

# Dover District Council Annual Report to Tenants 2010/11

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# Introduction

Welcome to the 2010/11 Annual Report. This has been a busy and exciting year for the housing service in Dover. We hope that you will find this report interesting to read, and one which helps you judge whether or not we are making a good job of running the housing service in your area.

Last year the headline story was, of course, the consultation about whether or not to transfer your housing management service to East Kent Housing. Throughout the summer, staff, tenants and leaseholders were out and about finding out from you how you felt about this. 2250 tenants and leaseholders took the time to reply to the survey and 72% agreed with the idea. As a result East Kent Housing was launched on 1 April 2011.

Inside this report you will find a lot of facts and figures about the housing service and how we did during the year from 1 April 2010 to 31 March 2011. The report will tell you where we performed well and where we did less well. We hope you will remember some of the things that happened in the last year and will be interested to read about these, as well as what we plan to do next year.

If you would like this report in another format (such as in Braille, large print or audio), please let us know by calling us on **01304 872 213** or email **housing.services@dover.gov.uk**



It is my great pleasure to introduce the first Annual Report since East Kent Housing started managing your home on behalf of the local council from 1 April 2011. It has been a very busy year, including appointing the Board of Directors, which includes tenants, councillors and independent board members.

The involvement of residents in improving our services is very important to us and we always like to hear from you, either individually, through your local Tenants Group or newly formed local Area Boards.

Our priorities in the coming year are to improve the way the services are delivered, and given the current climate, make savings at the same time. Challenging times indeed, but we are committed to improving repairs, customer service, housing management and the general environment where you live.

I do hope you find this report interesting, please contact us if you have any questions.

**Helen Buller, Chair of the Board for East Kent Housing**



While this report looks back over what has been achieved in the previous financial year it also helps to mark the start of an exciting opportunity for tenants to become more actively involved in helping to shape the housing services they receive.

All the hard work involved in setting up of East Kent Housing earlier this year was based on a belief that tenants will, over time, benefit from a single minded focus on the development of excellent housing management services with a strong emphasis on tenant involvement.

It is important that you have information that will help you decide whether or not this aim is being achieved. Therefore, while this report looks at past performance it provides benchmarks against which you will be able to judge how services improve in future years.

**Paul Whitfield**



Last year was a busy and exciting time as the Consultation Process regarding the formation of the Arms Length Management Organisation (ALMO) was in full swing.

Tenant representatives worked with Council Staff to ensure that tenants and leaseholders were given information so that they could make an informed choice. I, along with my fellow tenant representatives, attended road shows around the District answering questions and providing additional information.

Tenants and Leaseholders now have a representative on the main board of East Kent Housing and tenant representatives together with Councillors make up each Area Board.

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We are looking forward to a year of changes and challenges that will improve the homes and areas we live in and give tenants and leaseholders a greater say in how things are run.

**Anthony Ovenden – Chairman of Dover’s Area Board**



Looking back on the past year I am so proud of the progress we have made. Of course the transfer of the management of our housing to East Kent Housing was a huge change - one in which so many people played key roles, including your tenant representatives who have worked incredibly hard on your behalf to make sure that all tenants could look forward to better services in the future. This is my opportunity to say thank you to them and to all of you who took the time and trouble to take part in the discussions and consultations.

A time of change is also an opportunity to take a fresh look at things and that is just what all of us will be doing, to see where we can make things better by maybe doing things just a bit differently, but we will not be able to do it all at once and we will not do it without talking it through with your tenant representatives!

**Councillor Chandler, Dover District Council**

## How we put this report together

Before we even started to write this report we asked as many of our tenants and leaseholders as possible to tell us what they were interested in reading about. We have used an online survey and taken the same questions out to meetings across the District. Thank you to everyone who took the time to complete these. You told us that you are most interested in reading about:

- What we do and who we are; and
- Where we spend our money.



Last year we worked with tenants and leaseholders to find out which areas of our service they felt we could improve in their area. We used this information to offer you new service standards called local offers or promises. The new local service standards came into effect on 1 April 2011 and we have included in this report details of how we are doing with these.

We also asked you where you would like to see us make improvements to our service this year, and you came up with a number of new local offers or promises that you want us to work on. Each section of the report sets out what these are going to be from April 2012.

## About Us

We currently manage 5021 homes. 4579 are rented and 442 are leasehold.

Below is a breakdown of the homes that are rented.

### General Needs Homes

	Bedsits	Bungalows	Flats	Houses	Maisonettes	Total
0 bed	26					26
1 bed		265	394	42	1	702
2 bed		254	836	718	55	1863
3 bed		1	21	1440	30	1492
4 bed			6	68	3	77
5 bed				2		2
<b>Total</b>	<b>26</b>	<b>520</b>	<b>1257</b>	<b>2270</b>	<b>89</b>	<b>4162</b>

### Sheltered Homes

	Bedsits	Bungalows	Flats	Maisonettes	Total
0 beds	115				115
1 Bed		44	201		245
2 bed		9	47	1	57
<b>Total</b>	<b>115</b>	<b>53</b>	<b>248</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>417</b>

### We receive money from:

Rents	16,227,000.00
Non-Dwelling Rents	415,000.00
Charges for Services and Facilities	328,000.00
Contributions towards expenditure – Supporting People	143,000.00
Contributions towards expenditure - Leaseholders	225,000.00
<b>Total</b>	<b>17,338,000.00</b>

**We spend this money in the following areas:**

Repairs and Maintenance	3,705,000.00
Supervision and Maintenance	2,713,000.00
Rents, Rates, Taxes and other charges	122,000.00
Negative Subsidy Entitlement	5,388,000.00
Depreciation of Fixed Assets	3,374,000.00
Debt Management Expenses	22,000.00
Bad Debt Provision	83,000.00
Rent Rebate Subsidy Limitation	35,000.00
Payment to Government	1,896,000.00
<b>Total</b>	<b>17,338,000.00</b>

We think the most important thing we do is working with our residents. We had the following budgets for tenant participation in 2010/11.

