

# Housing service report 2011



**Welcome** to your annual Housing service report to tenants which tells you some of the things we have been up to in the last year, how well we are performing and some things we want to do better in the year ahead.

We are committed to providing our tenants with the best possible service we can. We know we do not always get it right but I hope over the next few pages you can see that with your help we are continuing to improve and meet the standards that you expect from us.

I welcome your feedback and ideas and would encourage you to get involved or have your say to help us continue to improve.

We know that for many of you times are hard and that there are a number of challenges facing the city and its residents over the next few months but you can be assured that my teams and I will work as hard as we can to continue to improve your homes and neighbourhoods in the year ahead.

**Nick Cross**  
Senior manager, Housing service



This report will inform you how your housing service compares to the Tenant Services Authority (TSA) national standards all social housing landlords should meet. It updates you on some of the changes we have made based on your feedback over the year 2010/11 and how we plan to improve your housing service this year. A group of tenants have been involved with the design and the content of the report. If you would like to give us your feedback or get involved with the production of the report next year, please call 023 8083 3185.

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## Update on last year's commitments



### We told you how we planned to improve your housing service in our last annual report.

With tenant feedback we have changed the name of the report, added to the content and changed the layout so it is easier for you to read.

We have fed back to you on progress we have made throughout the year in Tenants' Link, and have highlighted some other improvements below. There is more detailed information about how we have changed and plan to change your Housing service in the rest of the report.

**Last year, you said you wanted us to raise standards, deliver high levels of customer satisfaction and provide homes that tenants and leaseholders feel proud of.**

*We:*

Asked tenant inspectors' views how we could improve the way we deal with antisocial behaviour cases and complaints and worked their recommendations into our new procedures.

Refurbished a number of 60 Plus supported housing complexes based on tenants' feedback to ensure it meets their and future tenants' needs.

Worked with the Tenants' Federation to create more tenant involvement opportunities.

Asked you how we can improve the repairs service when it is redesigned, how decent neighbourhoods money should be spent to improve your areas, and which housing improvements we need to focus on as a priority (Tenants' Conference in May 2011).

Set up a Decent Neighbourhoods Stakeholder group so tenants from different parts of the city can meet to share ideas and successes, and learn from each other's experience.

**Last year, you said you wanted safe and secure neighbourhoods where people respect each other.**

*We:*

Involved tenants in piloting a new estate inspection system and have conducted walkabouts with housing management officers to ensure we do the work you want.

Work with local organisations to develop joint approaches to tackle domestic abuse and antisocial behaviour.

Completed estate improvement schemes after asking tenants which changes would most improve the quality of their estates.

Establish what tenants' needs are when they move in, to help us support them to sustain their tenancy, so that you have more settled communities.

**Last year, you said you wanted us to understand and meet your needs at an individual and local level.**

*We have:*

Started working on estate plans and income patch plans for local areas, to help us understand more about who lives on which estate so we can provide services that fit local tenants' needs more closely.

Recently piloted local estate newsletters in five areas of the city to update tenants on more local housing news.

Reviewed our process for agreeing and installing adaptations to properties

Restructured our service so that housing management officers spend more time on your estates, picking up local issues and responding to local needs.

# Tenant involvement and empowerment

## The TSA standard states that we should:

- Offer a wide range of opportunities for tenants and leaseholders to get involved in the Housing service, providing support and training to help them to do this.
- Consult with tenants and develop “local offers” which are commitments agreed between us and our tenants about the service we will deliver locally.
- Create opportunities for tenants to scrutinize the service.

## What have we been doing?

*We:*

Involved tenants to develop a new strategy “Having Your Say, Doing Your Bit” which tells tenants how they can get involved to improve the Housing service or make a difference in their neighbourhoods.

Worked with tenants to establish eight local offers to improve tenant and leaseholder involvement in the city. We will continue to develop the service over the next year to make sure that we meet them.

### The eight local offers cover:

- 1 Tenant training.
- 2 Tenant involvement and feedback.
- 3 Getting more tenants involved.
- 4 Improvement of staff commitment to tenant involvement.
- 5 Service improvements.
- 6 Promote opportunities for tenants to design more tailored services.
- 7 Improvement in tenant satisfaction, an increase in opportunities for tenants’ scrutiny at a local level.
- 8 Increased value for money in tenant involvement.

