



## **MHA's Scrutiny Panel**

### **Report – Communications**

#### **Acknowledgements**

##### **PREPARED BY THE TENANT'S SCRUTINY PANEL**

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#### **SCOPE OF THE REVIEW**

The Scrutiny Panel considered Communication to be of vital importance and, as it is such a vast area to cover, decided to identify some priorities and set objectives to maintain a focussed approach. It was also recognised that the usual method of adopting the Key Areas of Focus method would not work in this instance so would work collectively as one group throughout this project.

Once the objectives were agreed each one could be tackled separately and the Panel looked to consider, at the outset, the various ways to test each area (see 'supporting evidence' against each recommendation). At the end of each session the Panel pre-planned the next session and identified research required to assist and save time. It was also an opportunity to instruct a wider consultative group's view so all the information was available for further discussion at the next meeting. The following wider consultation was conducted as part of the review.

- **Telephone Survey details:**

A telephone survey was undertaken with all 63 tenants, who have previously requested to receive communications in large print, to ascertain if they were receiving communication via their preferred method and if not, how frequently this occurred.

- **Email Survey details:**

An email survey was sent to all 165 tenants who had stated that their preferred method of contact was email, in order to ascertain if these tenants were receiving communications from MHA via their preferred method and if not, how frequently this occurred. 59 responses were received to the email survey.

- **Other evidence considered....**

Tenant responses to the Tenant Satisfaction Survey 2017/18 regarding communication preferences by disability groups. A sample of standard letters, social media platforms, 'live' testing of different methods of communication, and general research.

## **INTRODUCTION**

Communication is the key to building and maintaining good relationships between staff and tenants. We recognised the need of getting this right and tailoring to the individual needs of each tenant, particularly if they are not digitally able or have other specialist requirements as a result of a disability, for example. (Disability groups were discussed at length, including older tenants, younger tenants, and digitally excluded tenants)

Generally, we all have expectations when communicating and use lots of different methods to do this. Digital is the quickest, cheapest and most convenient way to communicate with tenants and all forms of communication were looked into and forensically viewed, from those tenants that are keen to use such platforms and those tenants who are either unwilling or unable to communicate in such a manner. It was recognised that MHA cannot completely migrate over to digital communication and leave people 'behind' so how can we do this?

The Panel also recognised that not all tenants want to have regular contact with MHA for one reason or another and will only communicate for essential services (i.e. repairs).

During initial discussions all of these factors were prominent throughout and so the following objectives were set as a guideline for the project.

## **PROJECT OBJECTIVES**

- Future proof communication (Value For Money/creating efficiencies)
- Tackling and accommodating disability including mental health and inclusion issues.

- All able to communicate appropriately with MHA using their preferred method of communication
- Ensure easy, clear, concise, jargon free and consumer friendly communications.

## **How the Review links to Vision...**

By 2023 MHA will be the top performing Social Enterprise in Wales providing quality homes and services, transforming peoples' lives and giving them the confidence and support to realise their ambitions. We will create an environment where people can have a brilliant quality of life, in areas where they aspire to live and work.

## **Corporate Objectives**

The Scrutiny Panel looked at the Corporate objectives and came to the conclusion that communication reached across all objectives and so were covered within the parameters of the review.

### **RECOMMENDATIONS SUMMARY**

#### **Objective 1: Future Proofing Communication**

1. Facebook – follow up resolutions on Facebook to ensure that other users know that an issue has been dealt with
2. Website – Neighbourhood Officer page needs to reflect staff changes
3. Notification of absences on mobile phone, including voicemails and emails
4. Live chat options require clarification to explain Customer Services for general enquiries, for example

#### ***Migrating tenants online....***

5. Create an MHA App to improve communication with tenants
6. A targeted marketing campaign conducted raising awareness of different methods for different needs.
7. On-hold message promoting comms methods when customers telephoning in are waiting to speak with staff (to incl. OOHs).
8. Mobile digital workshops provided by MHA
9. Seek funding to assist with training

#### **Objective 2: Tackling & Accommodating disabilities (including mental health, and inclusion services)**

10. Consult with partnering support providers to confirm that MHA is communicating by the most appropriate means
11. MHA targets promotion for tenants with speech difficulties to encourage use of email and Live Chat, including targeted campaigns to appropriate group.
12. Meeting the needs of those requiring communication in large print.