£50,000 for Environmental Projects (this is a rolling budget which currently stands at around £300,000).

£32,000 for Tenant Consultation

£12,000 Tenant Training

In 2010/11 – £15,500 was spent on Environmental Projects

In 2011/12 – £7,300 have been spent with further projects being completed this year totalling £30,000.

Some of the projects completed include:

**St Cecilia’s – Bike Sheds**

A project was put forward to replace an old wooden shed with a bike shed for tenants and leaseholders. Tenants can now put their bikes in the shelter. This solves the problem of bikes being left in communal areas.



Shed before



Bike sheds after

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### **Jubilee Flats – Extra Parking Bay**

An extra parking space created from a grassed area.

Sholden Bungalows – we improved the parking area with a dropped kerb.

Charles House – we erected a fence at top of the wall to prevent children from climbing on it.

### **Projects planned for this year**

A complete makeover to the front of the flats in Curzon Road to include fencing, planters and paving.

Bike shelters at Jubilee flats and Honfleur Flats.

Notice boards in flats (Dover/Deal Area).

Installing new fences at Stuart House, Birdwood Avenue.

# The Tenant Services Authority Standards

There are five standards that we have to meet. The Tenant Services Authority drew up these standards, in consultation with tenants, to help improve the services provided to the eight million people who live in social housing in England. You can find out more about these national standards on the TSA website at [www.tenantservicesauthority.org.uk](http://www.tenantservicesauthority.org.uk)

In this report we tell you how we are performing on each of these standards and where we plan to improve in the future. Under each heading we also tell you about our local offers, what we have done and what we will do in the future to meet local needs.

The standards are:

## Tenant Involvement and Empowerment Standard

- Customer service, choice and complaints
- Involvement and empowerment
- Understanding and responding to the diverse needs of tenants

## Home Standard

- Quality of accommodation
- Repairs and maintenance

## Tenancy Standard

- Allocations
- Rents
- Tenure (types of tenancy etc)

## Neighbourhood and Community Standard

- Neighbourhood management
- Sheltered housing
- Local area co-operation
- Dealing with anti-social behaviour

## Value for Money Standard

- Making sure you get value for money



## Standard One

**Tenant involvement and empowerment, this includes:**

- Customer care, choice and complaints
- Involvement and empowerment
- Understanding and responding to the diverse needs of the tenants

# Tenant Involvement and Empowerment Standard

## Customer service, choice and complaints

### What we do

We aim to make it as easy as possible for you to be able to contact us and access the services we provide. We can be contacted by telephone, e-mail, letter, via our website or in person at our offices in Dover.

Our office at Whitfield is open from 9 am to 5pm, Monday to Friday.

Housing Services can be contacted on **01304 872 1199**.

Repairs can be reported on **01304 872 299** during office hours.

Emergency repairs outside office hours can be reported on **01304 821 199**

Housing staff provide a face to face service through surgeries, neighbourhood walkabouts and a duty system in our offices.

We publish the dates of surgeries in 'Dates for your Diary List' and on our website. Surgeries are held at:

**Aylesham** - Aylesham House, Dorman Avenue South, Aylesham

**Dover** - Gateway, Castle Street, Dover

**Deal** - Deal Library

**Elvington** - Elvington Community Centre, St John's Road, Elvington

**Sandwich** - Barnesend Court, Mill Place, Sandwich

### What we do well

- ✓ We use our website, local offices, newsletters and face to face contact with you to tell you how you can contact us and access our services.
- ✓ We set clear standards for our services and provide details of these for you.
- ✓ We offer choices over the way we communicate with you and if you ask us to we will translate information into other languages or Braille, provide it in large print, or in other media such as audio tape.
- ✓ We provide clear information about our responsibilities and your responsibilities as a tenant or leaseholder in our tenancy agreement and handbooks.

- ✓ We publicise how you can become involved in the development of our services and how they are managed.
- ✓ We welcome your comments and suggestions about the services we provide and make it as easy as possible for customers to give feedback or complain.
- ✓ We keep a close check on the correspondence you send us to ensure that complaints contained in your letters are identified, as well as those we receive face to face, over the telephone, by e-mail, and via the customer contact centre.
- ✓ We have a straight forward complaints and comments system and always tell customers what their options are if they are not happy with our services.
- ✓ We use customer feedback to improve services.

### **What we did in 2010/11**

- We continued to develop our service improvement groups and tenant participation to ensure that tenants have the widest possible opportunity to get involved and influence how we provide services.
- We reviewed the information provided on the internet with our tenant representatives. Following the suggestions made during this consultation the website has been updated to enable tenants to access a wider range of services via the internet.

### **How are we doing with our local offers?**

We said we would:

#### ■ **Increase information available on the website for tenants**

We have worked with tenant representatives to ensure that the website is continually updated with relevant news and information to tenants and leaseholders.

#### ■ **Increase awareness of the Tenant Involvement Agreement (TIA)**

Following discussions with tenant representatives 'bite size' pieces of information explaining the TIA were published in the tenants and leaseholders newsletter. Due to the establishment of EKH this has now been put on hold because the Area Board will be working with tenants across all four authorities to approve a new agreement (compact).

