

# **DARTFORD** **BOROUGH COUNCIL**

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**ANNUAL REPORT  
TO TENANTS AND  
LEASEHOLDERS 2010**

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Tel: 01322 343434

Fax: 01322 343432

Email: [customer.services@dartford.gov.uk](mailto:customer.services@dartford.gov.uk)

Calls are welcome via typetalk

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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# 1. INTRODUCTION

## **Peter Dosad, Head of Housing**

We have produced this draft annual report for the year ending 31 March 2010 in line with the Tenant Services Authority's (TSA's) requirements. We are required to report to our tenants how we are performing when compared to the standards set out by the TSA for all social housing landlords. This report outlines our performance, how we will deliver housing services and looks to identify any weaknesses and set out what improvements we intend to make.

This draft reflects our views and what our tenant and leaseholder representatives have told us about how they think we measure up to the TSA's standards. It also includes their suggestions on how we can improve. We have set out the commitments and actions we propose to take by 31 March 2011 to improve our services and meet the TSA's standards and these may change as a result of the comments we get back from you.

We would now like to hear from all our tenants and leaseholders, so that as many of you as possible are involved in producing and reviewing this report before it is published in the autumn.

Tenant and leaseholder representatives told us that the annual report should not be too long, so we will also produce a shorter, summary version of this report to send to all tenants and leaseholders. The full version of the report will be made available to any tenant and leaseholder who requests a copy in a format that suits their needs.

The report will be approved by members of the Cabinet at their meeting in October 2010, which is the decision making body of the Council. It will then be graphically redesigned to improve its appearance and make it easy to read.

For more information about the TSA and the Regulatory Framework, please visit the TSA website at [www.tenantservicesauthority.org](http://www.tenantservicesauthority.org).

We look forward to hearing your comments and suggestions.

## 2. WELCOME

### Jeremy Kite, Leader of the Council and Portfolio Member for Housing



Welcome to this draft annual report setting out our performance as a landlord in the year ending 31 March 2010 and the commitments we propose to make to Council tenants and leaseholders for this current year.

Tenants and leaseholders, quite rightly, have a powerful influence at Dartford Borough Council. This report shows some of the many examples of how tenants and leaseholders shape our housing policies and priorities and the ways we provide landlord services and how you check on our performance.

I'm pleased to report that we achieved some big improvements to our services in 2009/10, working in partnership with tenants and leaseholders and getting better value for money. In particular, the new housing maintenance partnership with the Breyer Group means we can ensure that every tenant's home meets the Decent Homes Standard and provides a better service to all of you. We still have room for improvement, however, and the report sets out how we intend to work with you to provide excellent Housing Services.

I would like to thank all our tenant and leaseholder representatives and staff who have worked very hard in the last year to bring about real improvements in our Housing Service. By working closely together, we are making steady progress towards achieving excellence in all our housing services and making the improvements we set out in our Housing Services Improvement Plan.

## 3. FACTS AND FIGURES

### Our vision

Dartford Borough Council is a borough council in the north of Kent with the vision to make Dartford ‘the place of quality and choice, a place where people choose to live, work and enjoy their leisure time’.

The Council’s corporate housing aim is to “facilitate quality, choice and diversity in the housing market and create strong and self reliant communities”.

### Governing arrangements

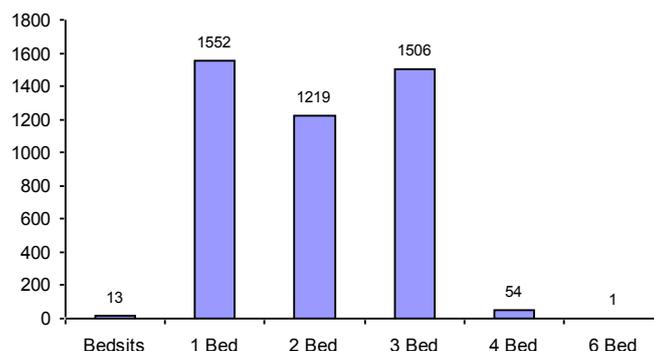
The Cabinet is the decision making body of the Council and is made up of elected Members. It sets the overall policy direction and budget for the Council. It sets priorities and resources to meet the needs of the community. Each member has a portfolio of responsibilities with Housing belonging to the Leader of the Council, Councillor Jeremy Kite.

### Stock profile

The Council owns and manages its own housing stock. At 31 March 2010 Dartford Borough Council had 4,345 rented homes. This includes a stock of 595 supported housing units for older people in 14 schemes across the borough. The Council also manages 402 leasehold flats. The stock itself is spread across the borough and is mainly houses and low rise flats.

Chart 1 below shows how our stock is broken down into bedroom sizes:

**Chart 1: Bedroom size of housing stock**



### Tenant profile

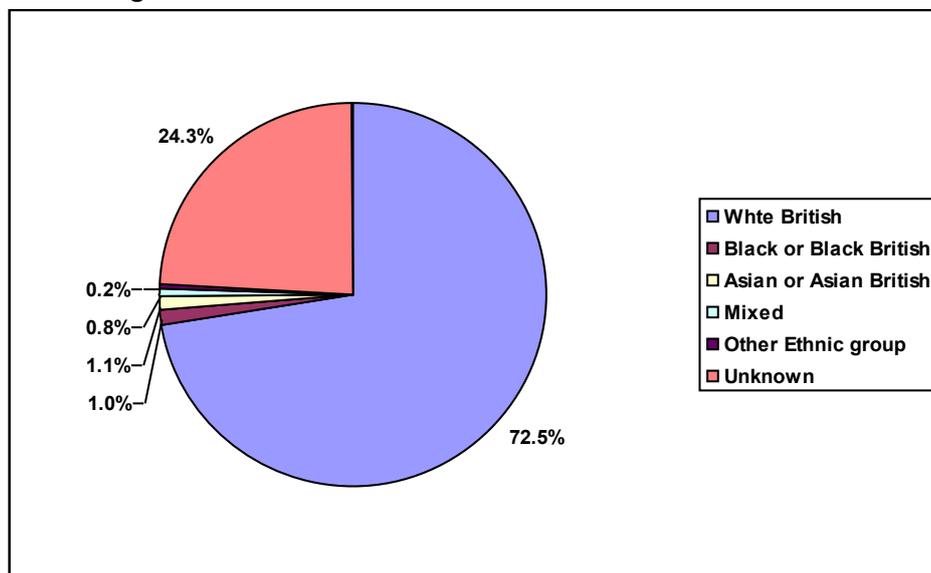
Made up of sole and joint tenancies, there are 5,450 tenants in total.

**Gender** - 37.52% of our tenants are male; 62.42% are female; and, 0.05% chose not to supply us with gender information.

**Age** - 6.29% of our tenants are under 25 years old; 63.38% are aged 25 to 64; and, 30.33% are aged over 65 years.

**Ethnicity** – Chart 2 below shows that the majority of our tenants are of White British ethnic origin (72.53%) and 3.1% are from an ethnic minority or mixed background. 24.3% of tenants did not supply information on ethnicity.

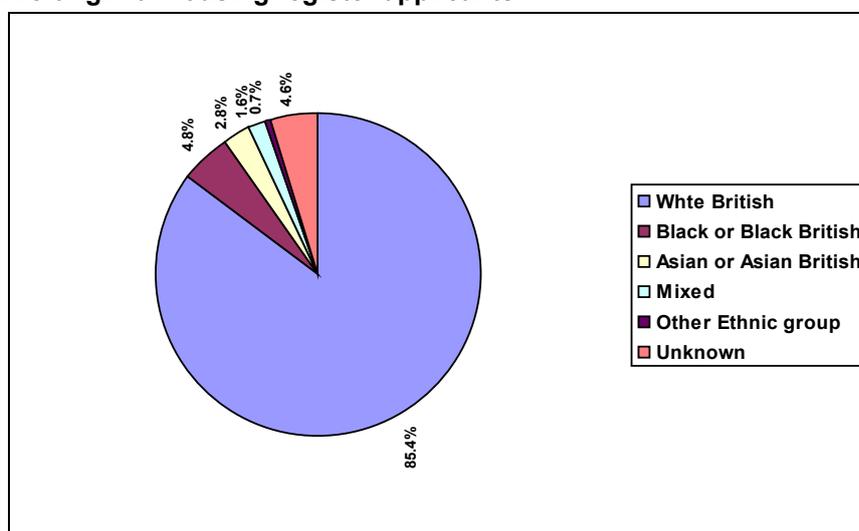
**Chart 2: Ethnic origin of tenants**



### **Housing Register applicants**

There are currently 3760 people on our housing register, made up of the ethnic groups depicted in the following chart. As with our tenants, the majority of people on the housing register are white British.

**Chart 3 Ethnic origin of housing register applicants**



**Disability** – 6.07% of our tenants have told us that they have a physical disability.

### **Housing Services staff profile**

The Housing Services team, excluding Housing Policy and Development and housing Options and Advice, employs around 50 members of staff in Allocations (CBL), Housing Finance, Housing Maintenance and Housing Management. The Housing Management team employ 11 members of staff to manage our housing stock (see structure charts in Appendix A).

## 4. RESIDENT INVOLVEMENT AND EMPOWERMENT STANDARD

### How our tenants were involved in this report

Having previously worked with our Residents' Forum during the creation of the TSA and its role as the new social housing regulator, we held our initial workshop with the Forum in August 2010 to fully explain the reasoning behind and development of the annual report. Discussions at this meeting were wide ranging but essentially centred on how standards will be monitored and the process of developing local standards. Many members of the Forum had already heard of the TSA and its possible abolition but were also aware that the regulatory framework would still be in place.

The Forum considered a number of issues including how it could increase the diversity and number of members; reflected that leaseholders are equally affected by the standards set by government as tenants; and that there were many areas where the Forum felt that standards could be helpful in terms of expectations and transparency.

The Forum agreed the following recommendations to be taken forward:

- That the Council use the term 'local standard' as opposed to 'local offer' in its annual report and subsequent publications as it is more user friendly.
- A local standard should be developed to increase the membership and diversity of the Residents' Forum.

The Forum also discussed the development of the annual report, what it should look like and how it should be distributed. There was unanimous agreement that the report should be:

- Easily understood
- In plain English
- Include a glossary (see Appendix B)
- Include pictures to break up blocks of text
- Include simple tables, charts and diagrams
- Include how residents can get involved with resident participation activities
- Include a feedback form
- Explain how to access the report in other formats

It was also agreed that the report will be distributed as a summary to the wider body of tenants and leaseholders and to include a summary in the Council's tenant and leaseholder newsletter, 'the Link'. Other suggestions include putting it on the website, in libraries and community centres and in the welcome pack.

The Forum is actively involved in the monitoring of services through portfolio members, contractor monitoring and a Joint Liaison Group. The group meets three times a year and comprises of the Leader of the Council, representatives from all political parties, the Forum and senior officers of the Council. The report and the development of local standards will also be considered at the meeting of the Joint Liaison Group in September 2010.

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

## **Customer Service**

As a customer facing service we understand the importance of ensuring that our residents can contact us easily and quickly via various mediums. We also understand the importance of understanding our resident's 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 in customer service, equalities and diversity; and the position is regularly reviewed.

### **Accessing the Housing Service**

There are various ways you can contact us:

- Visiting, phoning or writing to us at the Civic Centre or cash office where there are also free phones to other services, cash desks for rent payments and internet access for interactive services in the main reception area
- Live Chat
- Texting
- E-mailing individual officers or teams
- Repairs can be reported by phone 24 hours a day, 7 days a week
- Estate surgeries, out of hours meetings, attendance at fairs, open days and the Dartford Festival

### **Contact details and opening times**

See **Section 9** of this report for our contact details and opening times.

