

Wiltshire Council  
Where everybody matters

Wiltshire Council  
Housing Management  
Annual Report for 2009/2010

Expanded customer service point at Milford Street –  
New council offices at Bourne Hill

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## Foreword



I regard our stock of council properties in the south of the county as a valuable asset with no question of going for disposal via a further tenant ballot. It is clear that the south Wiltshire tenants are not prepared to move to being managed by a housing association and have rejected this in two previous ballots. We are currently building new council houses in both south and west Wiltshire for the first time in many years and we hope there will be further opportunities to provide much needed new affordable homes using council-owned land in the future. Our key focus is tenant satisfaction and this report sets out the standards we aim to achieve.

The Audit Commission report has been a challenge. It highlighted many areas of weakness in the department. We have reacted in a positive manner to the criticisms and have developed a good quality improvement plan that addresses all the issues. The formation of the Housing Commission to oversee this involves outside expertise as well as tenant representatives. This has spawned a number of initiatives, not only to address the shortcomings, but also to improve tenant involvement. We are also conducting pilot schemes to make council estates better places to live, with improvements to common areas and better re-cycling facilities.

In summary, it is the intention to make this service a vibrant pro-active service looking to the future but, maintaining the best possible standards for our tenants.

*John Brady*

Councillor John Brady, Portfolio Holder for Economic Development, Planning and Housing.

1st October 2010



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# Introduction

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This report covers the financial year from 1 April 2009 – 31 March 2010, which was the first year the housing stock was managed by Wiltshire Council, after its transfer from the ownership of Salisbury District Council.

This is the first report that has been produced since the Tenant Services Authority (TSA) took over regulation. The TSA is the regulator for social housing in England.

The report has been drawn up in consultation with a dedicated group of six tenants including representatives from the Tenants' Panel and Sheltered Housing Forum who advised us at the start what they wanted to see in the report. The report was then taken to the Tenants' Panel to seek their approval, and also to the council's cabinet for final approval before publication.

As part of the process of producing the report we have also been working closely with the "three Star" leading housing organisation Poole Housing Partnership which has provided excellent advice on best practice. We have compared our performance with other councils using the "Housemark" bench-marking club, and arranged a programme of field trips to other housing organisations recognised as leaders in a particular area, to learn more about best practice.

The background to this report is the Audit Commission inspection in February 2010 that found that the council's landlord services were offering a no star/poor service with uncertain prospects for improvement. The Audit Commission's report and the council's Audit Inspection Improvement Plan can be seen on the council's website on the following page:


<http://www.wiltshire.gov.uk/housing/housingmanagementpublicationspage.htm>

Alternatively a copy can be requested from our public reception at 27-29 Milford Street, Salisbury, Wiltshire SP1 2AP. Tel. 01722 336272, HSGMail@wiltshire.gov.uk.

As a result of the Audit Commission's assessment, the council quickly drew up an Audit Inspection Improvement Plan which seeks to build on the good aspects of our service that the Audit Commission recognised. These included the fact that nearly all our homes reached the government's decent homes standard ahead of target, that we have an excellent record on gas servicing, and high levels of satisfaction with our repairs service. The Improvement Plan addresses the areas of weaker performance, particularly around equality and diversity and customer care issues, improving policies and procedures and our leaflets, developing a strategy for our assets, making more efficient use of staff resources for our repairs service, and reducing reletting times for empty properties.

The overall aim of the Improvement Plan is to ensure that we will be in the top quarter of councils which still own their homes by March 2012. We have tried to avoid jargon in this report, but where there are references to 'upper quartile, that is what it means: to be in the top quarter or 25% of landlords.

The layout of this report is based around the five TSA standards that apply to our service. We set out what the TSA standard is, the required outcomes, and then our service standards that were



drawn up in consultation with the Tenants' Panel. These service standards will be developed over the next six months, in partnership with the Tenants' Panel, into a strong 'Local Offer' of what our service aims to deliver to you, our tenants. This local offer will be contained in a prospectus that will feature what we regard as the best deal for the future of council housing in Wiltshire.

In assessing whether our service meets the standards we have sought the views of a range of tenants including members of the Tenants' Panel and Sheltered Housing Forum, our literature review groups, and also carried out a 'mystery shopping' exercise over the summer to test our service. A consultant worked with a group of volunteer tenants to test the full range of our service and provided a report with the group's findings. This has helped us get extra feedback and identify areas of weakness where we need to improve.

# Background

This report sets out the new regulatory framework that social housing providers have had to meet from April 2010 as laid out by the TSA. At its heart are six standards and against each of these we have described the outcomes landlords should meet and our specific expectations of them.

## This Annual Report will following format:

- the TSA Standard
- our service standards
- our performance
- our self assessment and improvement plan