#### ■ **Ensure business planning reflects tenant's needs through tenant consultation**

A Joint Tenant and Leaseholder Group (JTLG) was formed to oversee the development of EKH. A Communications Group and an Editorial Panel made up of tenants and leaseholders was established to contribute to and approve the newsletter and annual report.

### **How do we plan to improve this service?**

Now that our housing management service has transferred to East Kent Housing we are just as keen to demonstrate to you that we meet the same standards. To do this we will be working alongside our colleagues in Canterbury, Thanet and Shepway to get ourselves ready to be judged on this. Over the next year we will be busy working with customers across East Kent to make sure that all four authorities have clear service standards for everything they do. We will advertise these and tell you how well we are performing against them. We will also:

- Improve our website to ensure that you can find the information you need more easily.
- Publish improved information about our complaints policy and expand the opportunities for people to comment on our services.

### **Dealing with your complaints**

Types of complaint received:

11 Housing Needs

2 Anti-social Behaviour

17 Repairs

4 Tenancy Management

### **What we are doing to improve**

East Kent Housing is reviewing the complaints policy and procedure with tenants to ensure we provide excellent customer service in this area.

## **Involvement and Empowerment**

### **What we do**

Tenants and leaseholders living in the Dover area have a range of opportunities to be involved with the housing service from simply reading our newsletters to joining one of the area tenant groups.

We encourage tenants to join us and share their ideas to help improve the services we offer.

What we do well

- ✓ We offer a range of opportunities for our tenants and leaseholders to work with us to improve services.
- ✓ We have a tenant board member on the main EKH board.
- ✓ We have an Area Board made up of tenants and leaseholders.

- ✓ We support a wide range of tenant groups including individual area groups, a communications group, an editorial panel, a cleaning contract group and forums that can be set up when required.
- ✓ Our tenants and leaseholders have been involved with the selection of our repairs contractor, Mears, and continue to work with us and Mears to improve the repairs service.
- ✓ We publish a comprehensive neighbourhood walkabout programme on our website and in the 'Dates for your Diary List'. Tenants can join housing staff and others who provide local services on these inspections to point out areas of concern.
- ✓ We offer training opportunities for tenants and leaseholders.

### **Involvement across the District**

We work with two area groups (Dover/Deal and Sandwich/Rural). Between them these groups represent approximately 5021 leasehold and tenanted properties in the Dover District. Each Area Group had at least nine meetings during the year that all tenants and leaseholders were invited to.

### **What we did in 2010/11**

- We consulted with and worked alongside tenants and leaseholders to set up the first 'Super ALMO' in the country and our tenants' homes are now managed by East Kent Housing.
- We worked with tenants and leaseholders to set up Area Boards who will scrutinise the performance of EKH.
- We worked with our Editorial Panel to redesign the way we publish facts and figures about the housing service.

### **Case study – Your Area Board**

In February, and again in March, over 100 tenant representatives from across East Kent met to agree how they could organise themselves to monitor the performance of East Kent Housing. Tenants and leaseholders gave up their time to come along to two workshops designed to find out how local residents could hold the organisation to account and make sure that EKH delivers its promises to improve services.



The groups looked at ways in which they could get involved and investigate how well services are provided in each of the four local authority areas. They were particularly keen to find ways to work with EKH and make improvements, where these were needed. They also looked at the sort of information they would need to be able to decide whether things were running properly and how often they needed this information to be able to challenge things they felt were going wrong.

As a result, we now have Area Boards working in each of the four areas whose members meet four times each year and scrutinise how well EKH are doing. These Board meetings are open to all tenants and leaseholders and the Board members will be working to represent the tenants and leaseholders living across the district. If you want to find out more or become involved visit [www.eastkenthousing.org.uk](http://www.eastkenthousing.org.uk) or telephone your Tenant Involvement Officer on **01304 872 213**.

### **How do we plan to improve this service?**

We will:

- Work with our Area Board to develop ways for them to scrutinise all aspects of the housing management service.
- Provide training for our Area Board members to ensure that they are equipped to scrutinise the performance of EKH effectively.
- Review the way we involve tenants and leaseholders across East Kent and improve the opportunities for those who would like to be involved and help us improve our services.
- Provide more online opportunities for tenants to be involved.

### **New Local Offers**

- We will increase the scope of our Editorial Group so that they can review various documents and leaflets produced by East Kent Housing.
- We will work to set up new tenant forums to look at specific areas of interest, for example, disabled facilities/youth groups.
- We will work to develop a range of new ways in which tenants and leaseholders can have their say in the housing service.

### **Understanding the needs of Tenants and Leaseholders**

We are committed to promoting equality and embracing diversity in all our areas of work. We aim to provide high quality services that are geared to the needs of individual tenants and leaseholders to ensure fair treatment for all. We strive to ensure equal access to our services for the whole community regardless of race, gender, disability, age, religion, nationality, social background or sexual preference.

Our commitment to equality and diversity, and the way we tailor our services to meet the needs of different sections of the community, has been recognised by external organisations.

Understanding the different needs and characteristics of our tenants will enable us to provide services that are relevant and accessible to all. To help us with this we have carried out a Tenant Profile Questionnaire that was completed by over 60% of our Tenants and Leaseholders and has provided us with useful information about some of the characteristics and the make-up of our tenants. So far this survey has shown us that many of our tenants consider themselves to be:

- 96.14% White British
- 70.09% are Christians
- 99.9% have English as their preferred language
- 44.86% consider themselves to have a disability.
- 64% are female and 36% are male.

East Kent Housing recognises that we need to continue with this exercise in order that we can design and deliver our services in a way that meets all our tenants' needs.

