

DARTFORD

BOROUGH COUNCIL

HOUSING ANNUAL REPORT TO TENANTS AND LEASEHOLDERS for 2012-2013

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If you or anybody you know requires this or any other council information in another language please contact us and we will do our best to provide this for you. Braille, Audio tape and large print versions of this document are available upon request.

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Calls are welcome via typetalk

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1. Foreword

Welcome to our third annual housing report to tenants and leaseholders. It has been developed following feedback from our tenants and from measuring our performance across a range of housing services and from the development of local standards.

The work we do with the Dartford Borough Resident's Forum is invaluable in ensuring we continue to deliver housing services which make a difference to tenants and leaseholders.

We have done a lot of work over the last year to ensure that we met our targets in the action plan and we have continued to develop both our local standards and our core service standards.

We hope that you enjoy reading this report and find the information both interesting and informative.

We remain committed to working with tenants across a range of services and to make continuous improvements.

More information on the ways in which you can get involved can be found on page 9.

2. Introduction

The Regulatory Framework first developed by the Tenant Services Authority and continued by the Homes and Communities Agency has now become a part of everyday life for tenants and the Council alike.

This report will explain what we have been working on over the last 12 months and will show you what we have achieved and detail those areas where we still have work to do in order to meet our targets.

In addition we will show you statistical information on how our performance compares with similar landlords.

The five national standards in the regulatory framework are:

Standard	Main Areas
Tenant Involvement and Empowerment	Customer service, choice and complaints Involvement and empowerment Diversity
Neighbourhood and Community	Neighbourhood Management
Home	Quality of accommodation
Tenancy	Allocations Tenure
Value for Money	Applies to all standards to show that the landlord is achieving value for money

3. The Standards

Tenant Involvement and Empowerment

What have we done?

- Carried out Resident Satisfaction Surveys as a matter of course and used feedback to address issues and improve the service we deliver
- Informed you about events, services and Council news by newsletters, website, notice boards and email
- Sent you a copy of the Link newsletter four times per year
- Sent information on request about how you can get involved in shaping the service
- Let you know when estate inspections took place in your area and provided feedback on previous issues through the Link and through the Dartford Borough Residents' Forum (DBRF) as a monitoring body
- Provided performance information on our services to tenants and leaseholders on a regular basis in an easy to read, clear and standardised format (following feedback from the DBRF)

- Consulted with you on major changes to our services and on new housing policies and procedures, for example the new Allocations and Tenancy Policies implemented in 2013.
- Supported residents' groups and the DBRF through the Resident Liaison Officer
- Provided training to help develop residents' skills, for example mystery shopping
- Carried out visits to tenants affected by the reductions in Housing Benefit and welfare reform to offer advice and assistance

Our promises to you:

We will:

- Continue to carry out resident satisfaction surveys to improve the service
- Send you a copy of the Link newsletter 4 times per year
- Inform you about events, services and Council news by a variety of methods
- Develop customer access reviews for housing policies and involve you in their development
- Continue to support appropriate resident groups and the DBRF

Neighbourhood and Community

What have we done?

- Carried out further customer satisfaction surveys across all estates in 2012.
- Looked to prevent incidents of Anti-Social Behaviour (ASB) occurring, for example by working with the Community Safety Unit (CSU) to help protect vulnerable people.
- Reviewed a suite of housing policies to make them fit for purpose in 2013 including the Anti-Social Behaviour Policy for housing, Assignment Policy, Mutual Exchange Policy, Demoted Tenancy Policy, Tenancy Fraud Policy, Decant Policy, Rent Arrears Policy and the Management Transfer Policy
- Involved the DBRF in more in depth monitoring of standards for estates services
- Introduced the Council's repairs contractor across estates enabling minor repairs to be carried out on the spot
- Provided a Handyman service across the borough
- Made the best use of opportunities provided by community payback to get works undertaken on individual gardens for elderly and disabled tenants on Temple Hill, Sutton at Hone and Tree estate. In addition the 'Pinnacle Plus' initiative has improved the appearance of all garage areas having been tidied up and cleared of weeds and litter

- Supported the DBRF in building an awareness of the CSU
- Obtained customer satisfaction information from victims of ASB to help improve the service including information on the reporting process
- Carried out a benchmarking exercise for the housing management service to compare costs and performance. Dartford's service has improved in the last year in six out of seven housing management areas including cost and performance and we are in the top quartile in four areas compared with 71 similar local authorities (see Section 5).

Our promises to you:

We will:

- Continue to carry out regular customer satisfaction surveys across the service
- Carry on implementing the new Allocations Policy and ensure residents are kept abreast of any changes following any reviews of the policy
- Continue to invest time and resources into the Dartford Borough Residents' Forum and other resident associations
- Continue to provide a Handyman service
- Review the Estate Inspection process following feedback from tenants
- Provide specific ASB training via the Chartered Institute of Housing and the Tenant Participation Advisory Service as part of the new training plan for the DBRF
- Obtain feedback from victims of ASB to continue to improve the service

Home and Tenancy

What have we done?