#### **Objective 3: Everyone able to communicate appropriately using preferred method of communication**

13. Provide the new tenants handbook to all new and existing tenants

14. Added addendum to the TSS question; “How satisfied are you with MHA arrangements to communicate through your chosen language” to explain that this relates to the spoken language
15. Maximise email addresses by texting all tenants with mobile numbers requesting this.
16. Reminder to all staff of the importance of checking, updating and actioning tenant’s communication preferences
17. Preferred method of communication should be captured for all new tenants during the new tenant visit. Tenants should be asked if they would be happy to communicate with MHA via email, with a view to making this the default communication method rather than printed media. Printed media would still be required in some situations to meet legal obligations.

**Objective 4: Easy, clear, concise, jargon – free and consumer friendly communications**

18. Amend all Homesearch standard letters following assessment (Homesearch randomly selected for this exercise)
19. Recommended that all departments review the standard letters periodically.
20. Raise profile of Easy Read Tenancy Agreement and offer to all, regardless of perceived needs.

**Observations**

- Observation 1:** Website Changes: Notice that MHA uses Cookies
- Observation 2:** Website Changes: Help with Money page does not encourage tenants to contact MHA above CAB or OSS
- Observation 3:** Website Changes: Difficult to locate Homesearch via website as this does not feature under the ‘contact us’ nor is there a unique tab on the home page
- Observation 4:** Live Chat
- Observation 5:** Introduce Area Communication Champions

## Recommendations

### Objective 1: Future Proofing Communication

**Recommendation 1:** Facebook – follow up resolutions on Facebook to ensure that other users know that an issue has been dealt with

<b>Key Findings</b>	Going back through Facebook posts, Panel members recognised that MHA tend to take the conversation off public view space and deal with this privately. So, as far as the other site visitors are concerned, this case just ends abruptly and they have no way of knowing if we have done anything with it. From a tenants' perspective it would be good to have some closure and confidence that MHA address concerns using this platform.
<b>Supporting evidence</b>	Scrutiny Panel members homework/observations. Checks on Facebook
<b>Outcome For Involved Tenants</b>	Increase customers' confidence to report issues via social media and provide reassurance that issues will be picked up and dealt with if they are seeing an update stating that someone's problem is now resolved. This should result in an increase in tenants reporting issues via an online method.

**Recommendation 2:** Website – 'Neighbourhood Officer' page needs to reflect staff changes

<b>Key Findings</b>	It was found that changes in Neighbourhood Officers regularly occurred and those tenants under whose remit the Officer was overseeing matters were not always being advised of those changes. Thereby causing confusion when needing to contact their NO. It was also considered this creates a general lack of connect with staff. The website had not been updated to reflect current situation, particularly around those staff who had left MHA and if this is the only way this information is communicated, it should be immediate.
<b>Supporting evidence</b>	Experiences from Panel members and neighbours. Cross referencing staff details against the website.
<b>Outcome For Tenants</b>	To maintain a good relationship with MHA and making it easy for a tenant to contact us and know that the person they are talking to is familiar with their area, it is vital that contact details are updated regularly.

**Recommendation 3:** Notification of recorded absences on all MHA staff mobile phones, including voicemails and emails.

<b>Key Findings</b>	All panel members, at one point or another, have experienced the lack of messages informing that staff were not available due to absences so have either had to ring someone else unfamiliar with their case or wait for the staff member to return their call. If staff are taking annual/sick leave a voice message should be left on their mobile phone, and also email and work's phone explaining this and indicating the date of return or an alternative contact (if possible).
<b>Supporting evidence</b>	During a testing exercise, using a variety of different communication methods, members experienced the same issues. Some notification emails were received by Panel members and also members noted that voicemail messages did not reflect such absences.
<b>Outcome For Tenants</b>	Knowing if staff are absent presents the tenant with choices dependent upon the urgency of the issue. It also means that they are not waiting around unnecessarily for someone to communicate back which could take days. This would greatly facilitate good communication and strengthen relationships and confidence in MHA.