### **What we do well (how we meet the standard)**

- ✓ We have a clear equality and diversity policy and hold regular equalities training for our staff.
- ✓ We offer translation and interpretation services as necessary.
- ✓ We can provide information to tenants and leaseholders in a variety of formats.
- ✓ We work with local agencies to adapt the homes of tenants who have a disability to allow them to remain in their own home.
- ✓ We have reviewed the way we provide aids and adaptations to ensure that vulnerable tenants are not disadvantaged within the process.
- ✓ We work with floating support providers and other agencies to help and support our most vulnerable tenants and leaseholders.
- ✓ We collect and hold valuable information on the needs and preferences of our tenants and use this to inform service improvement.
- ✓ We have a range of housing staff including housing officers, housing managers and support workers who provide high levels of support to people living in their own homes.
- ✓ All staff have attended equality and diversity training to enable them to understand the impact of their daily actions on different sections of the community and their responsibilities to tackle unlawful discrimination.
- ✓ We have started a programme of Customer Access Reviews (Equality Impact Assessments) for all front line services. This involves looking at what we do from the perspective of different groups of people in the district, such as disabled people or people from different cultures.

### **What we did in 2010/11 and how are we doing with local offers**

We have involved tenants and leaseholders in Customer Access Reviews (CARs), where we take a close look at the service being delivered to ensure it is accessible and meets the needs of all tenants and leaseholders.

We have been using our profiling questionnaire to collect information from our tenants and leaseholders about themselves.

We reviewed and revised our tenant involvement structures.

The three yearly election process for tenant representatives was carried out.

We regularly met with our older tenants at the Sheltered Housing Consultation Group and they have given us good ideas about how we can improve services they and other tenants receive.

We have continued to involve tenants and leaseholders in review groups that have looked at:

- Kitchen choices
- Void standard monitoring
- Cleaning contract
- Repairs contract (where tenants helped to select our contractor)

### **CASE STUDY – Tenant Involvement**

The Editorial Panel was initially set up to help produce, proofread and agree the articles for the tenant newsletter. During the year we have widened the scope of this group so that it can monitor the Annual Report and any documentation that Housing Services require a tenant view on.

### **How do we plan to improve?**

EKH is busy working with tenants and staff to develop an equalities policy that ensures our customers and staff are treated fairly. To make sure all of our customers have equal access to our services we will:

- Carry out a full review of how customers access each service to ensure that there are no barriers preventing different groups using the services we offer.
- Look at how we provide translation services to our customers who do not have English as their first language.
- Work with staff and tenants to help develop a clear and effective equalities policy.

### **New Local Offers**

Over the coming year we will:

- Continue with our survey to collect information about and gain a better understanding of our tenants' and leaseholders' needs.
- Work with tenants to identify the ways in which we will use this information to improve our service.

- 
- Publish information, by 31 January 2012, to demonstrate our compliance with our legal duty under the 2010 Equalities Act. This means we will seek to eliminate unlawful discrimination, harassment and victimisation, advance equality of opportunity between different groups, and foster good relations between different groups.
  - Work with tenants to develop and put in place equality objectives by 6 April 2012.
  - Review opportunities for tenants to be involved in monitoring local services.
  - Undertake annual one-on-one meetings with tenant representatives to ensure that they have the skills required to carry out the tasks we ask of them.



## Standard Two

### **Home Standard, this includes:**

- Quality of accommodation
- Repairs and maintenance

# Home Standard

## Quality of accommodation

### What we do

Our Asset Management Team is made up of a Maintenance Manager, two building surveyors, four area maintenance surveyors, three services engineers, four area maintenance surveyors and four maintenance co-ordinators. Between them they are responsible for the management of all planned and day to day repairs carried out in the Dover District. Dover District Council met the Decent Homes Standard in December 2010 but we continue to work hard to identify when and where our properties need to have work carried out. We have an annual budget for planned improvements (for example central heating, kitchens and rewires). For 2011/12 this is £4,095,000.



During 2010-2011 we completed the following major upgrades:

- 220 new kitchens
- 315 heating installations
- 336 rewires
- 89 properties had structural repairs
- 65 properties had new roof coverings

We also carried out approximately £650,000 of adaptation work.

There were no non-decent homes at the end of 2010/11.

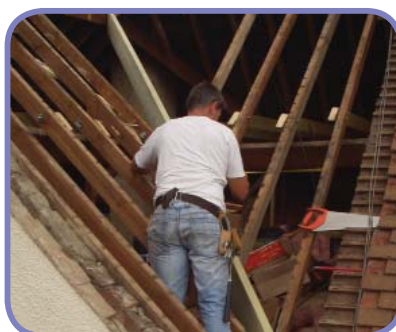
### What we do well

- ✓ We work well with tenant representatives to help improve our standards for planned maintenance.
- ✓ We offer our tenants and leaseholders a choice of the materials used in their homes.
- ✓ We work with tenants to improve our estates by setting aside a budget each year for improvements and working with tenants to agree them.
- ✓ We carry out regular health and safety inspections in our blocks of flats and plan improvement work where we need to.

✓ We have developed a five year plan to maintain the quality of our homes.

We had a number of targets for 2010-2011 which included:

- Continuing to ensure that we maintain our stock above the decent home standard.
- Monitoring and reporting to Tenant Groups the service standards for planned maintenance and adaptations work.
- Measuring and reporting the number of repairs completed at the first visit to improve our 'right first time' approach.



### **How do we plan to improve this service?**

We plan to work with the other local authority areas within EKH to save money on our contracts.

We will share good practice in service delivery between all areas covered by EKH.