Get involved by requesting our tenant involvement leaflet. Call 023 8083 3185.



“I was involved in this very interesting piece of work, which should move tenant participation forward with more input from tenants and leaseholders in the future.”

Ray Harris, Bitterne.

*We:*

Reviewed our Tenants’ Link magazine with tenants to make it more useful, relevant and interesting for tenants and leaseholders.

Tell you about the difference tenants have made to local communities in Tenants’ Link, to recognise their efforts and to inspire others to get involved.

## Tenants leading the way...

We are in the process of setting up two new groups for tenants to monitor our performance and ensure we provide you with value for money. They are:

**The Tenant’s Panel** – Will receive regular performance updates from us which they can use to question us about what we are doing and how well.

**The Resources Group** - Will look at how we spend your money on home improvements and day to day work.

If you would like to join one of these groups call 023 8083 3185.



Samantha Pia Owen reviewed Tenants’ Link with us and on receiving the latest edition said:

“Wow. The new look Tenants’ Link magazine came today and what a surprise. I was asked my views on it last year and I was surprised to see that staff listened to us and made most of the changes I had put forward, including a trial of a local issue for each estate. Well done to all the staff.”



Did you know?

## In 2010/11 tenant inspectors reviewed the following services:

### 1. Antisocial behaviour service

We now use the action plans recommended by them, and provide more feedback to complainants.

### 2. Warden service

We are using their feedback to help plan the future service.

### 3. Community Alarm Responding service

Their ideas for better joint working are being considered by us.



Holyrood tenants won a grant of £140,000 over three years with our support. This was spent on a play area that makes a huge difference to the local community.

## How have we been doing?

£8,945 Spent on tenant training last year.

220

Tenant training course places booked, at an average cost of £40.65 per place. Courses were on equality and diversity, writing questionnaires, applying for grants, dealing with ASB, treasurer training, minute taking, and how to organise a street party.

112

Tenants trained, some of whom did more than one course.

£113,601



Grant funding obtained by tenants’ groups to make a difference in their neighbourhoods in 2010/11 (up from £50,000 in 2009/10).

758



Tenants sit on our ‘sounding board’ who we involve in shaping your housing service (up from 666 at the end of 2009/10).

67%

Tenants think the council listens to their views.

61%

Tenants think the council acts on their views.

75%

Tenants think the council encourages them to get involved.

The above figures are from the 2010 Tenant and Leaseholder Survey findings.

## From your feedback we will:

- Work with tenants and leaseholders to monitor the eight ‘local offers’ and the actions in your tenant and leaseholder involvement strategy “Having Your Say, Doing Your Bit”.
- Ensure you are as involved as you would like to be to in shaping the Housing service, and making a difference in your communities.
- Continue to develop our tenants’ training programme, to support and inspire more of you to become involved, and develop the skills that will be useful in volunteering or applying for paid work.
- Ensure we set up the Resources Group and Tenants’ Panel by the end of 2011.
- Introduce a programme of tenant mystery shopping for different service areas, so interested tenants can feed back to us on their experience to help us improve.

## Customer service, choice and complaints

### The TSA standard states that we should:

- Take into account the diverse needs of tenants.
- Make it easy to complain and deal with complaints fairly.

### What have we been doing?

You can contact us in a number of ways – via letter, email, telephone and website, or in person. If required, we can communicate with you in a particular language, by telephone or in person, rather than by letter.

You can make a complaint, compliment, or comment on our service, in a number of ways and we publish our complaints process to help you.

### How have we been doing?



Complaints we responded to in 10 working days (down from 91% in 2009/10).



Complaints we resolved at the first stage of the complaint process. 20 complaints went on to stage 2 (19 in 2009/10), and 2 (6 in 2009/10) to stage 3 before being resolved.

### From your feedback we will:

- Continue to research what your individual and collective needs and local priorities are to help us meet them.
- Analyse your complaints in more detail to learn lessons, and improve your services. We will publish the highlights of our findings for all tenants to see.
- Involve the Tenants' Panel to help us improve the way we deal with complaints and to resolve complex issues.

## Understanding and responding to the diverse needs of tenants

### The TSA standard states that we should:

- Treat tenants with fairness and respect and understand different needs.

### What have we been doing?

*We:*

Introduced a new set of values for staff which include customer focus, customer involvement, dignity and caring. We discuss how well staff meet these values and how we can improve our standards in their appraisals.