You can visit our website [www.dartford.gov.uk/housing](http://www.dartford.gov.uk/housing) which had over 25,300 hits in 2009. It has a large range of information and you can check your rent account or pay your rent online, report a repair or track your repair, check your housing application or view available properties. We also use it to get customer feedback from surveys; for example, Kent Homechoice, our choice based lettings scheme. Work is currently underway to redesign the website to make it much more customer friendly and the housing team are at the forefront of those discussions.

Staff provide home visits to residents who cannot come to our offices, and regularly attend and support residents meetings outside office hours. At the Civic Centre we offer a duty officer facility where callers can see a housing officer without an appointment. The Contact Centre at the Civic Centre is also able to deal with basic housing enquiries.

### **Customer satisfaction with the Housing Service**

The STATUS Survey is the standardised tenant satisfaction survey that local authorities have been required to carry out every two years. The key outcomes of the last survey in 2008 are shown below.

### **STATUS Survey 2008 - Tenant satisfaction with the Housing Service**

- 77% of our tenants were satisfied with the service
- 63% of our tenants last contacted us by phone
- 64% of our tenants found staff helpful
- 58% of our tenants found that staff were able to deal with their problems

In a national context, levels of satisfaction with landlords have varied little over time. The average level across all English local authorities as measured by previous rounds of the STATUS Survey has remained consistent at 77%. District and unitary authorities consistently demonstrate the highest levels of satisfaction whereas London boroughs, on average, show the lowest levels of satisfaction.

Current levels of tenant satisfaction in Dartford are, therefore, comparable with levels seen across all English local authorities. It should also be noted that due to changes in the survey methodology, the 2008 survey did not include tenants in supported housing schemes (although they were included in the 2006 survey). This is important as, at a national level, satisfaction levels are usually higher with older tenants and lower with younger ones.

The government announced recently the abolition of the requirement to carry out STATUS Surveys. This is due to their commitment to shift power away from government and back to local authorities and communities to reduce centrally imposed data burdens.

We feel that gathering the views of our residents about the services we provide is vital for measuring and assessing how we deliver the requirements of the regulatory framework. As you will see from the below examples and throughout the report, we use various other survey methods for measuring satisfaction in addition to the standardised STATUS Survey. Whilst we are no longer required to carry it out, we will review what to put in its place alongside our own feedback methods to ensure consistency and that any gaps are addressed.

### **Customer satisfaction with the Supported Housing service**

We use using customer satisfaction surveys at supported schemes for all new tenants and carried out a general satisfaction survey in 2009 called the Supported Housing Service Questionnaire.

This questionnaire was issued to the Councils residents of its 14 supported housing schemes in August 2009. 587 questionnaires were issued and 308 questionnaires were returned, equating to a return rate of 52%.

Over 80% of residents are satisfied, or very satisfied, with the overall housing related support service provided. Satisfaction levels fall slightly in respect of building and maintenance issues, with over 20% being dissatisfied with improvements made to their building; however, 77% are satisfied or very satisfied with the overall repairs, improvements and maintenance works that have been carried out.

This survey supports Housing Services view that there are no essential changes to be made to the Supported Housing service in the immediate future and this would be supported by Kent County Council's Supporting People assessment that our service is an A grade (the best).

### **Customer satisfaction with the Repairs service**

We carried out a repairs customer satisfaction survey in 2009/10. The results of the survey showed:

- 96.7% of our residents were happy with the service that they received for gas servicing
- 96.4% of our residents were happy with the service they received for repairs

Our new repairs contractor, the Breyer Group will carry out regular customer satisfaction surveys on a 10% sample of customers through telephone surveys. This will be done on a monthly basis and the questions that will be asked have been agreed by the Residents' Forum. The Council will also survey 10% of customers to ensure consistency.

### **Information about services**

We provide our tenants with a wide range of information about the services they receive, including a welcome pack for tenants and leaseholders, quarterly rent statements, information leaflets and a housing customer charter. All of our information can be provided in different formats on request including large type, audio tapes or CDs, Braille, electronically, or translated into other languages where requested. The tenants' and leaseholders' welcome pack has been updated with approval from the Residents' Forum and will be sent to all tenants and leaseholders in Autumn 2010.

In particular, our housing customer charter sets out our customer service standards. We will be involving residents in reviewing the housing customer charter this year in developing local standards for services to you.

Our quarterly resident newsletter 'the Link' informs and consults all tenants and leaseholders about our services and proposed changes. We also report repairs information in every edition of the Link along with details of planned works programmes. Updates are also made available on our website.

### **To improve our customer service to you, by 31 March 2011 we will:**

- Review and update the housing customer charter
- Publicise more widely the housing customer charter and set up monitoring mechanisms
- Look at using more innovative ways of communicating with tenants and leaseholders including the use of text services
- Review the way customer satisfaction surveys are carried out across the Housing Service
- Ensure that performance information is published regularly online, in the Link and in the Civic Centre. Information is also presented to the Quality Services Committee quarterly.

## Choice

Tenants and leaseholders have a lot of choice in how they contact and interact with us as mentioned earlier in the report.

Tenants and leaseholders can have a choice of appointment time when they report a repair, and can arrange an appointment as soon as they call the repairs team.

Tenants have a choice of finishes, colours and design when their kitchen is replaced. We also provide a choice of styles and colours for replacement doors and windows and for communal decorations. Residents who qualify for free decorating have a choice of wallpapers or colours. Residents were involved at all stages of choosing new contractors and tenant representatives participated fully in the evaluation process and interviews.

Residents also have a choice of four payment dates each month when paying their rent and service charges by direct debit. This was in direct response to the requests made by our customers.

The Council is a partner in a Kent-wide choice based lettings scheme for providing Council homes to new tenants called Kent Homechoice. This scheme is run through a single online website at [www.kenthomechoice.org.uk](http://www.kenthomechoice.org.uk), which advertises vacant properties in Kent centrally. Users of this scheme have choices on how to bid for a property, for example by phone, text, email, post, home appointments and through digital TV.

Our mutual exchange scheme provides choice to tenants who are looking to move and enables them to do so by swapping homes with other tenants. This scheme is currently operated by the Council outside of Kent Homechoice. However, it is planned that in the future it will be included in Kent Homechoice so that applicants only have to use one system making it easier to use.

### **To improve the choices available to you, by 31 March 2011 we will:**

- Make our mutual exchange scheme available through Kent Homechoice
- Move towards a single joint assessment form for all members of Kent CBL partnership making it easier for applicants to register their housing applications

## Complaints

The Council's corporate complaints procedure is advertised in our leaflet, our tenants' and leaseholders' welcome packs and on our website. You can complain in a variety of ways including in person, on the telephone, by e-mail, online through our website or by letter.

We have a three stage complaints process with a designated Corporate Complaints Officer.

We have clear service standards where we aim to:

- Acknowledge a complaint within seven working days
- Resolve a stage 1 complaint within 15 working days
- Resolve a stage 2 complaint within 21 working days

### **Complaint resolving performance**

In 2009/10, 94% of stage 1 complaints were resolved within timescales and 100% of stage 2 complaints were resolved within the timescales.

In housing, for quarter one of this year, 7 complaints were received, 3 were upheld, 2 were dismissed and 2 are under investigation.

None of the complaints that have been investigated by the Council in 2010-2011 have been referred to the Ombudsman for future investigation.

Complaints are monitored corporately and reported to the Quality Services Committee, which is a Councillor led meeting looking at service delivery with the aim of making improvements. However, we do not record or monitor informal complaints, which could give us valuable information to track patterns of complaint and help improve services.

We are committed to learning from what residents tell us and putting things right where changes are needed.

### **To improve the way we deal with complaints, by 31 March 2011 we will:**

- Monitor the type and level of informal complaints
- Adapt our service to learn from customers comments and complaints
- Inform tenants of how we use complaints to improve our service

## **Involvement and Empowerment**

### **Offering residents a wide range of opportunities to be involved**

Dartford has a well established Residents' Forum which acts as the main consultative body for the Housing Service. The Forum is involved in numerous activities including monitoring of contracts and services. Each Forum member has a particular portfolio which they hold for one year relating to a service area and this helps to enable residents to become actively involved in the development and monitoring of a service, including contracted services. The Forum also acts as the main consultative body when new policies and strategies are developed.

There are currently eight members on the committee which meets once a month. The executive committee comprises of the Chairman and four other members who attend the Joint Liaison Group three times per year. The committee are elected for three years to sustain continuity and experience.

Quarterly public meetings are held where any resident can come along, and there is also an annual general meeting.

As well as the Forum, the Council also offers alternative ways to get involved with service delivery. By offering a menu of involvement residents have a choice

in how much or how little they wish to become involved in shaping and monitoring the services they receive. This is hoped to offer a more individual, tailored choice to people who want to give us their views on services or in consultations, to monitor a particular services or become involved in more in depth activities such as the Forum, setting up a residents' group or neighbourhood agreements.

The Forum, although fully trained and now developed into an experienced group, delivering a good service themselves, is not made up of a representative group of Dartford Borough Council tenants and leaseholders as a whole. Many Forum members have been with the Forum for a considerable amount of time and they themselves recognise that they need new members with different backgrounds to continue their work successfully.

This is a common issue amongst providers and we recognise that we need to look at ways of engaging with a broader and more representative group of residents to ensure that any decisions are not biased towards the views of one particular 'type' of resident. When developing local standards, ways of engaging with our under represented residents such as younger people, young families and ethnic minorities will be researched and developed to broaden engagement with those groups.

The Resident Involvement Agreement was agreed with residents on 22 February 2007 and has been regularly reviewed. It sets out how residents are involved in strategic and local housing decisions, the standards that have been agreed for involvement of tenants and leaseholders, meetings and information. Our aim is to review the Resident Involvement Agreement this year, with the help of the Forum.

**To increase the range of opportunities for you to be involved, by 31 March 2011 we will:**

- Carry out a recruitment campaign for resident involvement
- Publicise existing resident involvement and the impact of involvement activities that have taken place
- Look into new ways to better engage residents
- Review our Resident Involvement Agreement

**Consulting with tenants and acting reasonably in providing opportunities to agree 'local standards' for service delivery**

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.

We already have some locally agreed service standards. For example, in two areas we have already established localised neighbourhood agreements which are agreements between the residents of a particular area and the Council. Within the agreement local standards for certain services, for example, cleaning and grounds maintenance are set out along with local priorities, identified by residents, and an action plan to set out how these will be dealt with.

Other partners can be identified as being necessary for the success of such an agreement and are invited to be involved in both the development and the review process to ensure that the action points are completed.

We recently launched our latest neighbourhood agreement for Alamein Gardens. A 'Garden Party' with BBQ was held on the estate with representatives from the Council, Breyer Group and Pinnacle. The event was very well attended and lots of feedback was received from residents on issues around the estate. These will now be turned into actions for improvements to be made.

The Alamein Gardens neighbourhood agreement involves not only residents but also other departments within the Council (the Community safety Unit, Grounds Maintenance, the Community Warden) as well as contractors for the Housing Service including Breyer (repairs and maintenance) and Pinnacle (communal cleaning). A report was presented to Quality Services Committee in September 2010 updating Members on the process and the rolling out of Neighbourhood Agreements. Our approach was both supported and applauded by Members.