We will encourage more tenant feedback to improve service delivery across all areas.

### **New Local Offers**

We will publish a future programme of planned maintenance work and improve communications between contractors, tenants and leaseholders.

We will continue to set aside money to ensure we maintain all homes above the Decent Homes standard.

We will improve co-ordination and the working practices of our contractors by holding joint meetings.

We will develop and promote energy saving initiatives to support environmental and sustainability strategies and to reduce energy costs for tenants.

## Day to Day Repairs

### What do we do?

Dover spends £1,550,000 on day to day repairs on dwellings, garages and voids. Our contractor (Mears) undertakes this work for us.

### What we do well

- ✓ We offer a morning or afternoon appointment system. This was the appointment system that tenants chose during the contract consultation.
- ✓ Our contractor sends a text reminder to you the day before to remind you they are calling.
- ✓ Our maintenance surveyors join housing officers on neighbourhood walkabouts and report any repairs.
- ✓ We have established a cleaning review group with tenants to improve the cleaning service for communal areas.

### What we did in 2010/11

Our contractor EPS gave notice to terminate the maintenance contract early in December 2010. We then appointed Morrisons on a temporary contrary until the new contract was agreed. In July 2011 Mears was appointed as the new contractor for day to day repairs and voids.

The early contract termination by EPS and the short term contract that followed have adversely affected the performance figures for 2010/11. The appointment of Mears is a long term contract and Mears already provide a good quality maintenance service for both Canterbury and Thanet, so we are confident that performance will improve in 2011/12

### Case study – adaptation works

Dover District Council carries out adaptations to its housing stock to help people remain independent and safe within their homes. To make good use of our housing stock we prefer to adapt ground floor flats and bungalows. This helps to ensure that we have a good stock of homes suitable for our elderly and disabled tenants for the future.

Adaptations are individual to a person's needs and where these are more complex we work closely with occupational therapists from Kent County Council and local hospitals.



Last year a bungalow was adapted for a tenant who because of ill health became a permanent wheelchair user. It was necessary to provide a larger bathroom and convert it to a wet room. An external storage room was incorporated into the bathroom to double its size. The internal doorways were widened so the resident could move easily around the home in a wheelchair.

Ramps were built at the front and back doors so access in and out of the property was possible. Following this work the resident was able to be more independent and less reliant on carers to help with day-to-day living.

### How we performed

The contract target is to complete 98.5% of all urgent jobs within the target times: 16 days (routine), three days (urgent) and four hours (emergency).

In the first year the targets were narrowly missed, due in the main to the impact of the handover and start up of the contract.

Number of jobs completed 2010/11	% total completed on time	% urgent completed on time	% Customer satisfaction
9631	84%	92.5%	97%

90.3% of repairs appointments were kept by our tradesmen.

Although performance was below target customer satisfaction rates of 97% remained above target.

### How do we plan to improve?

- We will be working closely with our repairs contractor to ensure we increase the number of repairs fixed right first time and that our performance compares well with other local housing providers.
- We aim to reduce the waiting list for adaptations by an average of two months.



## Standard Three

### Tenancy Standard, this includes:

- Lettings and dealing with empty homes
- Rents and tenure types

# Tenancy Standard

## Letting homes and dealing with empty properties

### What we do

Our waiting list is continuing to grow as demand for council housing far outstrips supply. In March 2011 there were 3037 registered on the waiting list for accommodation. Our waiting list is shared by most of the Housing Associations in the area.

When homes become empty, they are advertised and are offered to people on our waiting list using the Kent Home Choice system. Last year we let 270 homes to new tenants.

### Homes let by the Council in 2010/11

	House	Flat	Maisonette	Bungalow	Bed-sit	Bed-sit-Bungalow	TOTAL
0 bed					6		6
1 bed	3	56		26			85
2 bed	34	79	6	15			134
3 bed	39	2	1				42
4 bed	1	1					2
5 bed	1						1
TOTAL	78	138	7	41	6		270

During 2010/11, 115 households approached the council as homeless. Of these, 49 were accepted as eligible for assistance, unintentionally homeless and in priority need.

Of the new lettings that took place last year, 11 properties were allocated to people who had approached the council as homeless. 176 properties were allocated to people from the housing register and 67 were tenants who needed to move from one home to another.

We know how important getting a new home is so we try to minimise the time our properties stand empty. Our average time to re-let empty properties during 2010/11 was 30 calendar days, which was above our target of 23 days. This was mainly due to the poor performance of our previous maintenance contractor. We have now appointed a new contractor and are confident that performance will improve in future. We have also worked with our residents to introduce a lettings standard to ensure that all of our properties are at an acceptable standard when they are let.

## What we do well

- ✓ We are continuously seeking to reduce the time our homes stand empty to maximise our rental income.
- ✓ We have a fortnightly bidding cycle to keep our empty properties to a minimum.
- ✓ We have developed and published a letting standard with tenants.
- ✓ We compare our performance with other housing providers and regularly look at good practice so that we can improve the service that we are providing.
- ✓ We publish our allocations policy and key strategies.
- ✓ We have an easy read guide to the housing register and allocation process.
- ✓ We offer support and a choice of ways to bid for properties - applicants can bid by phone, text, by post, on-line or via digital TV service.
- ✓ We offer support and help with bidding to our most vulnerable tenants.
- ✓ We have an appeals process so that any resident can query their 'pointing' position.
- ✓ We help identify tenants who may wish to move to smaller accommodation and free up larger homes.
- ✓ We use an online mutual exchange system to enable tenants to find other accommodation where they want to live.
- ✓ We participate in the collection of CORE data to monitor who we are letting our homes to.
- ✓ We have devised and implemented a new post-tenancy inspection form to evaluate tenant satisfaction and feedback on the lettings process, the standard of their new home and their first impression of their neighbourhood.

