

RHA Annual Report 2009/10



An introduction to the report

This annual report is intended to tell you whether we are achieving the standards expected by our regulator, the Tenant Services Authority, in: –

- **Resident Involvement & Customer Service**
- **Repairs & Maintenance**
- **Lettings Homes & Setting Rents**
- **Looking After Neighbourhoods & Communities**
- **Value for Money.**

The Tenant Services Authority also wants us to work with residents to design more local services, known as 'Local Offers', because one level of service may not

meet the different needs of all residents. We'll agree local offers of services with our residents before 1st April 2011, measuring our performance against the local offers and reporting the results so that you can see how well we are performing.

If we fail to meet our performance standards or deliver our local offers then residents can hold us to account through the focus groups and residents' scrutiny panel. Local offers of services will be discussed and reviewed annually with residents

Our residents have helped with the production of this report, including the design of local offers, during their Annual Conference, focus groups and editorial panel meetings, and by replying to a postal survey.

Resident Involvement & Customer Service Standard

What does the standard say?

We must: -

- Provide choices, information and communication that is appropriate to the diverse needs of our residents
- Deal with complaints promptly, politely and fairly
- Offer all residents a wide range of opportunities to be involved in the management of their housing
- Agree local offers of service delivery
- Provide support to help residents to be more effectively involved
- Treat all residents with fairness and respect
- Show that we understand the different needs of our residents.

How well are we doing?

We offer a wide range of opportunities for residents to be involved in the management of their homes – surveys and questionnaires, meetings, Armchair Monitors, Annual Conference, Focus Groups, Editorial Panel and Board membership.



We offer support to residents to help them to be more effectively involved by providing training, travelling and childcare expenses, and translation services.

Over the last year we have made a number of changes in response to listening to residents' views. Some examples are shown below and full details are available in our 'Resident Involvement Impact Assessment for 2009/10, which is available on request.

Residents have helped to develop our Business Plan and agree local offers of service.

When we consulted with residents about our opening hours, 95% were very satisfied with the opening hours and the methods available to contact us.

Our complaints process is simple and easy to follow. It has three stages with the final stage being a panel of Board Trustees, giving the complainant the opportunity to present their complaint to the panel. During 2009/10 we received 20 complaints and 84% were resolved at the first stage.

You Said	What We Did	What Difference Has It Made?
Residents didn't like the answer phone used to report non emergency repairs.	We no longer use the answer phone.	You can always speak to a member of staff during office opening hours to report a repair.
Residents don't know who to contact.	We gave all residents a 'flashcard' showing all the methods of contact that we offer and who to contact.	You now have a handy guide to who and how to contact.
Telephones calls should be answered quickly.	We set a target for answering telephone calls within 5 rings.	We are measuring our performance against the target and will report the results to residents.





Two changes have been made, or are likely to be made, as a result of complaints made last year – the arrangements for re-setting the central heating boilers at sheltered schemes following a fire alarm to minimise inconvenience; and our pest control policy will be reviewed to make sure that our most vulnerable residents receive an appropriate service.

We offer information to residents in a format that best suits their needs. For example, information can be provided in languages other than English, large print, audio tape and Braille. We know how each resident prefers to be contacted and we use the method that suits them best – letter, telephone, email or visit.

We have asked all of our residents for information in relation to equality and any support needs so that we can treat all residents with

fairness and respect and tailor services to meet their individual needs. To date we have collected this information from 67% of our residents. We aim to have collected 75% by April 2011.

Plans for improvement

During 2010/11 we intend to introduce two new opportunities for involvement in response to feedback from residents: -

- **A focus group specifically for residents of sheltered schemes so that they can discuss and influence issues that are specific to their accommodation and needs.**
- **A scrutiny panel for residents to monitor our performance and review our service in more detail than the focus groups have time to do.**

Local offer for resident involvement in 2011/12

Residents have told us that we need to improve on the way that we communicate with members of our Focus Groups, Armchair Monitors and Editorial Panel. By April 2011 we'll agree service standards for how we communicate with, and provide feedback to, these residents.



Repairs & Maintenance Standard

What does the standard say?

We must: -

- **Maintain all homes to a standard set by the Government or the standard that applied when the property was built, whichever is the highest**
- **Provide a cost effective repairs service that offers choices to residents; aims to complete repairs 'right first time'; balances the amount spent between planned and responsive repairs; achieves value for money and meets all legal requirements for health and safety**
- **Work with other organisations, such as local councils, to provide an adaptations service that meets resident's needs.**

How well are we doing?

