

Preface

This report presents the findings of a research project on improving the quality of local authority housing management. The study was undertaken by the Institute of Local Government Studies during 1988 and 1989. A grant from the Joseph Rowntree Memorial Trust enabled this study to be undertaken. The key focus of the study was a concern to identify blockages to improving service delivery within local authority housing services. In particular we concentrated upon tenants' views of the service provided with evidence drawn from a sample survey of tenants on eight estates. Matched pairs of estates were selected in each of four in depth case studies in urban local authorities in the Midlands and North of England.

We are indebted to Dr John Raine and Professor John Stewart, both of the Institute of Local Government Studies. The former undertook some analysis of tenant survey data and the latter gave us access to material arising from a series of visits to housing departments which had been undertaken as part of a Local Government Training Board exercise on the future of the housing service in local government and the current state of management thinking within the service.

We would also wish to acknowledge the valuable advice and comments of our Project Advisory Group which consisted of:

Dr Janet Lewis – Joseph Rowntree Memorial Trust

John Watts – Director of Housing, Walsall

Dr David Clapham – Centre for Housing Studies, University of Glasgow

Ray Forrest – School of Advanced Urban Studies, University of Bristol

Ian Cole – Department of Urban Studies, Sheffield Polytechnic

They provided us with valuable guidance on several key aspects of our research programme.

The Joseph Rowntree Memorial Trust have published a 'Findings' document which summarises the key results of our work for a wider audience. This report supplements the 'Findings' outline of our study. The report has been aimed at a practitioner audience and it is our hope that its results will indeed lead managers along the route of improving the quality of local authority housing management. We are also intending to publish further more detailed analyses based on various aspects of our study. A detailed report on the survey is in preparation.

Inevitably within a short report much cannot be covered in detail, but we have attempted to concentrate on those areas where we feel there will be most interest. This interest has already been reflected in a series of practitioner and academic seminars at which we have presented the results of our research, and reflects a deep and widespread concern to improve public services.

We owe a considerable debt of gratitude to the four urban housing authorities who allowed us access for our study and particularly to all the members of staff of the housing departments who helped us, to tenants who co-operated both through the sample survey interviews which we commissioned from MORI, and to local councillors who showed keen interest in our work. We have agreed that the four local authorities and the eight estates within them should remain anonymous. We would also wish to thank those housing authorities in England, Wales and Scotland who responded to our request for information on what they were doing to improve the quality of the housing service.

We hope practitioners will recognise much of what we have to say and will find the time to weigh this against their own housing management contexts. We are aware of material published by the Department of the Environment, by the Welsh Office and the Scottish Office, as well as by the Audit Commission and others which addresses some of the issues considered in our report. Nevertheless we feel that our more distinctive contribution lies in a concern with customer perception of housing management quality and the managerial issues that arise for a housing authority seeking to provide a more consumer oriented service delivery. We feel that these are important issues for the 1990s.

Ken Spencer and Kieron Walsh, October 1989,
Institute of Local Government Studies, University of Birmingham