**To agree local standards with you, by 31 March 2011 we will:**

- Consult with tenants and leaseholders to develop local standards which meet the needs of local residents' priorities. We will use a variety of ways to give tenants and leaseholders as many opportunities as possible to give us their views and ideas, including our Talking Trailer which can be taken to venues around the borough to reach residents
- Agree arrangements for the regular monitoring and reviewing of local standards. This may include meetings, focus groups and the Residents' Forum
- Carry out self assessments on the service we provide as part of the annual report process alongside assessments made by tenants and leaseholders
- Roll out more neighbourhood agreements

**Supporting and Informing**

We are committed to providing continual training opportunities for residents.

Three of our Forum members have taken the opportunity to complete the CIH Level 2 Award in Community Action in Housing. One member successfully achieved her award this year and we are expecting the remaining members to have completed the course by the end of the year.

All Forum members are encouraged to take up training opportunities, where timely and relevant. This enables Forum members to become more confident in their roles as they have the skills to carry out not only tasks specific to the work of the Forum but also in other areas of life. For example, writing newsletter, chairing skills, equal opportunities and presentation skills. This means that the Forum is better able to complete its role and members can develop both professionally and personally.

As part of our commitment to resident involvement we offer ongoing support, networking opportunities and benchmarking (how Dartford Borough Council compares with other landlords) by making members aware of, and organising

attendance, at events such as the InStep South East Conferences, Tenant Participatory Advisory Service (TPAS) Annual Events and other local community events including the annual Dartford Festival. This also ensures that members are fully aware of developments both within the borough and more widely within the housing sector. This includes keeping up to date with topics that may have an impact on residents for example changes in government, policies or laws and economic climate (i.e. the recession).

Forum members also attend the TPAS annual conference. TPAS training has included equal opportunities and diversity, monitoring and evaluation, presentation skills and making meetings work. We publish information about consultations in the Link newsletter and on our website.

The Forum also reports to tenants and leaseholders about the work that they carry out and information for residents within their own publication – the Forum Focus. This is produced every six months with contributions from all members and written by the Editorial Portfolio group members of the Forum. As the Forum has developed over time they are now more widely called upon to be part of wider consultations from non-housing departments, where services affect residents in the borough. This includes being consulted on the new grounds maintenance contract was under review.

#### **Our dedicated Resident Involvement Officer provides support to the Residents' Forum and to tenants and leaseholders**

To contact the Resident Involvement Officer for more information about getting involved. Telephone Louise Gray on 01322 343841 or email [resident.involvement@dartford.gov.uk](mailto:resident.involvement@dartford.gov.uk).

#### **Providing a range of opportunities to influence how we meet all the TSA's standards, review performance against the standards and in the development of the annual report**

We told residents about the TSA's proposed and final standards through the Link, our website, reports to Cabinet and Forum meetings.

#### **For more information in the TSA's Regulatory Framework**

You can get a copy of the TSA's guide "What does the regulatory framework mean for you? A guide to social housing standards" from the TSA at [www.tenantservicesauthority.org](http://www.tenantservicesauthority.org) or call the TSA on 0845 230 7000 or contact us on 01322 343682.

The plan and timetable for residents to be involved in producing and reviewing this annual report and the development of local standards will be agreed by the Residents' Forum in September 2010 and circulated more widely afterwards.

The report will be made available on our website and a link to the report will be sent to all residents who gave us an email address or telephone number for texting. Copies of this draft report will be available from the Civic Centre and sent to residents on request. For future reports we are looking into increasing input from tenants and leaseholders who are under-represented in our existing

resident groups, such as younger residents and tenants from black and minority ethnic communities.

The issue of the annual report and local standards has also been discussed and developed by the Joint Liaison Group and will be monitored post introduction as part of the monitoring process.

**To provide a range of opportunities for you to influence how we meet all the TSA's requirements, review our performance against the standards and develop the next annual report, by 31 March 2011 we will:**

- Produce a special edition of the Link in September 2010 detailing the TSA standards and the opportunities to become involved in the development of the annual report and local standards
- Have regular articles in the Link newsletter, reporting back to you how we take residents' views into account and highlighting examples where this has influenced services
- Develop a performance report with residents to ensure we are reporting on the issues that are most important to you and that the information is presented in a clear and easily understandable way. We will aim to include, where possible, residents' assessment of the quality of services such as grounds maintenance and customer service. We already do this for repairs and cleaning services.
- Agree a plan for involving tenants and leaseholders in monitoring, reviewing and producing future annual reports, including ways to capture the views of under-represented groups.

**Understanding and responding to the diverse needs of tenants**

We do all we can to make sure our services are open, welcoming and easy to use for people of every age, religion or faith, gender including transgender, sexual orientation, race or ethnicity, and people with disabilities or care and support needs. We achieve this by having, for example:

- An equalities policy and staff training that helps officers respond well to a variety of individual needs, and treat people fairly and with respect
- Accessible offices that meet the requirements of the Disability Discrimination Act, and offering home visits
- An ability to produce information and documentation in different formats and languages at short notice
- Hearing loops in interview rooms, reception and cashiers counters, and big button phones, textphone and a computer for public use on request
- A programme of equality impact assessments, which is a tool for identifying the potential impact of our policies or services on our residents; with actions to make sure our services do not negatively impact on groups of people or individuals
- We have access to language line and provide a translation strap line on all communications

We also:

- Remove racist or hate graffiti within 24 hours

- Have a Domestic Abuse housing strategy
- Have a comprehensive Advice and information leaflet detailing services in Dartford and how to access them
- Arrange support for victims of domestic violence. For example, we make use of the sanctuary scheme which provides added security measures to the victim's home in order for them to be able to remain living there safely.
- Deal with racial harassment and religiously motivated hate crime by instigating same day investigation and response. We take a victim centred approach working with partner agencies on action including interviewing victims and taking appropriate action to deal with the incident depending on the severity of harassment. We have moved tenants in serious cases. The police have two hotlines for reporting hate crime, including one for homophobic hate crime, and an officer dedicated to dealing with it. There is also a racial hate crime forum for north Kent attended by the Community Safety Officer based within the Community Safety Unit.
- Are achieving and working towards excellence in the National Equality Framework for Local Government
- Comply with the CRE (now Commission for Equality and Human Rights) code of practice for racial equality in housing
- Are working to carry out relevant actions in the Council's housing strategies for younger and older people and those suffering from domestic abuse
- Are developing a vulnerable person's housing policy, which will explain how vulnerable residents are identified and supported, or signposted to relevant support services, that will help them successfully sustain their tenancy.

**To improve how we understand and respond to residents' diverse needs, by 31 March 2011 we will:**

- Check that the information we hold on our residents and their needs is up to date so that we can use it to continuously improve how we communicate with and provide services to people or groups with specific needs
- Use a variety of methods to try to involve harder to reach groups of residents in all aspects of our service
- Update the procedure for dealing with racist and religiously motivated hate crime in line with the arrangements across Kent

## **5. HOME STANDARD**

### **Quality of Accommodation**

#### **Decent Homes 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'.

### **Performance against the Decent Homes Standard**

To date, 90.22% of our homes meet the Decent Homes Standard. Only 425 do not meet the current standard.

Approximately 100 households have refused to have major works required in order for the property to meet decent homes. The remaining 325 properties that require works will be completed by December 2010. We have tried to contact the tenants who have refused works and are currently exploring the possibility of enforcing the works. All 100 failures fail on kitchen works under the location of the cooker, under Housing Health and Safety Rating System (HHSRS) legislation.

The stock condition survey also forms a useful evidence base on which to inform the Council's five year Housing Services **Business Plan**, which describes our vision for the future of our housing stock and how we intend to meet the investment requirements necessary to meet the Decent Homes Standard. Our existing Business Plan is coming to the end of its life and so a new Business Plan for the next five years will be published in 2011.

### **New repairs and maintenance contractor**

We will meet the Decent Homes Standard with the help of our newly appointed repairs and maintenance contractor, the **Breyer Group**. The seven year, £28 million contract began on 1 April 2010 with Breyer delivering both reactive repairs (for example fixing a leak) and major improvement programmes, (such as fitting new kitchens and bathrooms).

It is a cost effective service because the evaluation criteria set was based on a 70% quality and 30% cost basis to achieve a partner with the ability to provide a quality service, rather than employing a company that offered their services cheaply. Letting the contract over a long term period means that they can offer competitive prices knowing there is some amount of certainty for the future.

The procurement and evaluation process was extremely thorough with representatives from the Residents' Forum playing an active role in the evaluation of method statements, site visits and the final interview alongside Councillors and senior officers.

All areas of housing maintenance have been included in the contract, including reactive repairs, capital and planned improvement works, preparing empty homes for re-use, and disabled adaptations.

### **Dartford Decent Homes Plus Standard**

Residents were involved in the development of the **Decent Homes Plus Standard**, a higher standard than the Decent Homes Standard during the Stock Options Appraisal in 2004/05. This included a works programme for delivering kitchen and bathroom refurbishments and exterior door replacements.

Over the last 3 years we have replaced 2,966 doors (68% of total stock) and 1,526 kitchens (35% of total stock). We are now starting work on bathroom replacements.

### **Energy efficiency**

The Council is committed to working towards improving the energy efficiency of its housing stock by reducing carbon emissions that result from our heating, our lighting, our water use and the way we manage our homes which helps to lower the environmental impact on climate change.

Energy efficiency is measured using the 'Standard Assessment Procedure' (SAP) which provides an energy rating for a property. SAP ratings are expressed on a scale of 1 to 100 the higher the number the more efficient the property.

The average energy efficiency (SAP) rating of our homes is 72. When compared to 31 other landlords, Dartford was in the top performing quartile, having the 7<sup>th</sup> most energy efficient rated stock out of the 31 compared.

We are aiming to trial different initiatives which involve making adaptations to our housing stock to reduce carbon emission. Below are some examples of these.

#### **Here to Help**

We have been working with British Gas on the Here to Help Scheme over the last three years to reduce household energy bills and offer initiatives to help save money, increase income and improve the quality of life for our tenants and leaseholders.

Here to Help provides loft insulation, cavity wall insulation and hot water tank jackets in addition to a free benefits assessment to ensure tenants receive the benefits they are entitled to. It also offers free products advice and support from Here to Help charity partners: Help the Aged, Scope, RNIB, Save the Children and National Debtline.

Under this scheme, we know that 69% of our properties have adequate loft insulation and 77.5% of our properties have Cavity Wall Insulation.

#### **Retrofit**

In July 2010 the Council completed a full retrofit programme (making adaptations to an existing property) to one of its properties in partnership with the Technology Strategy Board. The aim was to make the property as energy efficient as possible, which included:

- Combined Photovoltaic's and solar thermal - 'PV-T' high efficiency hybrid solar panels
- Product increased solar PV efficiency by water cooling PV panels and adding the waste heat to the solar thermal circuit, designed for ease of installation and low impact appearance and appropriate for houses with small roof area
- 150mm thickness of insulated external render
- Triple glazed windows
- Use of Nanogel insulation for the floor
- LED lighting throughout - New product developed for social housing that uses 6.7w lamps and has a much extended life over incandescent or even compact fluorescent bulbs.
- Flue gas heat recovery - the Zenex Gas Saver, innovative use in combination with a solar thermal system
- Waste water heat recovery system
- Low-energy decentralised whole house ventilation
- Real time energy display system
- AA++ kitchen appliances
- Solar light pipes for natural light ingress

We are now exploring how technologies used in this pilot can be spread across the whole stock including neighbouring properties in the private sector.

To find out more about this project visit You Tube at [www.youtube.com/watch?v=deKo8oic\\_rQ](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=deKo8oic_rQ) where a short video will take you through the process.