## New Local Offers

- Before the end of the tenancy, the housing officer and area surveyor will consistently carry out pre-void inspections to advise the tenant of their responsibilities, including those regarding the condition of the property so that they can avoid being charged when they end their tenancy.
- We are investigating the idea of an incentive scheme to encourage those tenants who are moving to leave their property in the best possible condition. This will help reduce the amount of time our homes stand empty.
- We will be consulting on a revised allocations policy and the introduction of a banding system as an alternative to the current points system for assessing housing need.

## Rents and service charges

### What we do

We set rents in accordance with government guidance and we aim to collect all of the rent due to us.

At the end of 2010/11, current tenants rent arrears were £327,772 which equated to 2% of the annual debit for the year.

During the year, 7 tenants were evicted due to rent arrears, which is 0.15% of all tenants.

We recognise that many of our residents have been affected by the economic downturn and are experiencing difficulties in paying their rent. We offer a range of specialist housing support services to help tenants keep their tenancies and avoid the risk of eviction. This includes floating support to tenants who need additional support to live independently and manage their tenancies (such as paying bills or claiming benefits).

Our Housing Rents team is on hand to help when tenants who fall into arrears. They can give basic advice on debts and the availability of benefits so that tenants can maximise the money they have coming in. Where tenants have multiple debt problems we refer them to specialist debt advisors.

### What do we do well?

- ✓ We have clear procedures for rent setting and service charge arrangements.
- ✓ We issue quarterly rent statements to our tenants so that they can monitor their own accounts regularly and take action if they fall into arrears.
- ✓ We offer a range of payment methods so that residents can choose the most convenient way to pay their rent.
- ✓ We have a firm but fair approach to arrears recovery.
- ✓ We offer support for our most vulnerable tenants before and after they take up their tenancy.

### What we achieved in 2010/11

- Housing Rent staff were trained to sign post tenants to those organisations that would help to support them with debt management and to maximise their income by claiming the correct benefits.
- Possession claims submitted on line – this is less expensive and helps to reduce court costs to our tenants

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### How do we plan to improve this service?

- We will look at how tenants can have easier access to their rent account.
- We will review the process we use when we sign up new tenants to ensure we get important information to them in the most appropriate way.
- We will look at new ways of producing the quarterly rent statements to make them easier to understand.
- We will introduce a system of financial health checks for all tenants falling behind with their rent.

## Our Tenancies

### What we do

We give new tenants a secure tenancy agreement when they are offered accommodation.

We visit all our new tenants within six weeks to make sure they understand all aspects of the tenancy, the service we provide, what is expected of them and what they can expect from us.

### What we do well

- ✓ We have a clear tenancy agreement that sets out what you can expect from us as landlords and what we expect from you as our tenants.
- ✓ We provide guidance to all new tenants about where they can receive any support they may need to help them maintain their tenancy.
- ✓ We issue tenants with a comprehensive tenants' handbook with the tenancy agreement.

### How we plan to improve

- We will work with tenants and leaseholders to introduce introductory tenancies to all new tenants.

A man in a dark sweater stands in front of a brick building. A thought bubble is superimposed over the image, containing text about 'Standard Four'.

## Standard Four

### **Neighbourhood and Community Standard, this includes**

- Neighbourhood management
- Sheltered housing
- Local area co-operation
- Dealing with anti-social behaviour

# Neighbourhood and Community Standard

## Neighbourhood Management

### What we do

Our Tenants Services team is based at the Whitfield Office in Dover. The Sheltered Housing Team works from various sheltered schemes within the Dover District.

We have two Tenant Services Managers. One manages three housing officers providing services to Dover and its rural area, and also manages the rents team. The other manages three housing officers providing services to Deal, Sandwich and their rural areas, and also manages the Sheltered Housing Team.

They deal with anti-social behaviour, tenancy issues, neighbour disputes, estate inspections and estate improvements. They aim to provide a good quality environment by ensuring that the contractors cut the grass and shrubs, remove the rubbish and weeds, and provide a safe clean place to live in. They also work with other agencies and officers to deal with the more complex anti-social behaviour problems that need to be tackled jointly with other agencies.



Housing officers are responsible for several neighbourhoods and manages approximately 750 properties. These are a mixture of flats, houses and bungalows.

Housing officers carry out neighbourhood walkabouts looking at the condition of each street and block within the neighbourhood. Tenants, leaseholders, councillors, contractors, PCSOs and others are welcome to attend the walkabouts.

During walkabouts we can identify and then tackle issues that are a concern for residents. These walkabouts can help give ideas for future environmental improvements, which are presented to the Area Tenant Group for consideration. Residents in the Area Tenant Group consider projects as they emerge during the year. Each year an annual budget of £50,000 is provided for environmental improvements.

### What we do well

- ✓ We publicise and carry out a programme of neighbourhood walkabouts.
- ✓ We devolve responsibility to Area Tenant Groups for the environmental improvements projects, deciding the priorities for spending money on environmental improvements so that it is spent on the right things in the right places.
- ✓ We work with other partners in neighbourhoods to improve areas.

- ✓ We have reviewed our ASB service and signed up to the Respect Standard.
- ✓ We have monthly surgeries to allow tenants the opportunity to access our service at a location closer to their home.

