



ANNUAL REPORT

Summary for tenants and leaseholders 2010

DARTFORD
BOROUGH COUNCIL

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1. Introduction

Welcome to Dartford Borough Council's first Annual Housing Report summary. The report is designed to show how we are performing when compared to the Tenant Services Authorities (TSA) regulatory framework and our wider obligations as a social landlord. The report covers the year ending 31 March 2010 and details our performance, explains how we involve our customers in our decision making and service shaping processes and outlines our strategy for delivering housing landlord services in the Borough.

A full copy of the Annual Report is available on-line at www.dartford.gov.uk/housing/TSAAnnualReportandLocalStandards.htm or please call 01322 343682 for a paper copy to be sent to you in the post.

For more information about the TSA and the regulatory framework visit www.tenantservicesauthority.org. If you have any comments on the report or would like to get more involved with how housing services are delivered in Dartford email resident.involvement@dartford.gov.uk

2. Resident Involvement and Empowerment Standard

How our tenants were involved in this report

The Residents' Forum in Dartford was fully involved in the development of our first Annual Report. Workshops were held over the summer with members of the Forum to discuss the development of the report and how standards will be monitored in the future.

One of the key issues for the Forum was to increase the numbers and diversity of its members and that there were many areas where the Forum felt that standards could be helpful in terms of expectations and transparency.

It was agreed that monitoring of standards should form part of the agenda for each Forum Committee meeting and that the development of local standards should be carried out jointly by the Council and its tenants and leaseholders.

Wider consultation on the draft report was carried out during late summer and it was approved by Cabinet in October 2010 and submitted to the Tenant Services Authority.

Customer Service, Choice and Complaints

The Council understands the importance of ensuring that our residents can contact us easily and quickly via various mediums. We also understand the importance of understanding our residents' needs and expectations, and, the Residents' Forum plays an active role on all elements of service development and monitoring.

All our housing staff have been trained to provide excellent customer service to all; and the position is regularly reviewed.

The housing service can be accessed in a variety of ways including visiting, phoning or writing to us, visiting the cash office, live chat, texting and estate surgeries or by visiting our website at www.dartford.gov.uk

Customer satisfaction with the Housing Service

We measure customer satisfaction in a variety of ways across the service. One of the national measures of satisfaction is the STATUS survey, last carried out in 2008 where 77% of tenants were satisfied with the service they received, mirroring national trends. In addition:

- 80% of supported housing residents are satisfied with the service they receive
- 96% of tenants are happy with the service they receive for gas servicing and general repairs
- Our new repairs contractor, the Breyer Group will carry out regular customer satisfaction surveys on a 10% sample of customers through telephone surveys
- In 2009/2010 94% of complaints were resolved within standards

The Council's corporate complaints procedure sets clear service standards and is advertised in our leaflet, our tenants' and leaseholders' welcome packs and on our website.

Involvement and Empowerment

Agreeing local standards

As well as meeting the TSA's own standards, the TSA requires landlords to agree local standards with tenants which reflect their local priorities. It calls these 'local offers' but, as agreed with the Residents' Forum, these will be known as 'local standards' throughout this report. Our action plan sets out how we will agree local standards with you.

3. Home Standard

The Decent Homes Standard is the minimum standard that all social housing in England should achieve by the end of 2010. A decent home is defined as one that is 'wind and weather tight, warm and has modern facilities'.

We know we will meet this standard and beyond because over the past three years, we have completed a 100% stock condition survey that gives us a detailed picture of the condition of the Council's housing stock. This has also been independently audited and passed as 'fit for purpose'. To date, 90.22% of our homes meet the Decent Homes Standard. Only 425 do not meet the current standard but around 325 of these will be completed by December 2010.

Repairs and Maintenance

The Council contracts with two main providers in the repair and maintenance of its properties. Our new contractor, the Breyer Group carry out reactive and planned works, for example, emergency repairs and fitting new kitchens, and Swale Heating carry out gas servicing and repairs to all our gas appliances, for example fires and boilers.

In 2009/10 we spent:

- £1.275 million on reactive repairs
- £850,000 on empty property servicing
- £890,000 in planned repair programme
- £5.1 million in capital replacement programmes such as kitchens, bathrooms and doors.

In 2010/2011 we have a budget of £335,000 a year for aids and adaptations to enable older residents, and those with disabilities, to remain living independently in their homes.

4. Tenancy Standard

Allocations

We operate a very successful Choice based Lettings scheme (CBL) and are part of Kent Homechoice which enables residents to bid on properties in different areas of the County.

