%		57%	67%	<b>60%</b>	33%	34%
Partially	33%	100%	29%		<b>30%</b>	52%	45%
No			14%	33%	<b>10%</b>	15%	21%

**AC response** - The annual briefing event for inspected bodies gives specific details of timelines. A 2007 review of standard documentation, along with a newly introduced scoping meeting with the Lead Housing Inspector has clarified and emphasised timelines for inspected bodies.

## 6.0 General

### 6.1 Key Lines of Enquiry

The questionnaire asked about the usefulness of KLOE as an aid to self-improvement outside of the inspection framework. Respondents in general found the KLOE useful. Negative responses commented on the duplication of message, that they could be vague and that their number stifles innovation.

<b>Usefulness of KLOE</b>	ALMO	Strategic authority	LSVT	Traditional RSL	<b>Overall</b>	2005 survey
Very useful	67%	100%	57%	33%	<b>60%</b>	39%
Fairly Useful	33%		29%	33%	<b>30%</b>	35%
Unsure			14%		<b>5%</b>	23%
Not very useful				33%	<b>5%</b>	3%

The vast majority of organisations are aware of the review process at the Audit Commission and all are aware of the complaints process.

<b>Are you aware that there is a review process at AC</b>	ALMO	Strategic authority	LSVT	Traditional RSL	<b>Overall</b>
Yes	89%		100%	100%	<b>90%</b>
No	11%	100%			<b>10%</b>

<b>Are you aware that there is a complaints process at AC</b>	ALMO	Strategic authority	LSVT	Traditional RSL	<b>Overall</b>
Yes	100%	100%	100%	100%	<b>100%</b>

Only 5% overall have used either the complaints or appeals and only ALMO(s).

<b>Have you ever used either of these</b>	ALMO	Strategic authority	LSVT	Traditional RSL	<b>Overall</b>
Yes	11%				<b>5%</b>
No	89%	100%	100%	100%	<b>95%</b>

This is the fourth survey that Northern Housing Consortium has carried out around the issue of inspection and improvement. The questionnaire asked respondents if they think the Audit Commission responds to the comments of

the Housing Sector. The majority (60%) believe the Commission does so. This leaves a large minority that either do not or are not sure.

<b>Do you think AC responds to comments from the sector</b>	ALMO	Strategic authority	LSVT	Traditional RSL	<b>Overall</b>
Very well	22%				<b>10%</b>
Fairly well	67%		29%	67%	<b>50%</b>
Unsure			43%		<b>15%</b>
Fairly poorly	11%		14%		<b>10%</b>
Not at all				33%	<b>5%</b>
Don't know		100%	14%		<b>10%</b>

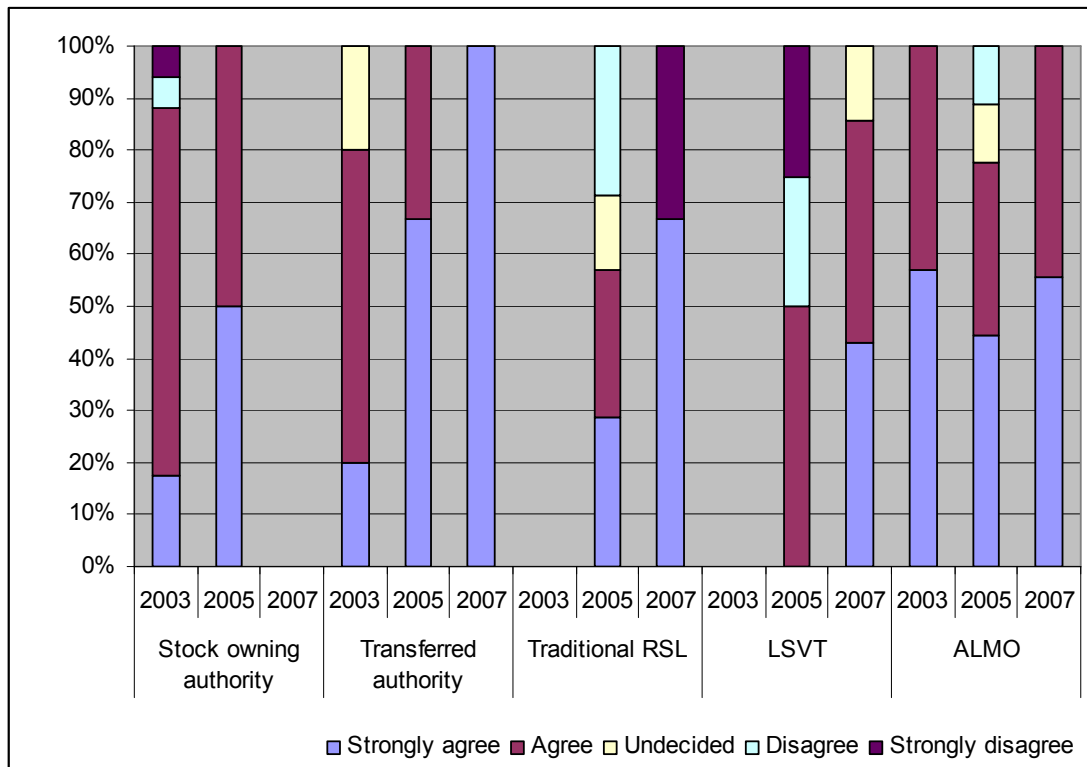
**AC response** - The Inspectorate intends to fully consult on the review of all landlord service KLOEs in 2008, alongside the introduction of housing standards by the new regulator.

