



# Case Study

## Preparing for Inspection

# Audit Commission Inspections

It's never too early to prepare for inspection and good organisations not only reap the value of being prepared, they demonstrate their ability to achieve continuous improvement.



“Initially tasked with assisting Charter with document preparation we were subsequently asked to provide far more substantial assistance. We provided both support and challenge to Charter throughout a traumatic time for the organisation and its people and they were pleased to get the inspection result they hoped for”

**Richard Ward**  
*Director, Government  
and Local Communities*

## Background

Charter Community Housing is a small housing association with 3,500 housing units under management, which was established to receive the transfer of Cherwell District Council's housing stock. They were notified that they would be inspected just a year after transfer.

## The Challenge

To assist Charter to prepare for inspection by the Audit Commission's housing team. Having recently separated from the council, Charter was already facing a number of demanding risks. The prime focus was delivering the promises made to residents before transfer but this meant that it needed to plan its allocation of resources carefully, both human and financial, to ensure that it addressed as much of its overloaded agenda as possible.

This was exacerbated when Charter was advised only weeks before the inspection that The Housing Corporation had invoked Supervision procedures due to concerns about governance and financial viability

## Our Approach

The Consultancy Company designed a three phase programme which project managed the Charter's preparation for inspection and provided additional human resources in areas where Charter's resources were stretched. We devised a 3 phase programme:

### Phase 1: Reviewing Charter's policies and procedures:

Working with the senior management team and middle managers across the organisation we developed a corporate style for the presentation of policy and procedure documents, checked for consistency of approach and introduced cross references.

This work proved the starting point for the preparation of Charter's self-assessment. We then acted as independent reviewers, encouraging the executive and senior managers to challenge their understanding of their organisation and the service which it provides.



“There’s lots to do with the Audit Commission inspection but you have a good grasp of what’s needed. Richard and Barbara are achieving the milestones I want and it’s great having them around.”

**Kate Hindle**  
Operations Director  
Charter Community  
Housing

### Phase 2: Coaching for focus groups and interviews:

Using our experience as inspectors we selected those members of Charter’s staff who were likely to be interviewed during the on-site inspection.

We gave these individuals two coaching sessions and a mock interview (based on Audit Commission’s Key Lines of Enquiry) followed by feedback. To fully replicate the inspection process, where appropriate, two consultants conducted the mock interviews.

### Phase 3: Planning for continuous improvement:

Throughout phases 1 and 2 we worked closely with Charter to identify areas where performance needed to be improved and service standards raised. We assisted them to implement our post-activity action plans immediately, allowing them to demonstrate a strong recent track record of improvement.

### Results

- A well managed project which gave a double benefit to Charter - a comprehensive preparation for inspection and solid proof of the organisation’s capacity for improvement.
- Audit Commission outcomes at the top end of the client’s expectations.
- A step change in the quality of internal documentation and performance management data.

The Kidlington Centre  
High Street  
Kidlington  
Oxford OX5 2DL  
T 01865 841177  
F 01865 841155

The Genesis Centre  
Science Park South  
Birchwood  
Warrington  
WA3 7BH  
T +44 (0) 1925 661715  
F +44 (0) 1925 661800

[info@the-consultancy.co.uk](mailto:info@the-consultancy.co.uk)  
[www.the-consultancy.co.uk](http://www.the-consultancy.co.uk)

REGISTERED ADDRESS  
15-19 CAVENDISH PLACE, LONDON W1G 0DD  
REGISTERED NUMBER 2861227