Developed our 60 Plus Supported Housing service to give the right type and level of support to meet individual tenants' needs. The teams have extended their service to support older vulnerable people who do not live in supported housing complexes.

Found out if new tenants have any support needs, or need communication in a particular format, so we know from the start if they need some extra help from us to manage their tenancy.



### How have we been doing?

Our waiting list for disabled adaptations (down from 2 years in 2009/10).



Average number of people 60 years of age and over, supported by our housing and support staff each month.



Verdict of our tenant inspectors' Community Alarm Responding service review, when they compared it to similar services of other providers. They told us it is considered to be very valuable by users.

### From your feedback we will:

- Continue work to develop an equalities action plan, and train and brief staff to make sure they understand diversity issues.
- Use our tenant information to develop more tailored support, to assist tenants to manage their tenancies and deal with financial issues.
- Review our adaptations policy to consider whether we should adapt certain types of property to offer a better service to people who have particular needs.

## Your home and repairs service

### The TSA standard states that we should:

- Make sure that homes meet the Decent Homes standard by the 31 December 2010.
- Provide a cost effective repairs service that gets the job right first time, and ensures all of our homes are safe.

### What have we been doing?

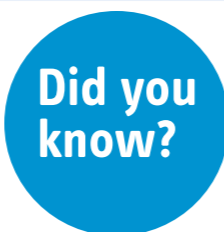
*We:*

Met the Government's Decent Homes standard, and are now looking at how we can improve properties over and above this basic standard.

Worked with the tenants' Capital Group to get their views and make decisions together on what the priorities for investment should be.

Have been working to decide how we can improve the repairs service.

Have refurbished some of our supported housing complexes so that they meet the needs of both current and future tenants. This includes the installation of showers in some bedsits, the conversion of some bedsits to one bedroom flats and improvements to communal areas.



**53,456** Number of repairs ordered (up from 51,168 in 2009/10).

**£112** Average cost per repair (up from £110 in 2009/10).

When you have a repair done you will get a questionnaire - don't forget to complete it and give us your feedback.

### How have we been doing?

**1,614** New kitchens were installed in 2010/11.

**1,110** New bathrooms were installed in 2010/11.

**100%** Annual gas safety checks completed (the same as in 2009).

**86%** Tenants are satisfied with their home as a place to live (findings from 2010 tenant and leaseholder survey).

**83%** Tenants are satisfied with repairs and maintenance to their home (down from 90% in 2009, findings from 2010 tenant and leaseholder survey).

**95%** Repairs completed on time 2010/11 (down from 96% in 2009).

### From your feedback we will:

- Work with the new Resources Group to establish how best to spend your money to improve homes and neighbourhoods, and your day to day services.
- Involve tenants in the redesign of the repairs service to increase the number of repairs we complete in the first visit. Our aim is for the tradesperson to always turn up on the right day, with the right materials to complete the job.
- Use hand held devices to allocate work to our trades people and stock their vans with materials required for most jobs. This will make better use of their time, increase the number of repairs done each day, and deliver a better repair service to you overall.
- Replace the remaining 1,450 kitchens and 2,500 bathrooms that still need to be upgraded. This work will take place over the next two years.

# Neighbourhoods, communities, and antisocial behaviour

## The TSA standard states that we should:

- Keep neighbourhoods, and communal areas safe and clean.
- Work with our partners to promote social, environmental, and economic well being in your communities.
- Work in partnership with others to prevent and tackle antisocial behaviour.

## What have we been doing?

*We:*

Conducted walkabouts with local tenants to check their neighbourhoods and identify work that needs to be done.

Ensure our local wardens carry out health and safety checks and block cleans to keep blocks safe and tidy.

Produced a new antisocial behaviour policy in which we agreed to give better feedback to tenants as you told us we did not do this well.

Have signed up to the RESPECT Antisocial Behaviour Charter for Housing – a series of commitments based on good practice and designed to improve antisocial behaviour services to you.

Meet regularly with the police to plan joint work to deal with antisocial behaviour more effectively.

Publish information on how we deal with antisocial behaviour in Tenants' Link.

Work with the Estate Regeneration team to ensure local people are given job opportunities on the new developments whenever possible, so they feel involved in and benefit directly from the project.

Develop our Decent Neighbourhood schemes with tenants so they meet local needs, promote a sense of ownership, and improve the quality of the estates.