All of our properties meet the Government's Decent Homes standard, which requires that homes have reasonably modern facilities, are warm and weatherproof. Although residents' satisfaction with the condition of our homes is very high, we've recently surveyed our Armchair Monitors so that we can agree a standard for our properties that exceeds the Decent Homes standard.

Last year we spent more money on planned maintenance than on responsive repairs. We are aiming to increase this so that we achieve greater value for money.

We have started to measure the number of repairs that are completed 'right first time' and we will publicise the results to all residents.

We work hard to involve and keep our residents informed about planned improvement works. However, feedback from residents



suggests that there is more that we need to do. Our residents' Focus Groups agreed how we should prioritise improvement works and also how we should involve residents in the planning of the works. We publicise the programme of work in our newsletter, hold meetings with the residents affected by the planned work and offer numerous choices from the style of kitchen units to the colour of shower panels.

The amount of compensation paid to residents following major repair or improvement work in their homes has recently been reviewed. The Board of Trustees agreed to increase the amounts paid, in line with the recommendations made by our Armchair Monitors.

We carry out extensive health and safety work each year including gas, fire and electrical checks, as well as servicing of equipment such as lifts.

We've increased the budget for funding disabled adaptations by more than 30% to £40,000 for 2010/11 due to the increased demand from residents and reduced funding from local councils.

During 2009/10 we installed 95% of all minor adaptations (for example,

grab rails, extra banister rails and lever taps) within 28 days.

Last year the adaptations provided to resident's homes to help them move around more easily and continue to live independently included 28 level access showers, 2 stair lifts, 2 door entry systems, 6 access ramps, and grab rails for more than 30 residents.

Plans for improvement

During 2010/11 we will: -

- **Agree with residents a standard to which our properties will be improved and maintained.**
- **Measure the number of repairs completed 'right first time' and set a target for achieving in 2011/12.**
- **Produce a diagnostic repairs handbook to help residents to report repairs.**

Local offer for repairs & maintenance in 2011/12

Residents have told us that we should do more for elderly residents so by April 2011 we'll agree an enhanced service for the residents of our sheltered schemes.

Tenancy Standard

What does the standard say?

We must: -

- Let our properties in a fair way, making the best use of them whilst helping local councils to meet the housing needs in their area and build sustainable communities. Offer services to deal with overcrowding and under occupation of homes
- Provide information to help residents who wish to move
- Minimise the length of time properties are empty before being re-let
- Charge rents in accordance with the Government's instructions and clearly explain to residents any changes in the rent charged
- Offer the most secure type of tenancy and meet all legal requirements relating to tenancies
- Have clear policies on managing tenancies and help residents to keep their tenancy, including making sure that each home is occupied by the person we let it to.

How well are we doing?

Our lettings policy is based on a points system so that the applicants with the most need for housing are re-housed first. We clearly explain the reasons for excluding some applicants from our waiting list.

Half of our empty homes are offered to applicants nominated by the local council. This is a condition of receiving grants from the Government towards building new homes and means that we help local councils to meet housing needs in their area.

We are members of HomeSwapper, a national scheme that helps residents to move home by exchanging with another resident.

In 2009/10 we let 141 homes and on average the properties were empty for 28 days before being re-let.

Of the 141 residents that we re-housed, 20 moved from another Railway Housing Association property and 61 were re-housed due to ill health or disability.

On average we spent £914 on each empty home to get it ready for the new resident.

We charge rents in accordance with the instructions issued by the Government. This year has seen a reduction in many residents' rents, in line with the negative rate of inflation in September 2009.

We have a good record for collecting rent and the amount of rent owed to us is very low compared to other landlords. We have an agreement with the Citizens Advice Bureau in the North East to enable our residents to get easy access to welfare benefits and debt advice.

Assured tenancies are offered to all new residents and discussed in detail before their tenancy starts. We also issue a Residents' Handbook to new residents and explain their rights and responsibilities as well as our key policies.

Twice yearly visits are offered to all residents to provide assistance and listen to the resident's views on our service. We also check that the property is occupied by the person(s) we let it to.



Plans for improvement

During 2010/11 we will –

- Introduce incentives to encourage residents who live in large under-occupied homes to move into smaller homes
- Reduce the time it takes to re-let empty homes
- Investigate the availability of furniture schemes to help residents who can't afford to buy new furniture.

Neighbourhood & Community Standard



What does the standard say?

We must work in partnership with our residents, other landlords, local councils and other agencies like the Police to keep the neighbourhood and communal areas clean and safe and promote social, environmental and economic well being.

How well are we doing?

Our estates are tidy and well maintained. In 2009/10, 96% of residents were satisfied with the maintenance of communal gardens.