#### **To improve the quality of tenants' homes, by 31 March 2011 we will:**

- Bring 100% of tenants' homes up to Decent Homes Standard, with a £7 million programme of improvements in 2010/11
- Benchmark the current works programme against the number of failures
- Continue to investigate ways of improving the energy efficiency of homes, reducing electricity and gas costs for residents and improving the sustainability of the stock
- Publish a refreshed Business Plan 2011 – 2016
- Continue with the Here to Help Scheme to improve insulation in remaining properties
- Continue exploring the benefits of the retrofit programme and promote the work we do to improve energy efficiency in our properties

## **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.

Residents can report repairs 24 hours a day by phone, text, email or an online repairs report form. Appointments can also be made straight away with the Repairs team at a time that is suitable for each resident.

In 2009/10 the Council spent £1.275 million on reactive repairs which has seen a year on year decrease in spend (£1.675m in 2007/2008 and £1.528m in 2008/2009); £850,000 on empty property servicing, £890,000 in planned repair programmes and £5.1 million in capital replacement programmes such as kitchens, bathrooms and doors.

The average time to complete routine repairs rose from 10.5 days in 2008/9 to 13.3 days in 2009/10 when the previous repairs contractor was responsible for repairs and this is one of the reasons why the previous contractor did not win the new contract from April 2010.

However, it is anticipated that the Breyer Group will strive to improve overall repairs performance and supply us with better performance information that we can feed back to you.

The Council and Breyer have agreed targets to do more planned maintenance, which will reduce the need for emergency and day to day repairs and leading to efficiency savings and a better service for residents. The partnership aims to be carrying out 70% of works on a planned basis by April 2011.

#### **Repairs performance in 2009/10**

- 11,274 responsive repairs completed
- 91.4% routine repairs completed on time
- 94.0% urgent repairs completed on time
- 98.0% emergency repairs completed on time
- 96.4% of tenants were satisfied with the repairs and maintenance service
- 86.5% of those who completed feedback slips were satisfied with the repair they had received
- As reporting on repairs completed 'right first time' has not been a required key performance indicator until this year, we did not start to measure this until April 2010 where so far, we have completed 89% of repairs 'right first time'

#### **Repairs survey**

In July 2010 we sent out a survey to all tenants and leaseholders about the repairs service. We wanted to find out what you thought was important about the service so that you could help shape our new partnership with the Breyer Group.

From this survey, you told us that:

- The three ways you would most like to report a repair is by telephone, text and in person
- You would most like to report your repair to Dartford Council
- You prefer repairs appointments to be the same as they are now
- The most important things about the service you receive from the Breyer Group is that appointments are kept
- You most prefer to give your feedback on repairs by posting back a survey card

## **How the Breyer Group responds to residents' needs**

Breyer operatives work to a strict code of conduct to ensure they provide an excellent level of service. Training in cultural awareness and working with vulnerable people is included. They also have comprehensive inductions when joining the company which includes training on health and safety, communications and individually tailored training programmes.

## **Local repairs and maintenance standard**

We will work with residents to develop service standards during 2010 as we work to agree the repairs and maintenance 'local standard'. The newly revised and updated tenants' and leaseholders' welcome pack, approved by the Residents' Forum, contains a detailed repairs guide. But we also aim to produce a new Repairs Handbook with the Breyer Group and the Residents' Forum.

## **Resident involvement in monitoring performance for repairs and maintenance**

We work very closely with the Residents' Forum on all aspects of the repairs service. In procuring the new long term contract with the Breyer Group, the Council put together a valuation team that included three local Councillors from each of the main political parties and two members of the Forum as well as key maintenance staff.

Two representatives from the Forum attend all partnering contract meetings and have every opportunity to contribute to the day to day running of the service. Performance information is also provided at the Green Matters meeting attended by Forum representatives and staff responsible for running Council wide cleansing and horticulture contracts.

Estate inspections are carried four times a year on each estate. These look at the conditions of communal areas, lighting, grass and hedge cutting, pavements etc. They are advertised in the Link newsletter, on communal notice boards and via flyers. Tenants and leaseholders are welcome to attend all inspections, however, results are not regularly published but we intend to improve on this as part of the annual report.

## **Adaptations**

The Council has budgeted for £335,000 a year for aids and adaptations to enable older residents, and those with disabilities, to remain living independently in their homes. We work in partnership with Kent County Council's Occupational Therapist Team to deliver adaptations in line with our joint Policy for Disabled Adaptations.

One of the benefits of the scheme is that the occupational therapists prioritise those residents who are in a critical need of adaptations, thus allowing the most urgent cases to be dealt with first. In addition, when we carry out kitchen and bathroom works and work to empty properties, we assess at this time whether the tenant needs any adaptations and whether the home is suitable for adaptation in the future.

In addition to adaptations, the Council also supports its older and disabled residents decorate or maintain their homes through other schemes. An older persons' decoration scheme is offered to disabled and elderly residents whereby they can apply to have one room decorated in their property free of charge every five years. This scheme is open to Council tenant households where all members of the household are 70 years or over or registered disabled. The Council will provide the labour and materials, such as a choice of paint and wallpaper at no additional cost.

In addition to the older person's decoration scheme, the Handyman Scheme also offers older and disabled tenants living in supported housing schemes a range of services that will help get small DIY jobs done. This can include anything from changing a light bulb, or putting up a curtain rail, to moving furniture.

### **Health and Safety**

The Council has effective processes, monitoring and control in place to comply with all health and safety requirements for gas, water, electricity, asbestos, fire risk and the Housing Health and Safety Rating System (HHSRS) which is a risk assessment tool used to assess potential risks to the health and safety of occupants in residential properties.

We have entered into a partnering arrangement with the gas service provider Swale Heating. The contract is based on a 3 star service that incorporates an annual service, landlord's gas safety certificate and all breakdown and repairs including out of hours. Since the start of this partnership the number of homes that now have gas safety certificates has increased significantly and the majority of properties have been assessed as safe.

We know that there are around 80 properties which fail the HHSRS. These are mainly due to Flames and Hot Surface category 1 failures where the cooker is located in the wrong position. The Council has attempted to resolve these failures through fitting new kitchens under its improvement programme, but some tenants have refused to have the work done which has led to these failures being unresolved. Therefore, the Council will be exploring ways legal action can be taken to enforce works as they pose a health and safety hazard to the occupier.

### **Performance in health and safety**

99.7% of homes had up to date gas safety certificates in 2009/10. Only 14 do not have gas safety certificates.

Our aim is to have 100% of properties with gas safety certificates.

We have recently entered the Kent Housing Group Excellence Awards under the Value for Money category. It was suggested by one of our officers that we could apply for the warrants via the Magistrates Court, rather than the County Court, giving us a saving of £122 each time. It has also decreased the time taken to gain access to the property and we can apply for a number of warrants at one time. The winners will be notified at the Kent Housing Group Conference at the end of September 2010.

Our regular customer satisfaction surveys show high levels of satisfaction with gas servicing and repairs. Table 1 below shows levels of satisfaction over the year 2009/2010, by month. As can be seen in Table 1 below, overall 96.7% of tenants were satisfied with Swale Heating.

Table 2 shows satisfaction with the repairs and maintenance service.

**Table 1: Satisfaction with Swale Heating**

	No. of cards received	No. of telephone surveys	Total no. of surveys	% customers happy with the service provided
April	31	83	114	93.9%
May	32	67	99	100.0%
June	28	80	108	95.4%
July	0	81	81	98.8%
August	8	107	115	96.5%
September	1	132	133	92.5%
October	0	130	130	95.5%
November	0	101	101	98.0%
December	0	99	99	98.0%
January	0	86	86	96.5%
February	0	28	28	100.0%
March	1	15	16	100.0%
<b>YTD</b>	<b>101</b>	<b>1009</b>	<b>1110</b>	<b>96.7%</b>

**Table 2. Satisfaction with Housing Maintenance and Repairs (EPS)**

	<i>no. of cards received</i>	<i>no. of telephone surveys</i>	<i>total no. of surveys</i>	<i>% customers happy with the service provided</i>
<i>April</i>	0	55	55	94.5%
<i>May</i>	11	89	100	97.0%
<i>June</i>	16	73	89	97.8%
<i>July</i>	58	41	99	100.0%
<i>August</i>	44	52	96	99.0%
<i>September</i>	45	48	93	94.6%
<i>October</i>	21	124	145	92.4%
<i>November</i>	19	119	138	94.9%
<i>December</i>	3	54	57	98.2%
<i>January</i>	1	64	65	95.4%
<i>February</i>	1	59	60	98.3%
<i>March</i>	0	40	40	100.0%
<b>YTD</b>	<b>219</b>	<b>818</b>	<b>1037</b>	<b>96.4%</b>

For the first four months of the new contract Breyer are reporting 97.63% overall satisfaction.

### **Fire safety works**

The Council's fire safety and fire risk assessment programme improves fire safety across our stock and the Council takes a proactive approach to tackling safety issues. We have carried out a thorough review of fire safety arrangements in blocks of flats, closely working with the fire service and all of our communal blocks have a completed fire risk assessment which is updated annually.

Work identified from the previous fire risk assessment have all been completed. We have completed fire improvement works at Alamein Gardens and this involved fitting sprinkler and smoke sensitive alarms. We have also carried out comprehensive fire risk assessments for all our supported housing schemes.

### **Grounds Maintenance**

Our current grounds maintenance contract will end in December 2010. A new contractor will be sought through a competitive tendering exercise to ensure value for money and quality. The contract will include maintenance of amenity areas on our housing estates. Tenants and leaseholders were consulted on the draft specification for the tender and this process is ongoing. The housing team have looked at what similar contracts are delivering elsewhere in the County and are also consulting with the DBRF on the issues.

#### **To improve our repairs and maintenance service to you, by 31 March 2011 we will:**

- Agree with residents a 'local standard' for repairs and maintenance
- Produce a new Repairs Handbook with the Breyer Group and the Residents' Forum
- Maintain and develop resident involvement at all levels of the partnership
- Monitor performance and costs, and ensure we compare well with other landlords
- Put relevant information on notice boards in the borough
- Feedback results of estate inspections
- Work towards ensuring that repairs and improvements are completed 'right first time'

## **6. TENANCY STANDARD**

### **Allocations**

Dartford was one of the first councils in Kent to introduce a Choice Based Lettings scheme (CBL) back in 2005 which has proved very successful. The Council and partner housing associations are now part of the 'Kent Homechoice' scheme, the largest CBL scheme in the UK, which has clear applications, decision making and appeals processes.

Dartford's Choice Based Lettings Policy outlines the Council's framework on the scheme, which is accessible on our website.

The Kent Homechoice partnership is currently exploring setting up a common assessment process across all local districts in Kent. This will enable a county-wide way of assessing priorities between housing applicants by using common bands, which will hopefully create a simpler system that people will easily understand.

Access to clear and relevant advice about housing options is provided by the Housing Options and Advice team, and this is supported by public leaflets and a dedicated website at [www.kenthomechoice.org.uk](http://www.kenthomechoice.org.uk).

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](http://www.kenthomechoice.org.uk).