Have worked with tenants to ensure they have any support they need to manage their tenancies and are given advice on maximising income and dealing with debt.

Completed Decent Neighbourhood projects in Weston, Itchen, Townhill Park, Kingsland and Sholing, and verge parking in Millbrook.



*We:*

Run Junior Warden events throughout the year to help young people develop their skills and knowledge and support them to be responsible citizens and to make a difference in their community. Recent projects worked on include a mosaic at Shirley Towers and gardening projects across the city including Milner Court, Willow Court, Bisley Court, Medwell Court and Toronto Court.

Support weekly Junior Warden clubs which teach young people to work as a team, making a positive difference in their local area.



## How have we been doing?



Tenants satisfied with their area as a place to live (up from 69% in 2008).



Occasions when evidence of antisocial behaviour was supplied by the concierge service to the police (up from 168 in 2009/10).



Antisocial behaviour cases per 1000 properties (lower than the national figure of 17.72).



Notices of seeking possession served for antisocial behaviour.



Acceptable Behaviour Contracts signed.



Referrals to New Forest Assessment Service (down from 345 in 2009/10).



## From your feedback we will:

- Improve the way we carry out estate inspections, so that we also identify how much they have helped to improve the condition of your neighbourhoods.
- Measure how satisfied people who make antisocial behaviour complaints are with the way we have dealt with their complaints, and the improvements made to the service as a result of them.
- Develop an antisocial behaviour video game with local young people, to highlight the consequences of antisocial behaviour and discourage it.
- Continue to develop our tenant training programme. This includes courses to help tenants gain skills which will assist with volunteering or applying for work.

## Did you know?



Junior Warden events held in 2010/11.



Junior Wardens across the city.



Estate inspections completed in 2010/11.



**“It was really interesting to inspect the antisocial behaviour service and I’m glad the council took on board our suggestions for improvement.”**

Ross Davis, Townhill Park, tenant inspector.

## Your rent and tenancy

### The TSA standard states that we should:

- Follow the Government's rules and guidelines for setting rents.
- Offer the most secure form of tenancy to create sustainable communities.

### What have we been doing?

*We...*

Explained how we set the rent to tenants who attended our 2010 annual winter conference, to help them understand the financial pressures and constraints we have to work within.

Work with the Rent Focus Group to look at how we manage rent collection and rent arrears, and get their ideas on how we can manage in a better way for you.

Introduced payment cards which tenants can pay rent and contents insurance with, at over 100 Pay Point and Post Office locations across the city, which have longer opening hours than housing offices.

Introduced 'any day' direct debits which allow tenants to choose which date their rent is paid out of their bank account.

Restructured our staff to include a team of Income Officers who specifically deal with rent arrears. They offer support and financial advice at an early stage to tenants who are struggling to pay their rent, to help prevent the issue from becoming a bigger concern for tenants.

Piloted annual tenancy visits in tower blocks to make sure properties are safe and secure, and to get current household and family details.

### How are we doing?

82%

Tenants had a settling in visit in the first six weeks of their tenancy.

585

Tenants referred to the Welfare Rights Unit for specialist debt and benefit advice.

19

Evictions for rent arrears (down from 22 in 2009/10).

2.7%

Rent arrears at end of year (up from 2.35% at end of 2009/10).



### From your feedback we will:

- Text rent account balances to tenants who use payment cards, so they can manage their accounts more easily.
- Work with tenants from the start of their tenancy to make sure they have the right financial advice and any support they need to manage their tenancy, and to prevent rent arrears building up. We understand that times are difficult and want to help you before the problem escalates.
- Develop income patch plans to allow us to deal with rent arrears in different areas of the city in different ways, as we understand that tenants' needs vary.
- Make our arrears processes clearer for you to understand and introduce tighter controls over cases which have court orders.

## Letting you a home

### The TSA standard states that we should:

- Make sure we let homes fairly, our reasons for making decisions are clear and that applicants can appeal against decisions.
- Make the best use of our housing stock and support sustainable communities where people are settled and happy to stay.

### What we have been doing?

*We...*

Offer homes based on the applicant's family size and need, to make the best use of our limited housing resource.

Use the Homebid system (choice based lettings) that allows tenants to choose a home in the area they want to live in.