### **What we did in 2010/11 and update on local offers**

- ✓ We involved tenants from different blocks of flats in the team reviewing the contract to clean our communal areas.
- ✓ We introduced a regular article in the Close to Home newspaper highlighting areas of the tenancy. The issues highlighted are all chosen by the tenants.
- ✓ We have introduced a new handbook for our leaseholders, outlining the duties and obligations of both the leaseholder and the council.
- ✓ We implemented a new leasehold billing system providing more detailed accounts for our customers.

### **Progress on local offers includes:**

- ✓ We have completed a satisfaction survey of garage tenants.
- ✓ We have publicised and are delivering a programme of neighbourhood walkabouts, their frequency reflecting local need.
- ✓ Findings from completed ASB satisfaction surveys are being analysed quarterly.

## Sheltered Housing

We manage 11 sheltered housing schemes throughout the Dover area which provide 266 flats and bungalows. All of the schemes are managed by our Sheltered Housing Officers and are connected to the Shepway Lifeline 24 hour monitoring centre. We also manage 206 semi-sheltered flats and bungalows.

### **What we achieved in 2010/11**

We have a sheltered housing tenants consultation group that meets quarterly. The group looks at policies and procedures and provides valuable feedback on the service we provide. A sub-group has formed from this to look at tenant involvement and satisfaction, and we are working currently on a survey to all our sheltered tenants. The group is open to all sheltered tenants. If you would like to get involved please speak to your Sheltered Housing Officer.

### **Quality Assessment Framework (QAF)**

The Quality Assessment Framework (QAF) was introduced in 2003 and sets out standards expected in the delivery of Supporting People services.

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The QAF has become an essential part of the means of ensuring that we deliver services to an acceptable standard and meet our contractual expectations. When first introduced there was some concern about the QAF and how it would be implemented. However, it has, without doubt, been one of the major successes of the Supporting People Programme.

The purpose of the QAF remains: to continue to drive up quality standards across the sector and to ensure that services evolve to meet the changing needs and aspirations of clients.

Local authorities are reviewed regularly. Grades vary from a 'C' which is good to an 'A' which is excellent.

Dover is currently graded as an A.

### **How we hope to improve this service**

The creation of East Kent Housing has thrown up many challenges for the sheltered service. With the exception of Thanet, the three other areas comprising EKH (Canterbury, Dover and Shepway) have sheltered housing. Each area has a different approach to how the services are delivered. In time these will be reviewed to ensure services can be provided effectively and to customers' expectations.

Representatives from EKH have been meeting regularly to discuss issues and develop initiatives to enable effective service delivery across all four authorities.

### **Case Study**

We have tenants who reside in sheltered schemes that do not have a communal lounge to meet in and we wanted to improve our communication to them. We have introduced quarterly newsletters with articles that respond to questions asked by tenants, as well as including current sheltered news.

## **Dealing with Anti-Social Behaviour**

### **What we do**

Dover implemented a new Anti-Social Behaviour (ASB) policy and procedure in 2010, meeting the requirements of the Respect Standard for Housing Management. We also produced a leaflet to show our tenants and residents how we tackle ASB. This leaflet is given to the complainant at the start of the case and highlights the non-legal and legal remedies we use depending on the type of behaviour we are dealing with. 'Behaviour and Responsibility' is clearly set out in our tenancy agreement to ensure tenants and residents on our estates can enjoy living in their homes.

### **What we do well**

- ✓ We make new tenants aware of the tenancy conditions relating to ASB at sign-up.
- ✓ We recognise the need to be fair and impartial to all parties involved in complaints about ASB.
- ✓ We take every complaint seriously and conduct a proper open-minded investigation.
- ✓ We categorise ASB cases, respond to complainants within target times, and discuss a realistic action plan to tackle the problem.

### **Our ASB Specialist:**

- attends daily briefings at the Dover Community Safety Unit and feeds back any information to the relevant Housing Officer to ensure swift action is taken if our tenants are involved in anti-social or criminal behaviour.
- meets with other agencies including police, PCSO's, Port of Dover Police, Kent Fire and Rescue, Licensing, Trading Standards, KCC Wardens, Environmental Protection Officers and youth workers every two weeks at the Community Safety Tasking and Co-ordinating Group (CST & CG) and works in partnership sharing information to tackle ASB in communities.
- attends a monthly meeting of the Dover Anti-Social Behaviour Action Group (DASBAG) to discuss particular individuals involved in ASB and works in partnership with other agencies to try to change their behaviour.
- attends a monthly meeting of Registered Social Landlords (RSLs) in the area to discuss solutions to ASB on our estates when our areas cross over and work in partnership with other agencies to solve the problem.

