



APPG for EBE Inquiry into Quality of New Build Housing in England

Submission by ICWCI: 26 October 2015

The Institute of Clerks of Works and Construction Inspectorate (ICWCI) is the professional body that supports quality construction through inspection.

Summary

This call for evidence is welcome and has provided the ICWCI with an opportunity to present the views and feedback from its members across England.

The current general perception is that the industry has become progressively management orientated, and Contractors increasingly face the dilemma posed by the quality-cost-time conundrum, a challenge that is exacerbated by the fall in skill and resource levels, knowledge gaps and general poor standards of workmanship. Clients and Developers for their part, demand value for money, cost optimization and projects that are delivered right first time. These issues have resulted in numerous defects (many of a repetitive nature), and have on too many occasions affected overall new build housing quality.

We strongly believe that house buyers need the assurance that a qualified independent third party inspector is safeguarding their interests to ensure that their new home is built to a high quality and is value for 'their' money; however, over recent years these two factors have been questioned and have become a concern.

General feedback from ICWCI members:

- *With the increase in house building, there has been a higher demand for site staff. This has had an effect on build consistency and increased the requirement for agency labour, thus often resulting in a decrease in skills.*
- *Warranty inspections visits are sometimes being missed.*
- *Private buyers often rely heavily on the Building Warranty CML Certificate. The Warranty provider only needs to inspect certain items and relies on the builder to comply with their Standards.*

- *Issued drawings and specifications do not always meet current building regulations and as such further defects occur.*
- *Main house builders have targets to achieve, often at half year stages. At the end of these stages the quality of the build is too often reduced particularly when they have to build quickly to achieve targets.*
- *Handover documentation is often poor for private plots; certificates are not always fully completed with items missing.*
- *Installations of goods are not always fitted to the manufacturers guidelines.*

Questions asked by ICWCI members:

- *Will the future building industry improve sufficiently in the coming years to provide skilled and qualified labour across all trades and disciplines?*
- *With reducing number of experienced and qualified professional currently available, how will the construction industry reverse the decline in quality and ensure that required standards are achieved?*
- *Are today's house build inspection practices adequate to meet Client expectations?*

Recommendations as suggested by ICWCI members:

- *All sites should be regularly quality monitored and independently inspected by a qualified site inspection practitioner. Housing Associations nearly always use or directly employ Clerks of Works/Construction Inspectors; can this be said also of housing developers?*
- *All sites should have regular warranty / building control inspections with free flowing dialogue with the Clerk of Works / Site Inspector.*
- *Significant CPD should be arranged and made mandatory for all site staff/trades.*
- *Apprenticeships for house build site staff should be reviewed, improved and increased.*
- *More focus on education (at age 14 and above) to attract the next generation into careers in construction)*
- *Home buyers/owners should have more readily available information around their options for a Survey/Inspection on their property, including what will and will not be picked up.*

What Clerks of Works/Construction Inspectors/Site Inspectors can provide

Clerks of Works/Construction Inspectors/Site Inspectors can and do play an integral part in a construction team with a responsibility to deliver a quality product. Feedback from industry clients speaks volumes on the value of Clerks of Works. i.e. Clerks of Works/Construction Inspectors/Site Inspectors provide:

- *a good general understanding of the specific construction inspection process (in particular around the inspection of materials and workmanship)*
- *an understanding of the obligations of all parties (requirements and boundaries)*
- *foresight; i.e. identification of issues/potential issues and the ability to suggest alternative methods or mitigation techniques*
- *a focus on quality; promote right first time initiatives, reduce rework and double handling etc*
- *impartiality, with a fair, considered and independent approach to ensuring value for money for the Client*
- *an awareness of acceptable standards, benchmarking and identifying non-conformance*
- *concise recordings of their findings*
- *a professional opinion and recommendations to alternative approaches*
- *knowledge of construction materials and components, including their use, limitations and possible alternatives*
- *an understanding and knowledge of the practical and legal aspects of health and safety*

In conclusion

The construction industry should review the future direction of new build housing to address concerns and issues around quality; within that review it is recommended that a higher degree of regular quality monitoring via independent inspection be factored in, i.e. by qualified site inspection practitioners/Clerks of Works. Indeed with this will come new training requirements; and as the professional body supporting quality through inspection, ICWCI will be available to offer support.

If you have any questions or require clarification, please contact Rachel Morris, Chief Executive Officer
r.morris@icwci.org; tel: 01733 405160