**Recommendation 4:** Live chat options require clarification to explain 'Customer Services' for general enquiries.

<b>Key Findings</b>	When contacting Live Chat you are presented with two options "Customer Services" and "Homesearch". The Panel felt that this could be reworded to "General Enquiries" which would removed any confusion as to what Customer Services assists with. Generally the term "customer services" relates to a complaint or a specific issue whereas MHA's customer services assists with all enquiries.
<b>Supporting evidence</b>	Live testing of Live Chat facility to query an appointment.
<b>Outcome For Tenants</b>	As MHA are promoting this type of communication as a tool to improve their services, it is essential that adequate provisions are in place to maximise usage.

**Recommendation 5:** Create an MHA App to improve communication with tenants

<b>Key Findings</b>	Most good organisations have employed Apps as a method of communicating with their customers and the Panel discussed the ranging benefits they enjoy from using them. Many of the website facilities can be
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	applied here which would add another type of digital communication method for customers. It was unanimously agreed by the Panel that such an App would benefit customers and also give MHA an opportunity to improve communication and services within the tenant base. Some link with mobile phone diaries and appointments could automatically appear here as an additional reminder. The Panel Members recognised that MHA do not have such a facility but suggested this would improve communication, cut down on unnecessary calls and build relationships.
<b>Supporting evidence</b>	See Barclays, Amazon, Argos and such varied organisations that have successfully employed Apps as a method of improving customers' lives, knowledge and satisfaction.
<b>Outcome For Tenants</b>	These Apps have been found to be effective and welcomed by customers. It gives more control to the tenant, allows them to manage their accounts and also makes it easier for them to contact MHA.

**Recommendation 6:** A targeted marketing campaign conducted raising awareness of different methods of communication for different needs.

<b>Key Findings</b>	It was found to be essential that MHA tenants understand and are kept informed of changes and have an opportunity to communicate more using their preferred method. MHA have a range of options available and these options are promoted on the back of publications and in literature (tenants handbook etc.) but some may find an alternative method easier if they were made more aware (for example, speech impediments – live chat). This was also supported during discussions and considering some of the results from the TSS. MHA also needs to raise awareness of service standards. The Panel suggested including promotion in tenant publications, libraries, communal areas of sheltered schemes etc. This also links to recommendation 7.
<b>Supporting evidence</b>	TSS (particularly around disability), discussion with one group member who has such a disability.
<b>Outcome For Tenants</b>	Makes life easier for tenants. Convenient and provides choices, most appropriate to the need of the tenant

**Recommendation 7:** On-hold message promoting communication methods when customers telephoning in are waiting to speak with staff (to incl. OOHs).

<b>Key Findings</b>	During testing of the individual methods of communication, Panel Members found a missed opportunity whilst waiting to go through to the CSA
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	Team. This short gap could be filled with alternative ways to communicate with MHA (Live Chat, texting, Paying rent online etc.) The Panel Members suggested taking an average of waiting time and design message to maximise this opportunity.
<b>Supporting evidence</b>	Experience and observations
<b>Outcome For Tenants</b>	Maximises information provided to the tenant giving more choice and making life easier generally (also see recommendation 6)

**Recommendation 8:** Mobile digital workshops provided by MHA

<b>Key Findings</b>	MHA sponsor and support a group in Raglan which encourages and trains tenants in the use of computers and the benefit of communicating through such means. Members of the Panel have visited this group and were impressed with the enthusiasm shown by participants. In light of UC and people's reluctance to join the digital world the suggestion would be to have a floating and informal training class which moved around to the most needed areas using staff and volunteers.
<b>Supporting evidence</b>	Personal visit, observations, using TI data there is recognition that some are wary of technology or don't have access to it to practice or get to know how to use it, therefore excluding some.
<b>Outcome For Tenants</b>	Better accessibility to services, helps those isolated either geographically, through disability/ill-health or lack of transport, improved communication and relationships with MHA

**Recommendation 9:** Seek funding to assist with online training

<b>Key Findings</b>	This particularly relates to recommendation 8. It was acknowledged by the Panel that additional funding would be necessary to support the target of increasing Digital Inclusion, which would greatly assist both tenants and MHA. One member referred to potential funding through the Welsh Government and the Panel suggested this be investigated further. With Digital Inclusion being a driver of The Welsh Assembly, it would be excellent if MHA would be at the forefront of this endeavour
<b>Supporting evidence</b>	See above
<b>Outcome For Tenants</b>	Further assistance for tenants would improve their quality of life and open up other opportunities like saving money etc. (also see recommendation 8 above)