Have supported older people who no longer need to live in a larger property to move somewhere smaller and more manageable, and to free up larger homes for families.

Piloted a new way of letting our new build homes, which involved checking whether the applicant had ever been involved in antisocial behaviour and their current home's condition before offering them a new property.

Introduced Homewsapper, a UK wide internet site that allows our tenants to look across the country to find a suitable exchange.

### How are we doing?

25.5

Average days it takes us to relet an empty property (down from 32 days in 2009/10).

33

Properties built under the Local Authority New Build scheme. Another 20 are due to be completed this year. This is funded by money awarded by central government following a bid we made. These are the first new homes to be built by the council in over 16 years.

73%

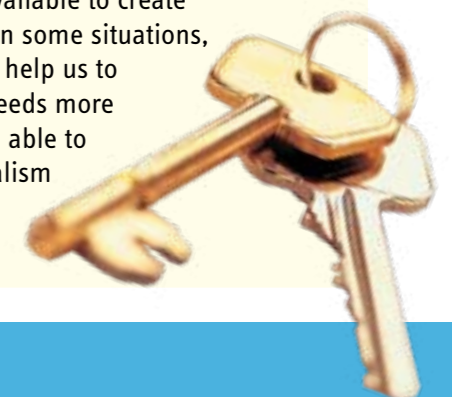
Tenants satisfied with the overall condition of their new home.

Val Morgan lived in a three bedroom house in Sholing for over 30 years and decided to move into a smaller two bedroom flat in Bitterne. She said:

**"This is the best thing I could have done. It's everything I could want and I am very pleased that a large family with four children are now living in my old house."**

### From your feedback we will:

- Review our 'Moving In and Moving Out' standards so that:
  - Tenants leave their properties in a good condition when they move out, so we can reduce the time and cost of getting them ready for the next tenant.
  - Tenants are happy with their new home when they move in.
- Develop our tenancy policy to balance our commitments to meet the needs of applicants for re-housing, while making the best use of our stock, and creating settled communities.
- Look at the options available to create fixed term tenancies in some situations, to find out if this may help us to meet local housing needs more effectively. We will be able to do this when the Localism Bill becomes law.



# Value for money

## The TSA standard states that we should:

- Manage resources to provide cost-effective, efficient, quality services and homes to meet tenants' and potential tenants' needs.

### What have we been doing?

*We:*

Looked at how we can make the repairs service more cost effective.

Carried out some staff and resident training in house to avoid the cost of hiring an external trainer.

Replaced our summer conference with a fortnight of involvement activities in 2011 called "MAD (Make A Difference) September" to reach a greater number of people for less cost.

Restructured our housing service and income service to ensure our staff spend more time in your area.

Encouraged people who need adaptations and are under occupying large properties to move to smaller homes as a longer term solution.

Looked at the cost and quality of a contractor's service before we give them work because the cheapest does not always represent the best value for money.

### From your feedback we will:

- Use the opportunity of self financing (a new financial regime for local authority housing) to develop a long term plan for improving our housing in a more cost effective way.
- Compare our costs with other social housing providers.
- Encourage residents to increase recycling on estates to help the environment and reduce waste management costs.
- Review the way we do our disabled adaptations to identify alternative materials that could be used to save money.
- Involve tenants to help us deliver value for money through the Tenants' Panel and the Resources Group.



**"I think this is a great idea and way for the council to consult with residents. I also enjoyed my ice cream."**

Linda Pellington, Holyrood tenant who was given an ice cream for her views at a local MAD September event.

### How have we been doing?

**£150,000**

Saved by the introduction of payment cards which reduce the costs of housing office reception facilities.

**12.5%**

Amount we save on postage costs on an ongoing basis. We send mail centrally, to benefit from a discount offered by the postal service. We save 4p for every first class letter and 3p for every second class letter.

**£66,000**

Secured from utility companies to spend on insulation. We added £31,000 to this budget to ensure 514 lofts were insulated and 257 properties had their cavity walls filled.

### Did you know?

We will take performance information to the Tenants' Panel so that they can judge in detail whether we are giving a value for money service and work with us to improve your housing service.

We will work with the Resources Group to make sure we spend money effectively on improving homes and neighbourhoods, and on day to day services.

This written information is available on request in other formats or languages. Please contact 023 8083 3185 for help.

[www.southampton.gov.uk/tenants](http://www.southampton.gov.uk/tenants)