- Spent £6.496m on our stock for capital works including rewiring, roof covering, doors, kitchens, boilers and renewable energy
- Reduced the number of council homes that were non decent from 3% last year to 2.3% this year
- Continued to reduce our re-let times from 23.81 days in 2011 to 22.52 days in 2012. The current re-let time is 21.01 days.
- Offered both morning and afternoon appointments for repairs and work towards having a two hour appointment window
- Offered a job reference number at the time of reporting a repair
- Offered contact information for contractors
- Monitored our customer satisfaction levels

- Encouraged our contractors to become involved with local events
- Gave you a choice of fixtures and fittings if you have improvements to your home
- Introduced energy efficiency and other measures to reduce the amount of money you spend on energy, for example Collective Switching
- Made sure that all tenants are made aware of their responsibilities when they sign up to a new tenancy
- Developed a local Tenancy Strategy and Tenancy Policy, in consultation with residents following legislation contained in the Localism Act 2011
- Implemented flexible tenancies for most new tenants from April 2013
- Reviewed, developed and implemented a new Housing Allocations Policy to ensure that Council housing is provided to local people in need
- Developed and participated in a common housing assessment process for housing applicants across Kent and implemented an online application process to make the process quicker for applicants

Our promises to you:

We will:

- Enable members of the Dartford Borough Residents' Forum to attend a number of void inspections to monitor quality
- Invest £7m into the housing stock in 2013/2014 for capital repairs including £1m for communal areas (agreed following consultation with residents)
- Sign up to the Kent and Medway Green Deal partnership
- Develop a new Repairs Policy in consultation with residents
- Continue to invest in decent homes
- Continue to update and review our housing policies where necessary

4. Value for Money

What we have done:

- Introduced more efficient and effective ways of running services
- Carried out a benchmarking exercise for housing management with other similar authorities
- Ensured that the adaptations service achieves value for money

Our promises to you:

We will:

- Continue to deliver energy efficiency and other measures that save you money, for example Collective Switching
- Monitor our performance and carry out benchmarking exercises using Housemark to ensure the service is providing value for money
- Involve the Dartford Borough Residents' Forum in our decision making processes

5. How do we compare with other similar landlord organisations?

The table below shows how we compared with other similar landlords (2011/2012 data). It uses a smiley face system which highlights if we are top performing or if we need to make some improvements.

It should be noted that benchmarking data does not always give a true picture of cost in terms of value for money. For example, in number 2, although we are ranked 60 out of 70 and are not in the top quartile, we have invested in major works programmes, including fitting new kitchens and bathrooms across the stock which has increased our overall costs. However, these improvements have made a difference and benefitted our tenants.

In addition, other authorities will not always deliver services in the *exactly* same way and the smiley faces are only an indicator of how we perform against other authorities delivering *similar* services.

	Area	Our performance	Position	Number compared to	Upper Quartile threshold
1	Total Cost Per Property of Major Works, e.g. renewal of bathrooms and kitchens (Staff costs)	£44.65	12 	71	£58.05
2	Total Cost Per Property of Major Works (Contractor costs)	£1,374.61	60 	70	£744.90
3	Percentage of dwellings failing to meet the Decent Homes Standard	5.80%	52 	73	0.00%

4	Average Energy efficiency rating of self-contained dwellings	71.5	13 	69	71.00
5	Direct Cost Per Property of Responsive Repairs e.g. plumbing issues or broken windows (Staffing costs)	£66.15	39 	70	£45.42
6	Average cost of a responsive repair. (Contractor costs)	£92.76	18 	68	£93.65
7	Percentage of all repairs completed on time	95%	33 	67	96.9%
8	Average costs per property for Voids Works	£129.22	18 	71	£132.52
9	Average time in days to re-let empty properties	22.52	16 	73	23.81
10	Rent loss due to empty properties (voids) as a percentage of rent due	0.62	11 	72	0.75
11	Total Cost Per Property of Rent Arrears & Collection	88.90	35 	70	£68.09
12	Current tenant rent arrears as a percentage of rent due	2.49	49 	71	1.35
13	Percentage of rent collected (excluding current arrears brought forward)	99.9	22 	70	99.9

Key:

Upper	Middle	Lower
		

6. Monitoring Performance

The landlord service will monitor performance using information provided through customer surveys and through the scrutiny role of the DBRF and Joint Liaison Group (comprising Members and residents). Details will be fed back to tenants and leaseholders using the Council's website and the tenant newsletter 'The Link'.

We will continue to monitor internal performance on a regular basis and report this back to senior management and Members of the Council.

7. Additional information

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

If you would like any more information on documents mentioned in this report or any other information on the housing service or the regulatory framework please look on our website: www.dartford.gov.uk or contact us directly on 01322 343434 or look on the Homes and Communities Agency website at www.homesandcommunities.co.uk

If you have any comments on the report or would like to get more involved with how housing services are delivered in Dartford email resident.involvement@dartford.gov.uk