## Objective 2: Tackling & Accommodating disabilities (including mental health, and inclusion services)

**Recommendation 10:** Consult with partnering support providers to confirm that MHA is communicating by the most appropriate means

<b>Key Findings</b>	It was found that through studying satisfaction survey results conducted by MHA, there are opportunities to further 'include' various disability groups who currently don't engage. For example, only 58% of tenants recorded with a disability had contact MHA within the last 12 months other than to pay their rent or service charges. The TI data tells us that there are 819 tenants with one disability, 459 with two, 173 with three and 50 tenants with four or more disabilities. It was recommended that some professional assistance be sought to help identify the most appropriate methods, dependent upon the disability group as MHA would not necessarily have this expertise. Input from such organisations as Mind and Mencap, would greatly enhance the chances of MHA successfully encouraging Digital Inclusion with all tenants. This information can be used to target specific audiences and raise awareness of facilities to communicate.
<b>Supporting evidence</b>	Tenant Satisfaction Survey 17/18, Telephone survey
<b>Outcome For Tenants</b>	Better opportunities for disabled groups to be included Digitally widens engagement.

**Recommendation 11:** MHA targets promotion for tenants with speech difficulties to encourage use of email and Live Chat, including targeted campaigns to appropriate group.

<b>Key Findings</b>	This recommendation relates to Rec 10. The Panel considered tenant insight and tenant satisfaction data relating to methods of communication within the disability groups and discussed how MHA could make life easier for those with speech difficulties to get in touch. The TSS results show satisfaction has reduced with those suffering with speech difficulties. One of the Panel members has such an issue and relayed his experiences and preferred methods of communication with the outside world generally. It was felt that some targeted promotion to those registered with difficulties would raise awareness of these services specifically and help people to communicate easier.
<b>Supporting evidence</b>	TS Data, Tenant Insight Data, discussion with panel member
<b>Outcome For Tenants</b>	Reduces impact on the individual and opens up opportunities to build on that relationship and

	communicate other services the individual might find useful.
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**Recommendation 12:** Meeting the needs of those requiring communication in large print.

<b>Key Findings</b>	A sample telephone survey checked if those requesting large print were receiving this. 46% stated that MHA never sent letters in large print. The Panel concluded that this failure would result in isolation. During the telephone conversation 26% also stated they no longer required this facility. This could be as a result of apathy or changes to their vision or adaptations to further assist them. Regardless, information appeared to be out of date and not used fully (see recommendation 15). In addition and to support this recommendation, 37.65% of blind/visually impaired tenants completed the TSS and the Panel noted this is the highest response ever due to provision of larger print surveys.
<b>Supporting evidence</b>	Tenant Insight Data, discussion with panel member, results of telephone survey
<b>Outcome For Tenants</b>	Inclusion and keeping tenants informed is vital. It also reduces the impact on the individual and opens up opportunities to build on that relationship and communicate other services the individual might find useful.

### **Objective 3: Everyone able to communicate appropriately using preferred method of communication**

**Recommendation 13:** Provide the new tenants handbook to all new and existing tenants

<b>Key Findings</b>	It was found that the new Tenants handbook is well presented and full of useful information so members considered that it would be beneficial for all tenants to have the latest version (in the appropriate format), which includes support and signposting, rights and responsibilities together with different ways available to communicate with their landlord. This new handbook has only reached <u>new</u> tenants since its publication last year.
<b>Supporting evidence</b>	Panel review of the New Tenant Handbook and feedback session.
<b>Outcome For Tenants</b>	Tenants are more informed and have a better understanding of their responsibilities and what MHA provides.

**Recommendation 14:** Added addendum to the TSS question; “How satisfied are you with MHA arrangements to communicate through your chosen language” to explain that this relates to the spoken language

<b>Key Findings</b>	870 or 89.9%, of 968 respondents, were satisfied with MHA’s arrangements to communicate with them through their chosen language. Whilst, this percentage was considered high, given that more than 90% of MHA tenants speak English, the Panel suggested that some respondents may be comfortable speaking English but were potentially less skilled using English in the written form or vice versa, resulting in lower satisfaction levels.
<b>Supporting evidence</b>	Tenant Satisfaction Survey 2017/18
<b>Outcome For Tenants</b>	To promote inclusion and to improve satisfaction levels that MHA is communicating with tenants through their chosen language.