**Table 2: Kent Homechoice applications and lettings in Dartford in 2009/10**

Transfer applicants on the housing register	831
Other applicants - homeseekers - on the housing register	2,582
<b>Total number of applicants on the housing register</b>	<b>3,413</b>
Transfer applicants joining the housing register in 2009/10	314
Other applicants - homeseekers - joining the register in 2009/10	1,511
<b>Total new applicants joining the housing register in 2009/10</b>	<b>1,825</b>
Lets of council homes to transfer applicants	113
Lets of council homes to other applicants	237
Total lettings of council homes	<b>350</b>
Percentage of lettings to local people	<b>94.6%</b>

### Transfers

- 32% of council lettings went to transfer applicants in 2009/10
- 24% of people on the housing register were transfer applicants

**Table 3: Council home lettings by Band in Dartford in 2009/10**

High housing need	
Band A1	1
Band A2	148
Band A3	42
Moderate housing need	
Band B	89
Low level housing need	
Band C	55
Households who do not fall into any reasonable preference category	
Band D	15
TOTAL	350

### Vulnerable housing register applicants

The Council recognises that vulnerable adults can require assistance to use choice based lettings in order for it to be fully accessible and their participation successful. There are a number of ways this is achieved:

- Applicants can nominate an advocate to bid for properties on their behalf or request that a member of the Housing Options and Advice team bids for them.
- Housing advice interviews operate a trigger system when certain issues are identified, such as drug or alcohol misuse or mental health issues. This will prompt the housing advisor to signpost the person to appropriate support services.
- We operate a 'green triangle' alert system which helps to better identify our vulnerable tenants.

- Each year the bidding history of vulnerable people is reviewed so that it can identify anyone who may need support or advice if they are having problems bidding.
- Home visits are also available for those who cannot access the Council offices
- By making referrals to floating support services, a free support service provided by Kent Supporting People in your own home. It is called floating because it can be given to people wherever they live.

### **Learning disabled housing register applicants**

In 2010, the Council carried out a housing needs survey for people with learning disabilities. This told us that there are a number of people in the borough with learning disabilities that want to move now or in the future yet there are only four people with learning disabilities registered onto the Kent Homechoice scheme. As a consequence, we know that we need to help more people with learning disabilities who are able to live on their own, to become registered onto the Kent Homechoice Scheme in order to access appropriate housing.

To make this happen, we have developed an easy read guide to Kent Homechoice and liaised with the Locality Learning Disability Team to make sure people with learning disabilities are identified and supported. We have also offered training on Kent Homechoice for professionals working with people with learning disabilities.

We will monitor the success of this through quarterly reports of the numbers of people with learning disabilities registered.

### **Lettings to Black and Minority Ethnic households**

We strive to make our services as fair as possible. In terms of lettings, Table 4 below details the breakdown of lettings by ethnic origin.

It was found that the proportion of lets in 2008/09 in the White ethnic group is 1.56% lower than the 2007 population estimate. Lets to Mixed ethnic group applicants is 1.43% higher than the population estimate and lets to Black or Black British ethnic group applicants is 0.52% higher. (2.7% of applicants did not state their ethnicity and so this proportion of lets is unknown), indicating that the lets are fairly proportional to the population.

**Table 4: Proportion of social housing lets made to all ethnic groups 2008/09**

Ethnic group	All lettings 2008/09	Numbers on waiting list 2008/09	Ethnic Group population estimate 2007
White British White Irish White – Any other White Background	88.84%	88.45%	90.4%
Black or Black British: African Black or Black British: Caribbean Black or Black British: Any other Black Background	3.22%	3.73%	2.7%
Asian or Asian British: Indian	1.29%	2.51%	3.8%

Asian or Asian British: Pakistani			
Asian or Asian British: Bangladeshi			
Asian or Asian British: other Asian Background			
Mixed: White and Black African	3.43%	1.47%	2%
Mixed: White and Black Caribbean			
Mixed: White and Asian			
Mixed: Any other Mixed Background			
Other Ethnic Origin: Chinese	0.43%	0.69%	1.4%
Other Ethnic Origin: Other groups			
Ethnicity Not Stated	2.79%	3.15%	-

### **Applicants with mobility needs**

We have a register of homes suitable for households with mobility needs, and advertise them accordingly as part of Kent Homechoice. Applicants are assessed according to their mobility need so we achieve best use of our stock to meet the needs of our applicants. In addition, older people are assessed for supported accommodation by a Supported Housing Officer.

### **Under-occupation**

We have a long established scheme to address under-occupation in our housing stock. The Downsize for Cash Scheme was set up in 1991 and was reviewed in 2007 and then again in 2009 to bring it up to date and encourage greater participation from tenants.

The scheme encourages under-occupying tenants to downsize to a smaller home by offering the following incentives:

- A payment of £500 for each bedroom released
- An additional £100 to help towards moving costs
- Payment of removal and packing expenses up to a maximum of £400.

In the 3 year period between 2007/08 and 2009/10, 58 moves have taken place through this scheme, which has enabled the release of much needed family sized accommodation.

### **Satisfaction with the Downsize for Cash scheme**

Satisfaction with the Downsize for Cash scheme in May 2009 found that:

- 82% of participants were overall very satisfied or satisfied with the scheme
- 63% thought the payment rules were very or fairly easy to understand
- 73% were very or fairly satisfied with the total payment received
- 82% felt the Council was very or fairly helpful during the whole process from registration onto the scheme to moving

### **Overcrowding**

Tenants who live in overcrowded conditions are given a high level of priority within our choice based lettings bandings. This applies to homes that are re-let as well as new build properties.

### **Mutual exchange**

Prior to government legislation, the Council already ran a successful mutual exchange scheme for tenants interested in moving to alternative accommodation. The Council now subscribes, on behalf of its tenants, to the national mutual exchange scheme called Homeswapper which allows tenants to move to different areas of the country should they so wish; fitting in with the current mobility agenda championed by the Government.

### **Number of mutual exchanges carried out**

In 2009/10, a total of 41 mutual exchanges took place, 5 from other authorities.

Details of both schemes are available from housing staff, on our website and in the 'Link'. Our aim is to make our mutual exchange scheme available through Kent Homechoice.

### **Re-let times**

We aim to minimise the time that properties are empty between each letting, which is called the re-let time. When doing this, we take into account the circumstances of the tenants who have been offered the properties.

### **Re-let time performance**

Our re-let times for the past three years are:

- 2007/08 – 18.63 days
- 2008/09 – 25.04 days
- 2009/10 – 24.66 days

Our re-let times in 2008/09 increased from our 2007/08 level and did not reduce significantly last year. Despite a difficult start, performance is back on target for August 2010. We have set a target to reduce our re-let times to 22 days for 2010/11.

### **Customer satisfaction with allocations**

Customer satisfaction and views on the choice-based lettings scheme is measured through the Kent Homechoice website. Table 5 below shows the outcome of recent questions asked:

**Table 5: Satisfaction with Kent Homechoice**

<b>Do you find the Kent</b>	Yes	287	84.66%
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Homechoice scheme website easy to use?	No	39	11.50%
	Don't know	13	3.83%
		339	
Are you satisfied with the Kent Homechoice service?	Yes	10	38.46%
	No	12	46.15%
	Don't know	4	15.38%
		26	
Should people be able to move from one area of Kent to another if they have a good reason?	Yes	246	94.62%
	No	9	3.46%
	Don't know	5	1.92%
		260	

We regularly ask new tenants how satisfied they are with their new home. Table 6 below shows that over the year 2009/10, 83.1% of customers were satisfied with the condition of their home when they moved in.

**Table 6: New Tenants Survey 2009/10**

	no. of calls	no. of tenants satisfied	% of tenants satisfied against calls made
April	31	25	80.6%
May	37	30	81.1%
June	20	17	85.0%
July	25	19	76.0%
August	36	31	86.1%
September	22	21	95.5%
October	28	27	96.4%
November	23	20	87.0%
December	18	8	44.4%
January	14	12	85.7%
February	24	23	95.8%
March	18	13	72.2%
<b>YTD</b>	<b>296</b>	<b>246</b>	<b>83.1%</b>

### **How we involve tenants and potential tenants in the way we allocate homes**

We have DBRF portfolio members for housing options and advice who we consult on any policy or procedural changes to the allocations scheme and who regularly review progress on our choice based lettings scheme.

Tenants were fully consulted during the introduction of our Choice Based Lettings Policy in 2004/2005. This was last reviewed in 2008 to ensure that it complied with recent case law, good practice, and further consultation guidance issued by the Government. We aim to carry out a further review of the Policy to take account of the latest statutory guidance issued in December 2009 called 'Fair and Flexible'. The Policy may also need to be amended if the common assessment process is approved, in order to align our bandings Kent-wide.

**To improve how we allocate homes, by 31 March 2011 we will:**

- Move towards a common assessment process for housing applicants across Kent, as being led by the Kent Homechoice partnership
- Reduce re-let times to 22 days
- Commence work to carry out a review of the Choice Based Lettings Policy

## **Rents**

The rents section of the TSA's Tenancy Standard does not apply to local councils. Our rents are set according to government rules. Information about our performance in collecting rent and dealing with rent arrears is included in the Value for Money section of this report.

## **Tenure**

All new tenants are signed up to an introductory tenancy, which runs for a period of 12 months called the 'trial period'. Provided the introductory tenant conducts their tenancy in a satisfactory manner during the trial period, they will then become a secure tenant on the 12 month anniversary of their start date. Being a secure tenant means that you have more rights than an introductory tenant, such as the right to exchange homes or the right to buy your property.

A tenancy agreement is always given at the beginning of an introductory tenancy. This outlines the tenant's roles and responsibilities of living in the property. It also sets out the Council's roles and responsibilities as a landlord.

The Council will enforce the rules of the tenancy agreement if they are being broken. This could be from issuing an informal warning to taking more formal action such as service notices of possession proceedings to the very last resort of instigating eviction. However, the main aim is to resolve the tenancy breach before it gets to this stage in order to ultimately help maintain the tenancy.

We have made many improvements in the area of tenancy, for example:

- In 2007/08 we revised our tenancy agreement.
- In 2009/10, we produced a revised tenants' and leaseholder's welcome pack, approved by the Residents' Forum.
- Over the last 2 years we have revised key policies including repairs, downsize for cash and aids and adaptations.
- We have introduced a management transfer policy and assignment policy.
- We have carried out financial capability training for staff and residents and work to support tenants to keep their tenancy and prevent homelessness.

## **Supporting our tenants**

Wide ranging support is made available to meet the needs of both new and existing tenants, both from housing management staff and staff accessed via other council departments and external agencies.

All new tenants have a pre-allocation appointment where they are shown around their accommodation and informed about their obligations as new tenants. They are provided with a welcome pack and checklist of what they need to do to

arrange to have their utility supplies connected etc. Key obligations are emphasised with regard to paying rent via a leaflet on when, where and how to pay their rent and acting responsibly as tenants. The sign up pack includes a wide range of leaflets on housing services, dealing with debt, advice services in and around Dartford, floating support and home contents insurance etc. If there is a need for financial support, tenants are signposted to the Debt Advice Network or the Citizens Advice Bureau.

Following on from this, all new tenants are visited after 6 weeks to ensure that there are no outstanding repairs issues or difficulties paying their rent or more broadly with the tenancy or area where they live in. Where a tenant is found to be vulnerable we carry out further home visits during the first year of their tenancy to check all is well.

A need for floating support may be identified at any time during the course of a tenancy, for example around problems that come to our attention due to poor payment histories. A referral is then made to Kent County Council to enlist the support of the most appropriate support provider. Additionally, for tenants with more complex support needs, the Housing Management team works closely with services from other agencies. This may involve arranging for a case conference to take place or attending one that has been called by another agency.

Where issues emerge around anti social behaviour housing management staff will look at how to tackle the root cause of the problem before proceeding to direct action, for example looking to engage a social worker to support a family or arranging for a parenting order or contacting schools with regard to issues around attendance. Close links also exist with staff in the council enforcement teams and environmental health to enable action to be taken to tackle noise nuisance or anti social behaviour. For example environmental health may assist in dealing with problems around noise nuisance by installing noise recording equipment. The most serious cases may also be referred on to the Council's Anti Social Behaviour Co-ordinator for consideration at the Community Safety Partnership's Anti Social Behaviour Group meeting.