We make the best use of available housing and demonstrate this in a transparent way by publicising the outcomes of allocations after the properties are advertised in each bidding cycle on the Kent Homechoice website at www.kenthomechoice.org.uk

We also operate schemes to enable residents to move to more suitable accommodation, including Downsize for Cash and Mutual Exchange through Kent Homechoice.

Over the year 2009/10, 83.1% of customers were satisfied with the condition of their home when they moved in.

5. Neighbourhood and Community Standard

Neighbourhood Management

The housing management team provides a range of services for all tenants from the start to the end of a tenancy including:

- Rent payments and queries. Advice and support in dealing with arrears and taking necessary action on persistent offenders.
- Action to tackle anti-social behaviour, neighbour nuisance or harassment.
- Changes to your household or contact details.
- Alterations to your property.
- Estate inspections and estate surgeries.
- Mutual exchanges or downsizing.
- Managing conditions on estates including estate cleaning, estate inspections and surgeries.

Pinnacle, our cleaning contractor, are responsible for cleaning all large blocks of flats and maisonettes and associated communal areas. They were selected as a partner in 2009 following a tender process and members of the Residents' Forum formed part of the selection panel.

Any resident who would like to represent the area in which they live can become a 'community contact' to help monitor and improve services. Please contact our Resident Involvement Officer for more information.

Estate inspections and improvements

- In 2009/10 we carried out 51 estate inspections. To get involved in estate inspections contact your Housing Officer.
- Improvements have been made to communal areas including an upgrade to bin stores at Alamein Gardens and a security entry system at Bridges Drive with funding from the government's Community Cashback scheme where we successfully bid for a grant of £40,000.
- We hold monthly estate surgeries

Anti-Social Behaviour

We use a full range of tools to combat anti social behaviour (ASB) including:

- Acceptable Behaviour Contracts

- Mediation
- Injunctions
- Noise Abatement Notices
- Demoted tenancies and possession action.

In addition, the Civic Centre will, in the future, have a permanent police presence and a police counter in reception.

Delivery

The ASB sub groups focus on named individuals and intervene to address their behaviour as soon as reasonably possible, making use of interventions and referring to projects such as the Youth Intensive Support Programme (YISP) and Family Intensive Support Programme (FIP) where applicable.

6. Value for Money Standard

Value for Money

Making better use of public money is one of the Council's priorities and we aim to reduce our costs while also improving our services to you. We have already made significant progress to help bring down our costs, while continuing to improve our performance and services to residents. We have been directing resources to meet residents' priorities, particularly improvements to tenants' homes and our estates.

We reduced the cost of managing homes from £17.72 per property per week in 2005/6 to £14.47 in 2008/9 and in 2009/10 to £10.03. We have one of the lowest costs compared to other authorities.

Rents

In 2009/10 the average rent was £83.76 per week. Around 35% of HRA expenditure covers repairs and management costs and 19.4% is spent on capital projects such as replacing kitchens and bathrooms, meaning that around 54% of your rent is used to maintain and improve your home, and improve our management services.

A large proportion (30.8%) has to be given back to central government where receipts (rent charges) are pooled centrally and redistributed across the country. The Government is currently reviewing this requirement and looking at ways to change the current pooled system.

If you would like any more information on documents mentioned in this report or any other information on the housing service please look on our website www.dartford.gov.uk or contact us directly.

Appendix A: Action Plan - TSA Annual Report

All actions to be completed by April 2011

A - RESIDENT INVOLVEMENT AND EMPOWERMENT STANDARD		
Number	Action	Theme
A1	Review and update the Housing Customer Charter	Customer Service
A2	Publicise more widely the Housing Customer Charter and set up monitoring mechanisms	Customer Service
A3	Consider more innovative ways of communicating with tenants and leaseholders including the use of text services	Customer Service
A4	Review the way customer satisfaction surveys are carried out across the housing service	Customer Service
A5	Ensure that performance information is published regularly on line, in the Link and in the Civic Centre	Customer Service
A6	Make our mutual exchange scheme available through Kent Homechoice	Choice
A7	Move towards a single joint assessment form for all members of Kent CBL partnership making it easier for applicants to register their housing applications	Choice
A8	Monitor the type and level of informal complaints	Complaints
A9	Adapt our service to learn from customer's comments and complaints	Complaints
A10	Inform tenants of how we use complaints to improve our services	Complaints
A11	Carry out a recruitment campaign for resident involvement	Offering residents opportunities to be involved