**Recommendation 15:** Maximise email addresses by texting all tenants with mobile numbers requesting this.

<b>Key Findings</b>	The Panel noted the results of the email survey (59 responses). 34% stated that MHA communicate with them using their preferred method, 40% occasionally and 6.8% rarely or never. In addition, 5 respondents stated that they would prefer to amend preference to text message. It was found that the Capita system contains information, including tenant mobile numbers. However, only a proportion of tenants have provided their email addresses but many have mobile numbers. Having this information opens up an opportunity to increase communication and its a much easier and cost effective way of communicating.
<b>Supporting evidence</b>	Tenant Insight Data
<b>Outcome For Tenants</b>	MHA should inform tenants by text that tenant email addresses could be used to communicate varied information to tenants, and that way contact would be immediate and of greater value to those tenants who do not use email on a regular basis.

**Recommendation 16:** Reminder to all staff of the importance of checking, updating and actioning existing tenants’ communication preferences

<b>Key Findings</b>	Please also see recommendation 14. The email survey (sample size of 165, 59 responses) noted 50% of tenants preferred telephone contact, 39% by email, 5 by text and 3.4% by Live Chat. Only 1.7% by letter. However, 5 stated that they would prefer to amend their preference. This could be because they are not
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	currently being communicated by their chosen method or that their needs have changed. However, it demonstrates that tenant communication preferences change over time. Bearing this in mind, it was recognised that this information needs to be updated and maximised and staff to use preferred methods once the information is available (see comments above about large print).
<b>Supporting evidence</b>	Email survey, Telephone survey Tenant Insight Data,
<b>Outcome For Tenants</b>	Tailored communication to need will make life simpler for tenants and keep them informed about important information from their landlord.

**Recommendation 17:** Preferred method of communication should be captured from all new tenants during the new tenant final interview.

<b>Key Findings</b>	Capturing this information at the beginning of the tenancy is easier than trying to get it later on. The Panel felt that MHA should push for email communication, with a view to making this the default method to replace printed media. Printed media would still be required in some situations to meet legal obligations. The Panel further discussed opportunities to maximise digital methods of communication and agreed new tenants would provide this opportunity as a starting point. It was also agreed that all information on tenants should be captured and applied in any endeavour to improve Digital Inclusion
<b>Supporting evidence</b>	Tenant Insight, new tenant sign up process,
<b>Outcome For Tenants</b>	Any communication method preferred by tenants is considered to be good and helpful. Digital communication is much quicker and easier than writing and telephoning so increasing convenience for all tenants.

#### **Objective 4: Easy, clear, concise, jargon – free and consumer friendly communications**

**Recommendation 18:** Amend all Homesearch standard letters following assessment (*Homesearch randomly selected for this exercise*)

<b>Key Findings</b>	This service is quite complex and may prove difficult for someone to understand if they have little or no knowledge of how it all works. Any improvement in communications would assist in a better understanding of the system, in general. The Panel looked at the language used within the letter templates and discussed at length. A number of changes were proposed to make the communication more tenant-
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	friendly and easier to understand (refer separately to individual amendments).
<b>Supporting evidence</b>	Homeseach letters
<b>Outcome For Tenants</b>	Change of 'language' will improve relations between tenant and MHA. It alleviates misunderstandings, reduces the impact of further telephone calls needed to clarify information and help the tenant to manage and meet expectations/actions required.

**Recommendation 19:** Recommended that all departments review their standards letters periodically

<b>Key Findings</b>	In light of the above exercise the Panel felt that this project should be extended across MHA to ensure we are consistently providing information which is easy to understand. Over the past few years the Panel have noticed many areas where letters to tenants needed to be changed to be more informative, less beurocratic and less threatening in some circumstances and prompted staff to look at this with fresh eyes.
<b>Supporting evidence</b>	Experiences, past reviews, evidence when considering Homeseach correspondence.
<b>Outcome For Tenants</b>	Tenants would be more appreciative of friendly, concise and to the point communication in all areas. See above.