To resolve issues that may emerge between neighbours the Council refers cases to the mediation service, Mediation in North Kent (Mink) to enable problems to be resolved directly between tenants without involving the Council and before they become more serious and potentially require more formal action.

To support tenants with financial issues there are close links with the Housing Benefit (HB) team including an interface with the HB computer system; enabling information on the system to be shared with housing management staff. Monthly meetings between housing benefit and housing management staff take place to resolve any issues. This supports the Service level Agreement in place. An example of close working includes early notification where a claim is under review but additional documentation has not been provided to process the claim, enabling contact to be made by housing management staff.

### **Case study of extra support provided after a tenancy visit**

A tenant's parents died leaving him with no local support network. As a result of this and existing health problems the tenant neglected to look after his flat and it

became extremely dirty and untidy. He also failed to pay his rent and other bills and was in danger of losing his property. His health deteriorated leading to him to need an operation.

Floating support was engaged as soon as the problems became apparent, to assist with budgeting and housekeeping and, following regular contact over a period of six months, has ensured that rent is now paid and other bills dealt with and health problems improved. A programme has been put in place to improve the property standard and to fit any adaptation that may be required following the operation.

### **Illegal sub-letting**

We are participating in a government funded Tenancy Fraud Project to make sure that our homes continue to be occupied by the tenants we let them to. We have employed a dedicated officer to carry out an audit on 10% of our properties and to date we have completed 429 visits. We have also set up a dedicated fraud hotline (0800 032 0031) to enable residents to report any possible cases of illegal subletting. Additional funding through this initiative has also been made available for people to access the private rented sector through our established rent deposit scheme.

**To improve our tenancy management services to you, by 31 March 2011 we will:**

- Continue our Tenancy Fraud Project and develop and put into practice an anti tenancy fraud policy.

## **7. 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 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.

Pinnacle were appointed following extensive consultation with tenants and leaseholders. As agreed with residents, Pinnacle work to a gold, silver and bronze standard and outcomes against these are provided at monthly contract monitoring meetings with Pinnacle and Resident Forum representatives.

Monitoring is also carried out via 30 contract cleaning monitors who are residents recruited from the wider community. Established standards are advertised on notice boards and publicised in training events. Fire safety risk assessments (FSRAs) have been completed on all blocks of flats and contract cleaning operatives have been provided with training on FSRAs to enable them to raise issues they find during weekly cleaning duties.

### **Customer satisfaction and performance with neighbourhood management**

Pinnacle carry out a regular resident satisfaction surveys to identify issues raised by customers. Residents who participated were asked to grade the service where gold is above the contract specification, silver meets the contract specification and bronze is below the contract specification. Only one person rated the performance as bronze.

Positive feedback has been received from residents and some comments include:

- *“Pinnacle has done an excellent job and the block has never looked so clean”.*
- *“Very happy with the service and standard of work since Pinnacle took over, all the residents are complimenting how clean the blocks are”.*

Block representatives are vital for ensuring that the cleaning provided by our cleaning contractor is of a high standard and that services are continually improved. On request, cleaners will put a slip through the resident's door and when a clean has taken place they will then inspect the cleaning and report back

on the standard. Training on the contractors standards and monitoring forms took place in July this year and was well attended by block operatives, representative from the Residents' Forum and housing staff.

Residents who do not live in a block but would like to represent the area can become a 'community contact'. Community contacts are residents that live in a block, street or supported housing unit who represent the views of their neighbours. Representatives attend meetings and other events to help us understand what it is like living the neighbourhood.

### **How estate inspections have improved communal areas**

As mentioned earlier, ongoing estate inspections cover all areas of the borough, which look at the conditions of communal areas on estates.

#### **Number of estate inspections carried out**

In 2009/10 we carried out 51 estate inspections.

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.

#### **How you can get involved with estate inspections**

Join us on our local estate inspections four times a year. You can talk to staff, contractors, tenant representatives and councillors about issues and priorities for your estate or block.

Contact your Housing Officer or see your community notice board to find out when your next estate inspection is due and the results of the last one. The schedule of visits and times is also published in the Link.

### **Safety and security on estates**

Safety and security issues are dealt with using crime and prevention advice given by the Council's Community Safety Unit (CSU) and the Police Architectural Liaison Officer (ALO). The estate inspections pick up on repairs issues with housing officers attending Neighbourhood Panel meetings (formerly PACT) where local priorities are set. We also make use of the government's Community Payback scheme to assist in cleaning and improving the area.

#### **To improve our neighbourhood management services to you, by 31 March 2011 we will:**

- Carry out resident satisfaction surveys on our estates and regularly test customer satisfaction with our cleaning and other estate services and their neighbourhood as a place to live
- Encourage more residents to get involved in estate inspections
- Carry out a review of mobility scooter storage in our supported housing schemes

- Carry out benchmarking of the estate service with other landlords to compare costs and performance

## **Local Area Co-operation**

The role we play in setting standards for the Housing Service is set out in our Housing Strategy 2009-2012, which sets out the Council's overarching strategic housing role. As well as considering landlord services, this Strategy also includes how we enable affordable housing development. Tenants and leaseholders were very involved in the development of this strategy and in setting the direction of the Housing Service.

As part of the wide ranging engagement of residents, the community and voluntary sector and other partners were also involved in its development. A series of focus groups were held and attended by a wide range of people, including housing associations, Kent County Council, and residents which helped to shape the final strategy action plan.

We work closely with partners, for example housing associations, to ensure we provide an excellent tenancy management service for all our residents including working with residents and partners to set up further neighbourhood agreements.

We hold regular forums for our housing association partners on both the management and strategic site. We also work with partner agencies such as Operation Horizon and hold monthly estate surgeries which help to pick up on community concerns, however, residents have told us that these need to be improved in terms of location and attendance.

## **Care, support and social activities in our supported housing schemes**

Our supported housing service works in close partnership with a range of supportive organisations, who have all helped to get our A grade service, to provide care and support and social activities for our older residents, such as:

- 24 hour life line service
- Fully equipped laundry
- Weekly coffee mornings
- Bingo
- Social evenings
- Line dancing
- Chair based exercises
- Scheme libraries
- Prescription delivery and collection service from the local pharmacy
- Guest rooms in some schemes for overnight visitors
- Mobile hairdresser
- Fish and chips mobile van
- Bus service provided by Age Concern
- Mobile chiropodist service

**To improve local area co-operation, by 31 March 2011 we will:**

- Ensure we continue to work effectively and co-operatively with other agencies
- Carry out a review of estate surgeries in terms of location and aim to improve attendance through better publicity
- Continue to consult widely on our new policies and strategies

## **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. We have close effective working arrangements with police and other agencies and local crime prevention initiatives. This includes close links with the in house Community Safety Unit (CSU) that is staffed by both the police and the Council's enforcement team, enabling issues to be raised and responded to on a daily basis. In addition, the Civic Centre will, in the future, have a permanent police presence and a police counter in reception.

In addition:

- Tasking and Co-ordination group meetings are held at least twice a week where crime and ASB issues are reported
- Housing Officers attend Community Safety Partnership meetings including ASB groups, Enviro-Crime and monthly CSU meetings
- Our tenancy agreement and welcome pack set clear behaviour standards including clauses on issues that tenants or leaseholders are concerned about, including noisy laminate flooring in flats and pets
- Our approach is early intervention and staff emphasise what is expected of tenants at new tenancy visits
- We use an independent mediation service which has proved effective in helping to tackle neighbour disputes
- We tell residents about anti social behaviour news through our resident newsletter the Link. This highlights our efforts to tackle ASB and informs residents about how to report ASB and how they can help us.

### **Case study of an anti-social behaviour incident**

A resident had a knife driven into his front door and was threatened by a tenant who then set fire to his van before being arrested. Action was taken by the Housing Officer to obtain an Anti-Social Behaviour Injunction to prevent the tenant returning to the locality where he had committed the offence while he was on bail and before he appeared in court for the criminal offence. Possession proceedings were started at the same time. Subsequently the victims were re-housed due to concerns about their safety but their evidence was crucial in helping to evict the perpetrator from his flat.

Housing contributes to objectives in the Dartford and Gravesham Crime and Reduction Partnership by attending joint meetings and taking action to support the CSP where enforcement action is required. The Partnership is committed to

the Anti-Social Behaviour Charter, a set of minimum standards and our commitment to you to tackle and reduce anti-social behaviour.

**Aims of the partnership:**

Reduce overall Anti-Social Behaviour by 5%

Reduce Criminal Damage offences by 10%

Reduce the % of people who perceive drunk or rowdy behaviour as being a problem (NI41 (Measured by KCVS).

Reduce alcohol and drug related offences, including ASB caused by underage drinking.

Reduce the number of vehicle nuisance (e.g. mini motos, off-road bikes) incidents by 5%.

**Delivery**

Through 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. Resources to deal with ASB are targeted via CSU's tasking and coordination group meetings. This includes the Op Gallant which is a dedicated ASB team who will attend calls regarding ASB between 2pm and midnight.

**Enforcement action**

12 households were evicted for rent arrears.

We served 366 notices of seeking possession compared to 453 the year before.

**To improve our services to you on anti-social behaviour, by 31 March 2011 we will:**

- Record and analyse ASB complaints to identify patterns
- Record customer satisfaction with ASB case handling and outcomes
- Agree with residents a 'local standard' for ASB to come into force by 1 April 2011

**8. 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.

Tenants told us in the STATUS Survey 2008 that repairs and maintenance and the overall quality of your home are two of the three most important issues for you. Tackling anti-social behaviour was the third most important issue. Value for money for your rent was one of the two least important issues alongside taking your views into account.

So we are taking action to provide you with better services and homes while trimming our costs.

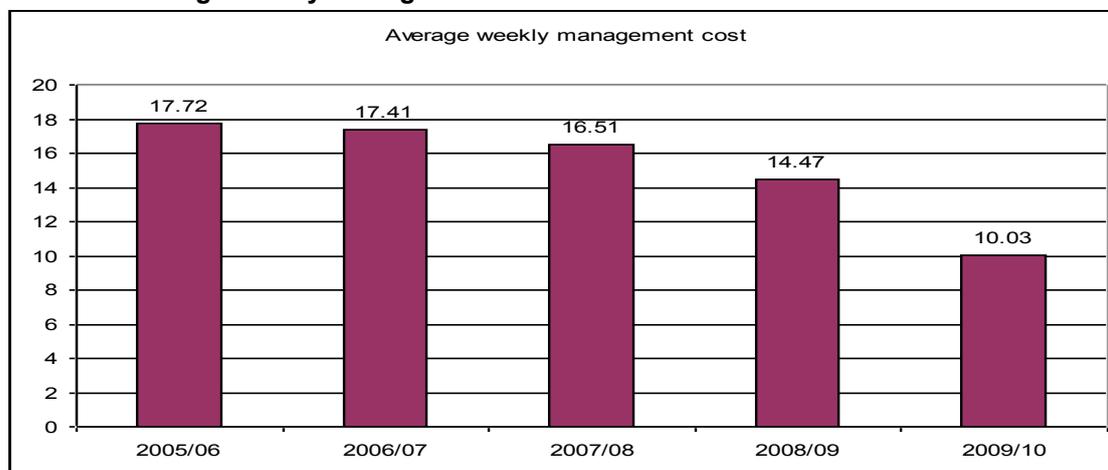
### Some of the ways we have improved value for money include:

- Making efficiency savings across all our budgets
- Being a member of Housemark, a benchmarking club, thus ensuring that we are providing a value for money service when compared to other landlords

### Costs of managing your home

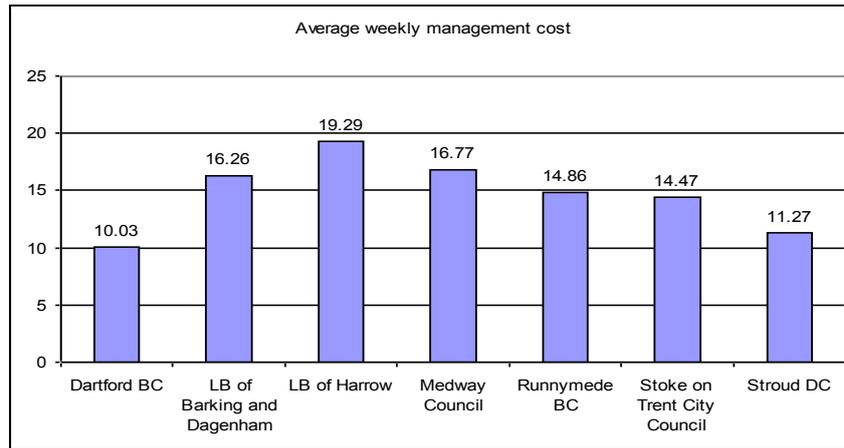
As chart 5 below shows, we reduced the cost of managing homes from £17.72 per property per week in 2005/6 to £14.47 in 2008/9 and in 2009/10 to £10.03.