## 6.2 Rating the inspection process

Organisations were asked the extent to which they would agree that the Inspection process helps to secure greater improvement and accountability in the delivery of local services. This has increased since the 2005 survey and stands at its highest level since we started asking this question. In keeping with other observations, the LA/RSL split is apparent (33% of traditional RSLs strongly disagree).

<b>Inspection improves services</b>	ALMO	Strategic authority	LSVT	Traditional RSL	<b>Overall</b>	2005 survey	2003 survey
Strongly agree	56%	100%	43%	67%	<b>55%</b>	39%	28%
Agree	44%		43%		<b>35%</b>	39%	62%
Undecided			14%		<b>5%</b>	6%	3%
Disagree					<b>0%</b>	13%	3%
Strongly Disagree				33%	<b>5%</b>	3%	3%

**Figure 4: Does Inspection improve services?**



Respondents were also asked to rate the Housing Inspectorate on a scale of 1-10 and comment on improvements that could be made. This year respondents were also asked to rate the Housing Inspectorate in terms of its usefulness in improving performance.

Rating the Housing Inspectorate	ALMO	Strategic authority	LSVT	Traditional RSL	Overall	2005 survey
10						3%
9	11%				5%	6%
8	33%		29%	67%	35%	21%
7	44%	100%	57%		45%	27%
6	11%				5%	21%
5						9%
4			14%		5%	3%
3						3%
2						
1				33%	5%	6%

<b>Rate the Housing Inspectorate on its usefulness in improving performance</b>	ALMO	Strategic authority	LSVT	Traditional RSL	<b>Overall</b>
10	33%		14%	33%	<b>25%</b>
9	22%	100%	14%	33%	<b>25%</b>
8	22%		29%		<b>20%</b>
7	11%		29%		<b>15%</b>
6			14%		<b>5%</b>
5	11%				<b>5%</b>
4					
3					
2					
1				33%	<b>5%</b>

### 6.3 Improvements

Suggested improvements covered a range of topics. The key suggestions can be grouped as follows:

- Use judgement to determine priorities for work schedules
- Less bureaucracy, more frequent but shorter inspections
- Regulate only core housing functions, rather than social enterprises
- More consistency between scores

### 7.0 Conclusion

One of the key over-arching themes of the research is the differing opinions coming from the local authority (strategic LAs and ALMOs) and RSLs (traditional RSLs and LSVTs). This came across over a range of questions for the second survey in succession, where local authorities had more positive experiences than those of their RSL counterparts.

Local authorities have worked with the Audit Commission over a number of years and the relationship has matured as it has progressed, while this is only the second survey since RSLs have been inspected by the Audit Commission. The Commission may need to consider more engagement with the RSL sector to improve the relationship.

#### 7.1 Improvements

There are a number of positive changes, where improvements are noted since the last survey and/or are generally well rated. These far outweigh the incidences where NHC members' perceptions had worsened and include:

- A more positive experience of pre-site and on-site meetings with the Inspectors

- The Inspectors increased understanding of the role of all stakeholders in the organisation
- Issues with the scope of the inspection

There have also been welcome improvements in respondents' perceptions of their opportunities challenge the Inspectorate and influence the inspection process.

## **7.2 Concerns**

Some areas have not scored as well as previously or have not improved:

The proportion of organisations that found the timing and notice period of the inspection helpful fell very slightly on 2005 levels. Despite this a large majority of respondents still stated that they found the notice helpful.

There was also a key area that was a non-mover. The outcome of the inspection was not as expected by a large minority of elected/board Members. This has not changed since 2005 and is in fact higher than in 2003. There is clearly room for improvement here.

## **7.3 Overall**

Organisations scored better than those questioned for the 2005 survey and prospects for improvement also increased. This serves to indicate that services are improving, at least within the scope of the inspection.

It is no surprise then, that when asked whether inspection improves services, there was an increase to the 90% agreeing that it does in 2007 from 78% in 2005.

The Consortium looks forward to the opportunity to share the findings with the Housing Inspectorate and having a role in further informing the regulatory and inspection framework.

### **AC closing remarks –**

The Housing Inspectorate welcomes the results of the 4th survey into our inspection work. The results show significant improvement for almost all questions asked. We look forward to working with the NHC and other stakeholders to address issues of concern.

The Inspectorate works well with stakeholders in the north like the NHC, NHF and HC to establish regional priorities. The survey shows the greatest gap in the knowledge of our work with traditional HA's. We will consider this with our stakeholders and move forward together to increase mutual understanding of our work.

We would like to thank the NHC and its members for the feedback and welcome individual improvement ideas, discussion and feedback on the content of this report or on inspection generally to:

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**Useful links**

**Housing Inspection (Audit Commission)**

<http://www.audit-commission.gov.uk/housing/index.asp?CategoryID=english%5E1628&page=index.asp&area=hpsector>