We employ contractors to clean the communal areas and windows at our schemes. A survey in January 2010 showed that residents are less satisfied with the window cleaning service so we are working to improve this.

Estate inspections are carried out twice yearly at all schemes of more than 6 properties. Residents are invited to accompany staff on the inspections to identify any problems. Following the inspection all residents receive a letter to tell them about any problems that were found and what we are going to do to deal with these.

We are involved in groups that aim to improve the local area for residents such as the Foxwood Action Group in York, the Bank Top Community Partnership in Darlington and the Darlington Financial Inclusion Forum.

We use a budget of £5,000 to support local community events.

Fortunately our residents experience few problems with anti-social behaviour and disputes between neighbours. However, we do work with social services, the Police and other agencies when necessary to deal with any nuisance. We have detailed procedures with stated timescales for responding to complaints of anti social behaviour, domestic violence, harassment or hate crime.

Plans for improvement

During 2010/11 we will: -

- **Introduce customer satisfaction monitoring for residents who report problems with anti social behaviour**

- **Update the tenancy agreement so that it is in plain language and includes clear conditions relating to anti social behaviour, harassment and hate crime, domestic violence and criminal activities.**

Local offer for neighbourhood & community in 2011/12

Residents have told us that they would like to make changes to the way that communal gardens are maintained so before 1 April 2011 we will agree new specifications with the residents of two schemes so that the work is tailored to meet their expectations. Over the coming years we will then agree a garden maintenance standard with the residents of each of our schemes that have communal gardens.

Value for Money Standard

What does the standard say?

We must: -

- Provide cost effective, efficient, quality services and homes
- Tell you how we've prioritised spending on each standard and local offers
- Tell you how we've made sure that we have achieved value for money
- Tell you what our plans are for improving on this
- Enable residents to influence the services we provide and the cost of those that are then charged to residents in service charges

How well are we doing?

Members of our focus groups influenced our budget for this year and agreed the priorities for spending.

We sent information in our Annual Review to all residents on how we spent money last year. This was sent with the summer newsletter. The vast majority of our residents (92.5%) consider that their rent represents good value for money.

Last year we reviewed the way that we carry out gas safety checks. As a result we now employ a gas service engineer rather than using contractors. We expect to save at least £28,000 per year and improve our performance from next year onwards.

To make savings on the cost of responsive repairs, non urgent works are held and then carried out as one project. A small saving of £5,000 was made last year because we didn't start doing this until part way



through the year. Greater savings should be made this year.

We evaluate the 'life cycle costs' of all the products we use in repairing, improving and building homes to ensure that we get the best value for money over the life span of each product.

Plans for improvement

During 2010/11 we will: -

- Review how we buy goods and services to make sure that we achieve value for money
- Compare the costs and quality of our services to other similar organisations.

How do we compare to other landlords?

We use an independent company called HouseMark to compare our performance against other landlords.

It has assessed that we compare well on the following:

- The cost of our repairs service
- Our rent levels
- Our performance on:
 - collecting rents
 - the amount we spend on empty homes before these are re-let
 - the length of time we take to re-let empty homes.
- Residents' satisfaction with:
 - the overall service we provide
 - the quality of their homes
 - their neighbourhood as a place to live
 - our repairs service
 - how we handle complaints
 - that their views are taken into account.

This is our first Annual Report that tells you how we are doing against the standards set by our regulator, the Tenant Services Authority. Please tell us what you think of our performance and the style of this report. Let us know your comments by talking to a member of staff, by telephone, letter, text, email or via our website.

English

Information can be made available in other languages, or other formats such as Braille, large format or audio tape, on request.

Arabic:

يمكن توفير المعلومات بلغات أخرى و صيغ أخرى مثل طريقة بريل أو شرائط سمعية ، حسب الطلب

Bengali:

আপনি অনুরোধ করলে এই তথ্যগুলি অন্য ভাষাতে, অথবা অন্য কোনো মাধ্যমে যেমন ব্রেইল-এ বা অডিও টেপে, পাওয়া যেতে পারে।

Somali:

Faahfaahinta waxa kale oo aad ku heli kartaa luuqadaha kale, ama siyaabo kale, sida Farta waaweyn ama canjal maqal ah, waana in aad soo codsato.

Turkish:

Talep üzerine bu bilgi diğer dillerde veya görme engelliler için kabartma alfabesi ve ses bandı formatında da temin edilebilir.

Urdu:

یہ معلومات دیگر زبانوں اور دوسری صورتوں جیسا کہ بریل (نمائینا افراد کے لیے خصوصی عبارت) یا آڈیو ٹیپ پر بھی فراہم کی جاسکتی ہیں۔



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