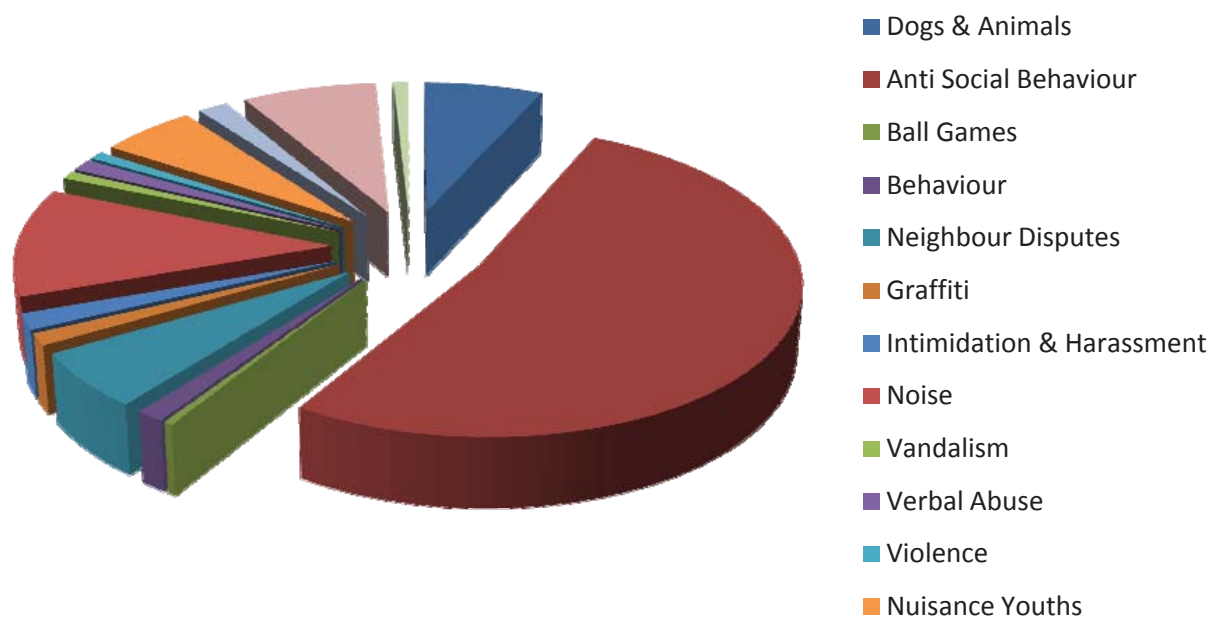
### **What we did in 2010/2011**

- ✓ We worked with the police and other agencies to tackle crime and ASB in our neighbourhoods across the district. Perpetrators were visited and reminded of their responsibilities as a tenant and the impact on their tenancy if the ASB continued.
- ✓ Tenants were reminded they are responsible for anyone living at or visiting their homes and further action could be taken in relation to their tenancy.

### Current Local Offers and Performance

We will continue to review our ASB procedure and working practices.	We will consult with our staff and tenants about any changes in the way we deal with ASB.
We will review our performance for 2010/2011, looking to develop areas for improvement including training.	We will regularly train our staff to ensure we deliver our ASB service effectively.
We will continue to work with the Shepway and Dover Mediation Service as an early intervention in neighbour disputes.	We successfully used the Mediation Service in two neighbourhood disputes last year. We recognised the need to involve the Mediation Service as early as possible during case management and this will continue in 2011/2012.
We will continue to attend Dover Anti-Social Behaviour Action Group (DASBAG) and Community Safety Target and Co-ordination Group (CST & CG) working in partnership with other agencies to review serious cases of ASB.	CST & CG meets fortnightly. DASBAG meets monthly.
We will continue to send Complainant Satisfaction Surveys following case resolution.	We are introducing a more robust way in monitoring these surveys to enable us to maximise the number of returns to improve our service.
We recognised the term ASB was too wide and changed our working practices to identify specific causes of ASB.	We are now able to report on more specific causes of ASB.

We dealt with 238 cases of anti social behaviour during the year which included:



The main resolutions to cases were early intervention by Housing Officers visiting complainants and perpetrators, as set out in our ASB procedure, and referrals to other agencies where appropriate. More complex cases are escalated to the ASB Specialist who offers support and advice to the Housing Officer to tackle cases effectively.

Once a case is resolved a Complainant Satisfaction Survey is sent to the reporter of ASB, which allows us to see how we dealt with the case and identify ways in which we can improve our service.

Of those who responded 66% were very satisfied or fairly satisfied with the outcome of their case and how we dealt with it.

### **Our Local Offers**

We are developing Neighbourhood Action Plans (NAPs) identifying areas where more intensive housing management is needed to make our neighbourhoods a safer place to live. These action plans will be reviewed and amended as required. It is also important these NAPs are developed with the involvement of tenants and other agencies to create safe sustainable environments and confident communities committed to improving the quality of life in their areas. The way we deal with ASB will form part of these plans.

### **Case Study**

Tenants in two of our neighbourhoods raised concerns about people riding bikes on walkways and paths. This was a danger to pedestrians and caused alarm to a number of residents, including mums with young children. Environmental projects were put forward to the Area Groups and following consultation, bike inhibitors were installed, solving the problem.



## Standard Five

**Value for money, this includes:**

- Making sure you get value for money

## VFM standard

### Making sure you get value for money

We always try to get the best value for money we can from the services we provide and each year we set ourselves a target to reduce the amount of money we spend and improve the services we offer.

The most significant development under this heading has been the creation of the East Kent Housing ALMO which was brought into being for the very reasons set out above. It is anticipated that by bringing services and staff together EKH can make savings in costs and provide our tenants with a far better service.

#### What we do to meet the standard

- ✓ We can show that we manage our income carefully.
- ✓ We have made savings from our repairs contract.
- ✓ We have compared carefully the cost of providing rent cards through various suppliers, and are using the supplier who offers us the best value.
- ✓ We compare ourselves with other organisations to see whether they do things less expensively. We then work with our tenants and leaseholders through our service review groups to see whether we can make improvements for the same cost.
- ✓ We work with partner organisations closely to ensure that we do not duplicate the work that they are already doing.

#### What we achieved in 2010/11

The Close to Home Newsletter was reduced in size from A4 to A5 and this resulted in a yearly saving in postage of £3,200. This saving has continued with the East Kent Housing Newsletter being produced in the same format.



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## And finally

We hope you've enjoyed reading this report, which we worked hard on to try to make interesting and informative. Throughout the development of this report we have been speaking to our tenants, leaseholders and resident groups to try to make sure that the information we provided was what you wanted to read about. We hope we have succeeded and would like to thank everyone who contributed to this report.