**Chart 5: Average weekly management cost**



Following a benchmarking exercise with other councils who have made their data available, we compare relatively well, although it is recognised that some London Councils are vastly different. Chart 4 shows Dartford as having the lowest cost of managing homes, but we aim to further reduce our costs so that we compare favourably with the best performing landlords.

**Chart 6: Average weekly management cost when compared to other landlords**



### **Costs of repairs and improvement**

We have reduced our overall costs on maintenance and planned works by working with Breyer to produce an average kitchen cost and agreed specification rather than using a lengthy schedule of rates process, where individual items are costed. Long term, this will offer certainty over costs for future programmes and will free up officers' time to concentrate on quality outputs. A similar approach is being trialled in other areas such as bathrooms and voids re-servicing.

It is expected that the new partnership with the Breyer Group will deliver long term savings as well as improving the quality of works and bringing wider community benefits.

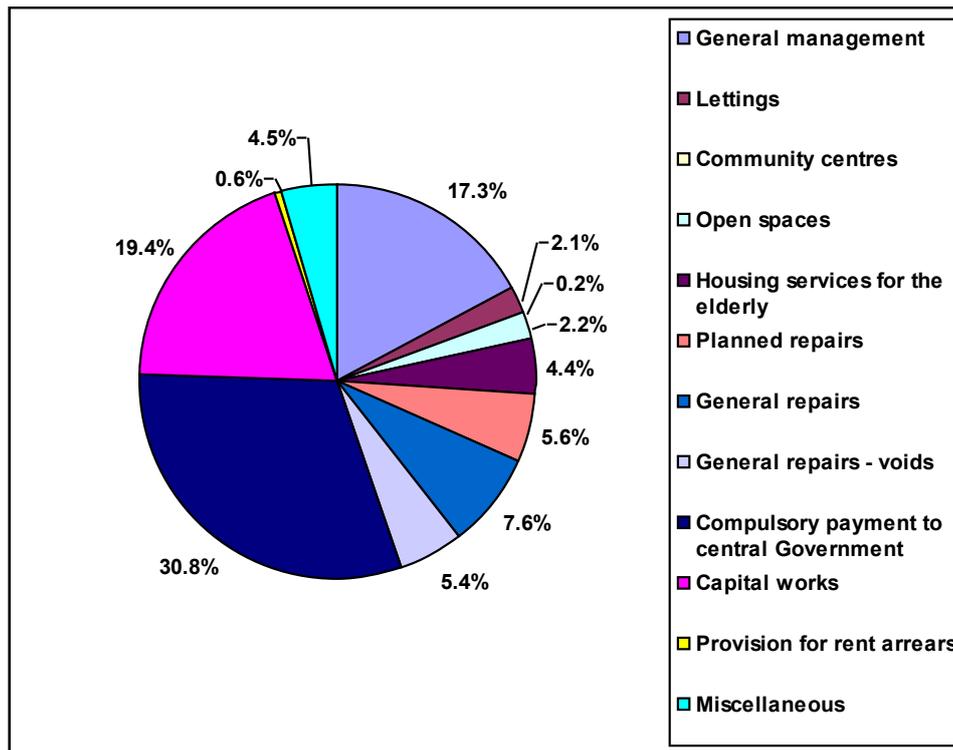
### **Benchmarking**

We compare our performance against other landlords through a 'benchmarking' organisation for landlords called HouseMark and by using information published by central government and government agencies. We compare ourselves against similar landlords and the best performing ones to provide us with a robust comparison and the opportunity to explore where improvements can be made. We produce benchmarking reports on tenant satisfaction and our performance.

### **Rents**

In 2009/10 the average rent was £83.76 per week and we spent it as shown in the following chart:

**Chart 7 – Breakdown of Housing Revenue Account (HRA) expenditure**



As can be seen, 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 improve our management services and to maintain and improve your home.

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. If councils were allowed to retain all of their receipts, including those from Right to Buy sales, this would free up extra revenue for repairs, maintenance and other improvements. The Government is currently reviewing this requirement and looking at ways to change the current pooled system.

We have reduced the time taken to set up rent accounts and process Housing Benefit applications leading to improved satisfaction with the service

In 2009/10 we collected 96.81% of our total rent charges

**Service Charges**

We believe that the service charges levied for the maintenance of communal areas continue to be reasonable, with increased value for money for cleaning services on previous years gained through the new cleaning contract with Pinnacle. The Residents’ Forum has also helped us increase value for money by monitoring this and our other service contracts to help improve the service provided.

In addition, in accordance with government rent legislation, the Council completed it’s un-pooling of service charges from rents in 2007.

**Making best use of our housing and land assets**

We are looking at opportunities for building new homes on housing land that we own to make best use of our assets and meet the high demand for more homes, for example on the new development at the Bridge which will provide up to 1500 new homes, including 30% for affordable housing.

**To improve the value for money of our services to you, by 31 March 2011 we will:**

- Introduce more efficient and effective ways of running services
- Reduce the costs of repairs and works to empty homes
- Provide leaseholders with accurate information on costs of planned works to buildings at the earliest opportunity
- Improve our rent collection rate to 98.3%

## 9. HOUSING SERVICES CONTACTS

### Housing Management

☎ 01322 343025/343710

#### Area team – East

Senior Housing Officers: Linda Tilley/Carole French ☎ 01322 343363

Housing Officer: Elaine Ambrose ☎ 01322 343061

Housing Officer: Louise Blakey ☎ 01322 343964

#### Area team – West

Senior Housing Officer: Len Morley ☎ 01322 343380

Housing Officer: Corrine Barber ☎ 01322 343574

Housing Officer: Nicola Sloane ☎ 01322 343854

### Rents

☎ 01322 343070/343570

✉ [rents@dartford.gov.uk](mailto:rents@dartford.gov.uk)

### Resident Involvement

Resident Involvement Officer: Louise Gray ☎ 01322 343841

✉ [resident.involvement@dartford.gov.uk](mailto:resident.involvement@dartford.gov.uk)

### Supported Housing

☎ 01322 343366

✉ [supported@dartford.gov.uk](mailto:supported@dartford.gov.uk)

### Repairs

☎ 01322 343800

✉ [repairs@dartford.gov.uk](mailto:repairs@dartford.gov.uk)

### Housing Options and Advice

☎ 01322 343814 / 01322 343082 for an application form

☎ 01322 343100 to hear what properties are advertised

☎ 01322 343371 to find out results

✉ [housingadvice@dartford.gov.uk](mailto:housingadvice@dartford.gov.uk)

### Emergency Out of Hours

☎ 0845 634 1212

### Civic Centre

The Civic Centre is open from 8.45am to 5.15pm Monday to Thursday and from 8.45am to 16.45pm Friday.

### Cash Offices

You may pay in person at one of the Council's two Cash Offices. These are located at:

Civic Centre, Home Gardens, Dartford, Kent, DA1 1DR

Open from 9am until 3pm Monday to Friday (closed Wednesday)

☎ 01322 343001

Swanscombe Town Council Offices, The Grove, Swanscombe, Kent, DA10 OGA

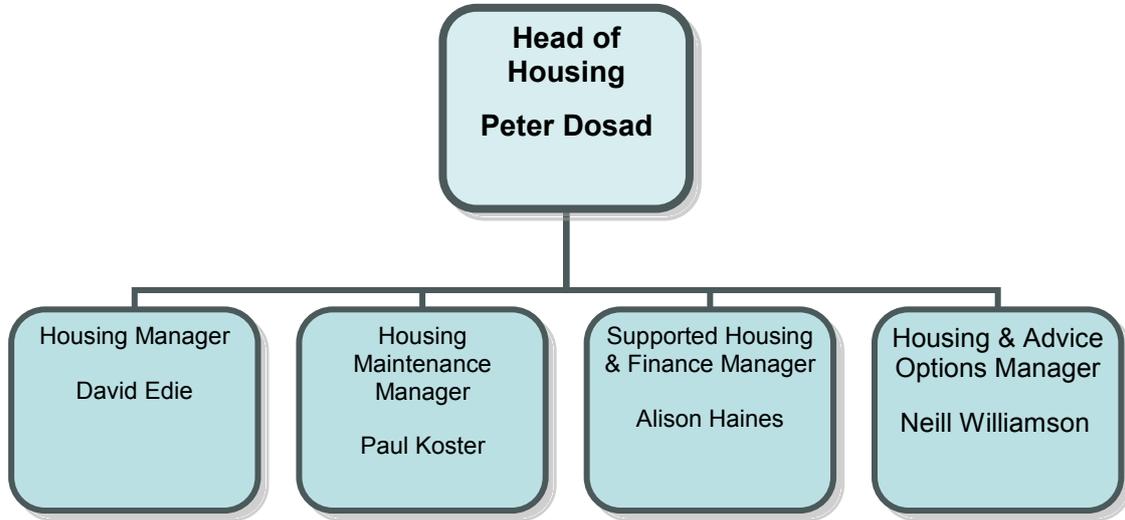
Open from 9am until 1pm Monday to Friday (closed Wednesday)