**Recommendation 20:** Raise profile of Easy Read Tenancy Agreement and offer to all, regardless of perceived needs.

<b>Key Findings</b>	The Panel noted that only 92.2% of tenants understood their tenancy agreement (when asked during the Tenant Satisfaction Survey) so further investigation considered the Easy Read version, which is a simple guide for tenants to better understand their tenancy agreements. However, when asked who received this version, staff confirmed "where there is a perceived need". The Panel felt that this did not address those who would not necessarily be perceived to require this (for example not all will admit to struggling with reading and writing). General communication across all tenants offering this alternative was recommended rather than assuming needs. Promotion through website and publications would be a good way to do this. The Panel also recommended a review of the graphics within to ensure it represented the tenant base more appropriately (ethnicity and symbols – i.e. noise use radio image instead?) See other suggested changes within the minutes.
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<b>Supporting evidence</b>	Tenant Satisfaction Survey, Easy Read Guide, discussion with officers, Tenant Insight Data
<b>Outcome For Tenants</b>	Better understanding of rights and responsibilities will avoid confusion and increase knowledge, trust and better relationships between MHA and the tenant. This may also improve tenant's behaviour if they know what is expected and what could happen if they don't.
<b>SMT Response: JK: Seems sensible, any problems with this? MM: Fine with this.</b>	

## OBSERVATIONS

**Observation 1:** Website Changes: Notice that MHA uses Cookies

<b>Key Findings</b>	Most, if not all major websites use cookies, and included in the terms of using the website, the user must agree to the use of cookies. MHA does not give notice that they use cookies.
<b>Supporting evidence</b>	Internet searches, Panel testing of MHA website
<b>Outcome For Tenants</b>	Openness if MHA do use this.

**Observation 2:** Website Changes: Help with Money page does not encourage tenants to contact MHA above CAB or OSS

<b>Key Findings</b>	Many tenants use the services of CAB mainly due to their lack of knowledge or confidence when involved in certain MHA procedures.
<b>Supporting evidence</b>	Community First, personal experiences
<b>Outcome For Tenants</b>	Most tenants who use the services of CAB certainly have problems with regard to communication with MHA. Persuading tenants to contact MHA directly could result in better communication and bespoke assistance with their financial circumstances. A more immediate in house response for tenants?

**Observation 3:** Website Changes: Difficult to locate Homesearch via website as this does not feature under the 'contact us' nor is there a unique tab on the home page

<b>Key Findings</b>	The Panel noted that when trying to access Homesearch on the MHA website, it was most difficult to locate. The Panel observed that with a little work by the IT department, there must be a way to have a link within the website to ensure easy access to Homesearch
<b>Supporting evidence</b>	Scrutiny Panel research
<b>Outcome For Tenants</b>	Making life easier for tenants.

#### Observation 4: Live Chat

<b>Key Findings</b>	Suggested changes: <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• In queue..? have a countdown so customer knows how long its likely to be before they speak to someone.</li><li>• Unable to type whilst waiting. This could save time as the tenant could put together their query before the operator gets to them.</li><li>• Have experienced live chat with other companies and ours is a little formal. Can we not end the conversation with some pleasantries?</li></ul>
<b>Supporting evidence</b>	Live testing of the system.
<b>Outcome For Tenants</b>	Small improvements would also improve the tenants experience and encourage them to use this more frequently

#### Observation 5: Introduce Area Communication Champions

<b>Key Findings</b>	Particularly in areas where is there a high density of disabled or vulnerable people, recruit volunteers to act as a friend and liaison with MHA staff.
<b>Supporting evidence</b>	Panel considered isolation of those with mental or physical disabilities generally and talked about opportunities to improve their lives.
<b>Outcome For Tenants</b>	Improved quality of life

#### Conclusion

This review of Communications throughout the MHA Organisation found that there were areas of strength and also improvement requirements which will benefit both MHA and its tenants (please refer to Recommendations and Observations within the report).

The Panel looked into VFM within those recommendations and decided where extra budget is required, the benefit of implementing the improvements would outweigh costings involved. It was noted that with budgets being necessarily controlled, the outcomes for tenants would enhance the aim of MHA to be the best RSL within Wales taking into account the fact that tenant satisfaction and overall commitment to improved services would work well to ensure that the aspirations of MHA are attained.