A12	Publicise existing resident involvement and the impact of involvement activities that have taken place	Offering residents opportunities to be involved
A13	Look into new ways to better engage residents	Offering residents opportunities to be involved
A14	Review the existing resident involvement agreement	Offering residents opportunities to be involved
A15	Consult with tenants and leaseholders to develop local standards	Agreeing local standards
A16	Agree arrangements with residents for the monitoring and reviewing of local standards	Agreeing local standards
A17	Roll out more neighbourhood agreements	Agreeing local standards
A18	Produce regular articles in the Link on reporting back on how we take residents' views into account and highlighting examples of where this has influenced services	Providing opportunities to influence
A19	Develop a performance report with residents on the issues that matter	Providing opportunities to influence
A20	Agree a plan for involving tenants and leaseholders in monitoring, reviewing and producing future annual reports	Providing opportunities to influence
A21	Check that the information we hold on our residents' needs is up to date	Improve our understanding of residents' needs
A22	Use a variety of methods to try to involve harder to reach groups of residents in all aspects of our service	Improve our understanding of residents' needs
A23	Update the procedure for dealing with racist and religiously motivated hate crime in line with the arrangements across Kent	Improve our understanding of residents' needs

B - HOME STANDARD

Number	Action	Theme
B1	Bring 100% of tenants' homes up to a decent standard in 2010/2011	Quality of accommodation
B2	Benchmark the current works programme against the number of failures	Quality of accommodation
B3	Continue to investigate ways of improving the energy efficiency of homes	Quality of accommodation
B4	Publish a refreshed Business Plan	Quality of accommodation
B5	Continue with the Here to Help scheme to improve insulation	Quality of accommodation
B6	Continue exploring the benefits of the retrofit programme and promote the work we do to improve energy efficiency	Quality of accommodation
B7	Agree with residents a 'local standard' for repairs and maintenance	Repairs and maintenance
B8	Produce a new repairs handbook with the Breyer Group and the Dartford Residents' Forum	Repairs and maintenance
B9	Maintain and develop resident involvement at all levels of the partnership	Repairs and maintenance
B10	Monitor performance and costs to ensure we compare well with other landlords	Repairs and maintenance
B11	Put relevant information on notice boards in the borough	Repairs and maintenance
B12	Feedback results of estate inspections	Repairs and maintenance
B13	Work towards ensuring that repairs and improvements are completed 'right first time'	Repairs and maintenance

C - TENANCY STANDARD

Number	Action	Theme
C1	Move towards a common assessment process for housing applicants across Kent	Allocations
C2	Reduce re-let times to 22 days	Allocations
C3	Commence work to carry out a review of the Choice Based Lettings Policy	Allocations
C4	Continue our Tenancy Fraud Project and develop and put into practice an Anti Tenancy Fraud Policy	Tenancy Management

D - NEIGHBOURHOOD AND COMMUNITY STANDARD

Number	Action	Theme
D1	Carry out resident satisfaction surveys on our estates and regularly test customer satisfaction with our cleaning and other estate services	Neighbourhood Management
D2	Encourage more residents to get involved in estate inspections	Neighbourhood Management
D3	Carry out a review of mobility scooter storage in our supported housing schemes	Neighbourhood Management
D4	Carry out benchmarking of the estate service with other landlords to compare costs and performance	Neighbourhood Management
D5	Ensure we continue to work effectively and co-operatively with other agencies	Local area co-operation
D6	Carry out a review of estate surgeries in terms of location and aim to improve attendance through better publicity	Local area co-operation
D7	Continue to consult widely on our new policies and strategies	Local area co-operation
D8	Record and analyse ASB complaints to identify patterns of ASB	Anti social behaviour
D9	Record customer satisfaction with ASB case handling and outcomes	Anti social behaviour
D10	Agree with residents a 'local standard' for ASB	Anti social behaviour

E - VALUE FOR MONEY STANDARD

Number	Action	Theme
E1	Introduce more efficient and effective ways of running services	Value for money
E2	Reduce the costs of repairs and works to empty homes	Value for money
E3	Provide leaseholders with accurate information on costs of planned works to buildings at the earliest opportunity	Value for money
E4	Improve our rent collection rate to 98.3%	Value for money

ਪੰਜਾਬੀ Punjabi 01322 343610	தமிழ் Tamil 01322 343611	Polski Polish 01322 343612	česky Czech 01322 343613	简体中文 Mandarin 01322 343614	Français French 01322 343615
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If you or anybody you know requires this or any other council information in another language, please contact us and we will do our best to provide this for you. Braille, audio tape and large print versions of this document are available upon request.

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Calls are welcome via typetalk

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