☎ 01322 343064

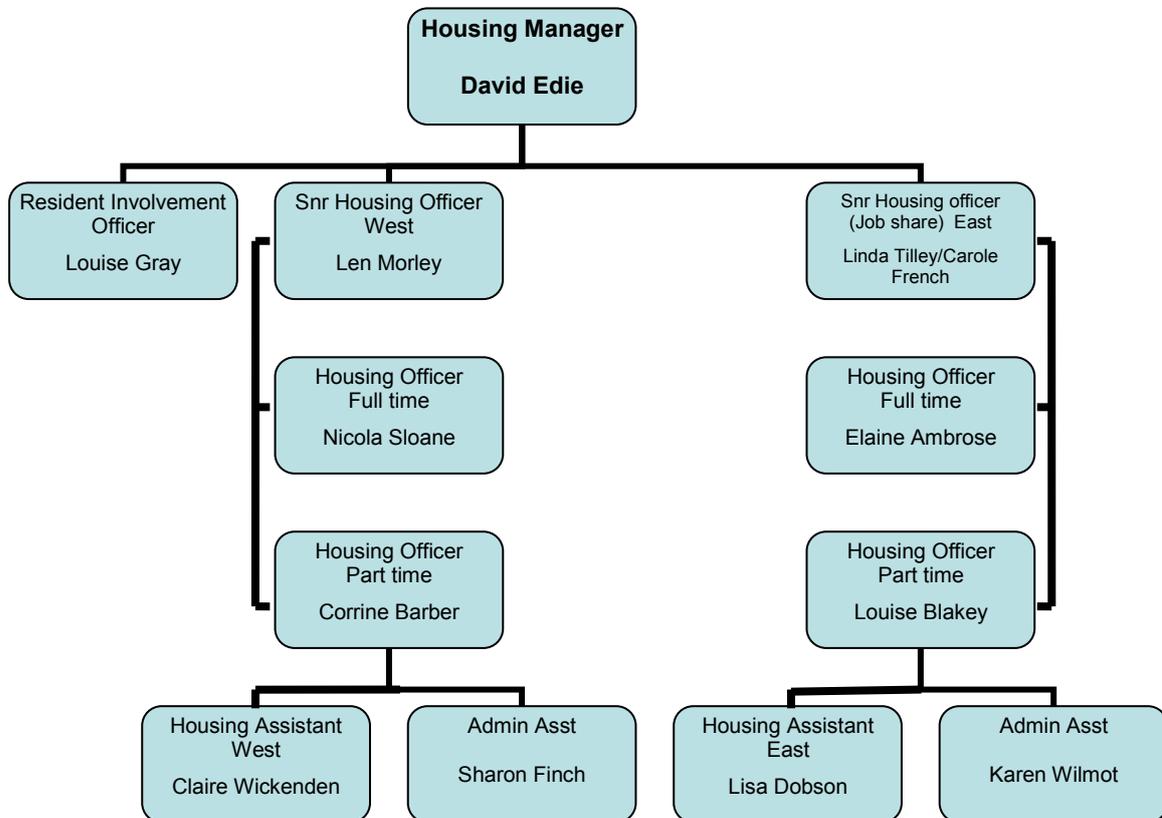
If you would like any more information on documents mentioned in this report please look on our website: [www.dartford.gov.uk](http://www.dartford.gov.uk)

# APPENDIX A - HOUSING SERVICES STRUCTURE CHARTS

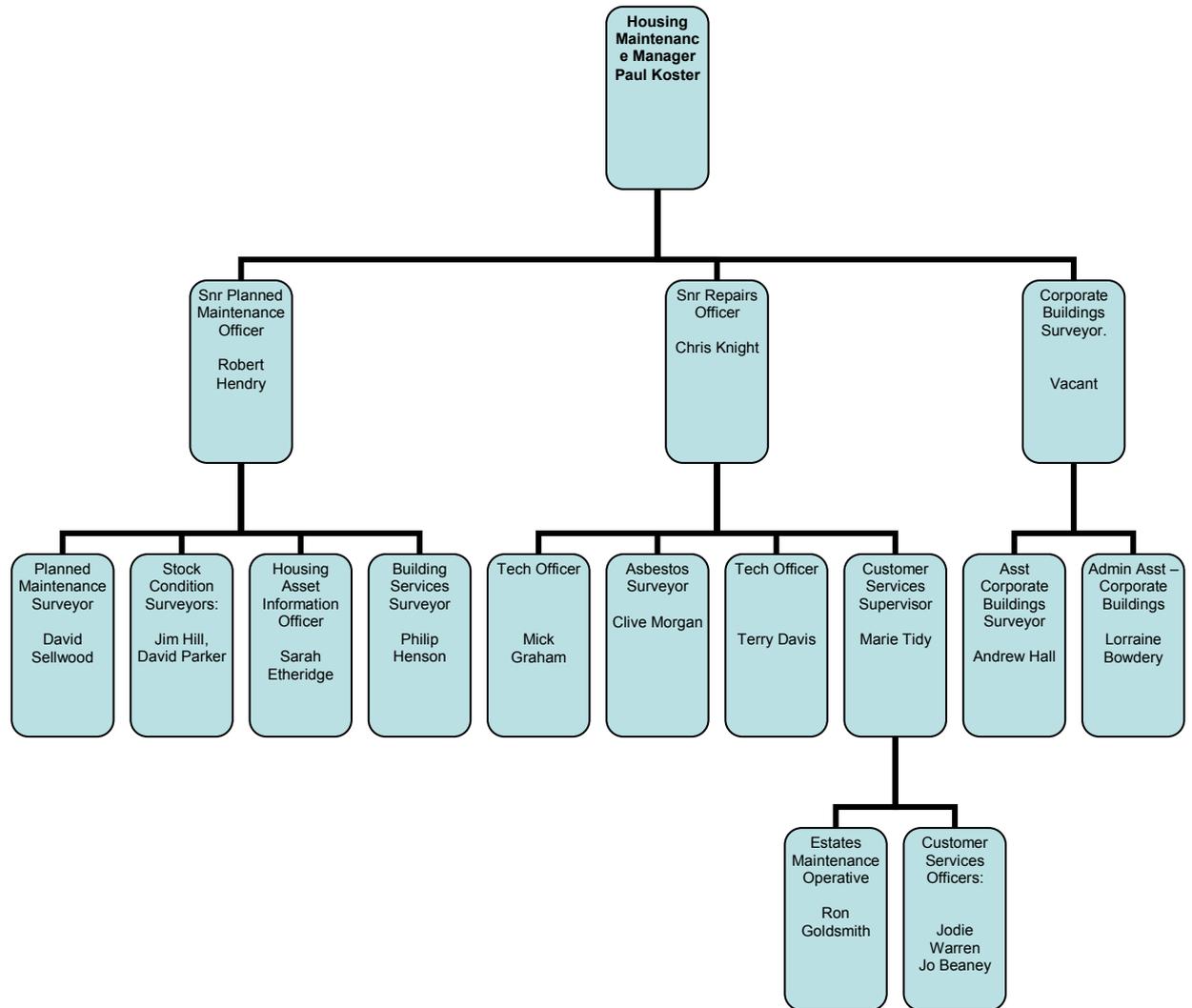
## Management Structure



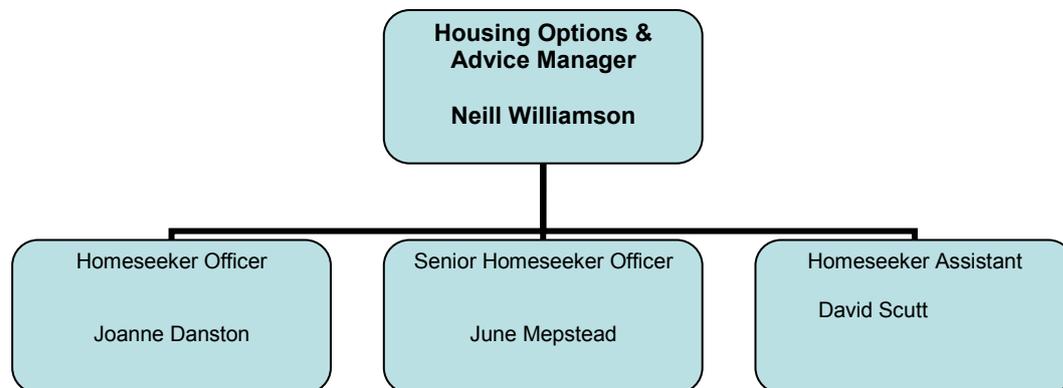
## Housing Management



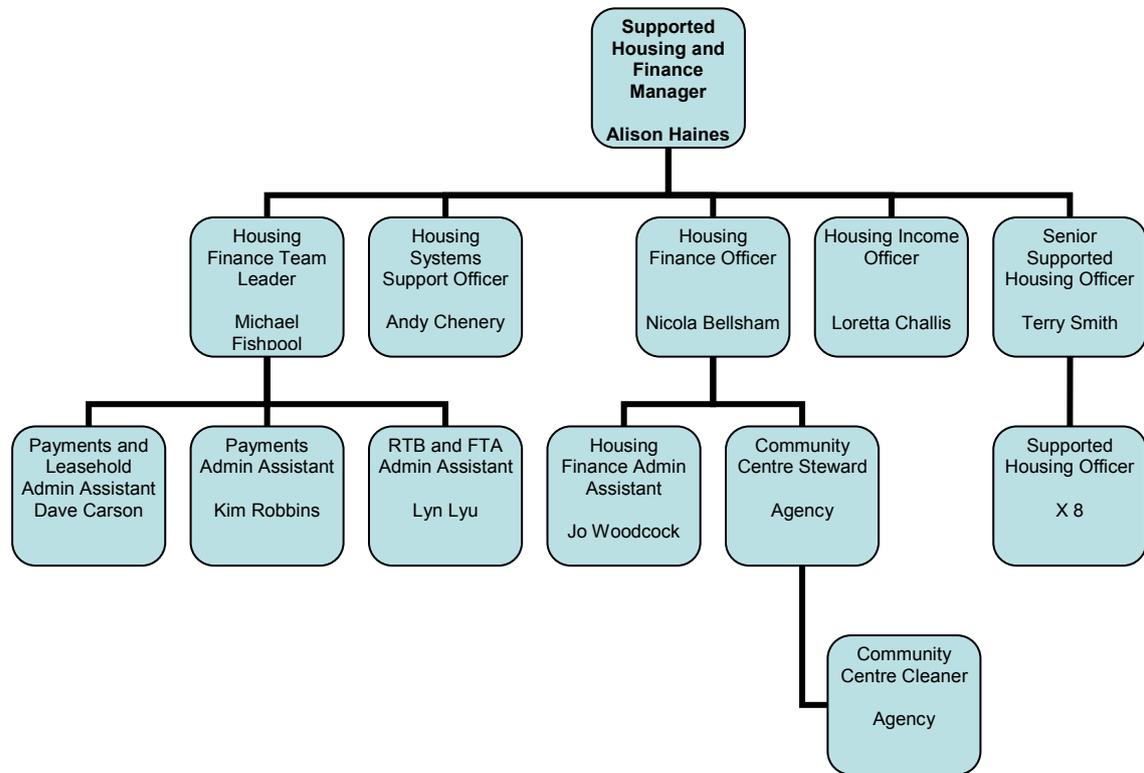
## Housing Maintenance



## Housing Options and Advice (Allocations)



## Supported Housing and Finance



## APPENDIX B - GLOSSARY

This glossary explains some key words or terms used throughout the report about the TSA's regulatory framework.

### **Annual report**

This is a report for tenants, outlining how the Council has performed against the TSA's national and our own local standards. It also sets out how we will make improvements to our services over the coming year. We have to produce an annual report on the 1 October every year.

### **Housing Services Improvement Plan**

This is the action plan that will make the offers we make on the Housing Service happen over the coming year.

### **Local standard**

Local standards are a set of locally agreed standards of service for residents. Agreed between the residents and the Council, local standards could take in a number of different areas. For example, how you consult residents, manage your neighbourhood or estates, or run your repairs service could each become the basis for a local standard.

### **National standard**

These are the six standards that all housing providers must meet. They include tenant involvement and empowerment, home, tenancy, neighbourhood community, and value for money (although this last one does not apply to local authorities).

### **Regulator**

The role of the TSA as a regulator is about making sure that housing providers are meeting the standards of service delivery it sets, and using various enforcement powers if improvements where standards are not being met are not made.

### **Tenant Services Authority (TSA)**

The Tenant Services Authority (TSA) is the new regulator for all social housing providers in England since April 2010. They came about so that regardless of whether you are a tenant of a local authority or a housing association, you receive exactly the same level of service. Their aim is to raise the standards for service for social housing tenants. There six standards under their framework for regulation.