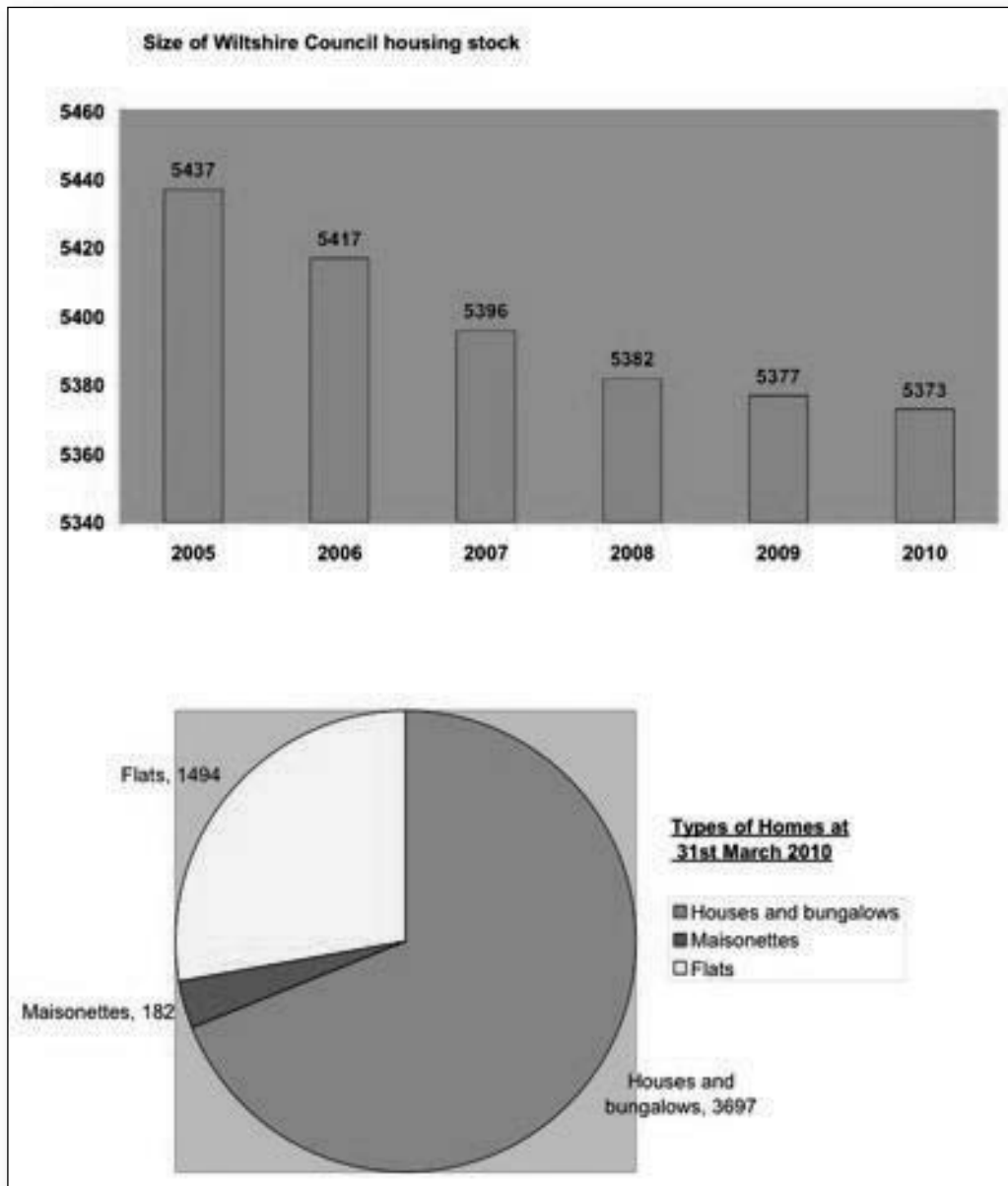
## The six standards cover:

1. **Tenant involvement and empowerment** – which contains requirements relating to customer service, choice and complaints; involvement and empowerment; and understanding and responding to diverse needs of tenants. This standard offers opportunities for their tenants to agree local offers, to take into account:
  - standards of performance offered to tenants
  - how performance will be monitored, reported to and scrutinised by tenants
  - what happens if local offers, having been agreed with tenants, are not met, which may include redress for tenants
  - the arrangements for reviewing local offers on a periodic basis.
2. **Home** – which contains requirements relating to quality of accommodation; and repairs and maintenance
3. **Tenancy** – which contains requirements relating to allocations; rent; and tenure
4. **Neighbourhood and community** – which contains requirements relating to neighbourhood management; local area co-operation; and anti-social behaviour
5. **Value for money**
6. **Governance and financial viability** – this standard does not apply to local authorities and is not, therefore, included in this report. However, tenants should be assured that as part of Wiltshire Council the service we provide is properly governed and financially sound. Over the past year we have established a Housing Commission involving councillors, tenants, staff, and representatives from other local housing organisations including the 'three star' Poole Housing Partnership, to provide strategic direction to our service.

## The background – our housing stock

### How many homes do we manage?

The number of homes we manage has been steadily decreasing. This is due to the Right to Buy scheme, although the rate at which homes are being sold has reduced, and the council has now started the process of trying to build new homes for the first time in a number of years.



# Section 1 - Customer service, choice and complaints

## A - TSA Standard 1

### **Required outcomes**

Registered providers shall:

- provide choices, information and communication that is appropriate to the diverse needs of their tenants in the delivery of all standards
- have an approach to complaints that is clear, simple and accessible that ensures that complaints are resolved promptly, politely and fairly.

### **Specific expectations**

Registered providers shall provide tenants with accessible, relevant and timely information about:

- how tenants can access services
- the standards of housing services their tenants can expect
- how they are performing against those standards
- the service choices available to tenants, including any additional costs that are relevant to specific choices
- progress of any repairs work
- how tenants can communicate with them and provide feedback
- the responsibilities of the tenant and provider
- arrangements for tenant involvement and scrutiny.

Providers shall offer a range of ways for tenants to express a complaint and set out clear service standards for responding to complaints, including complaints about performance against the standards, and details of what to do if they are unhappy with the outcome of a complaint. Providers shall inform tenants how they use complaints to improve their services. Registered providers shall publish information about complaints each year, including their number and nature, and the outcome of the complaints. Providers shall accept complaints made by advocates authorised to act on a tenant's/tenants' behalf.

### **Involvement and empowerment**

#### **Required outcomes**

Registered providers shall support co-regulation with their tenants by:

- offering all tenants a wide range of opportunities to be involved in the management of their housing, including the ability to influence strategic priorities, the formulation of housing-related policies and the delivery of housing-related services
- consulting with their tenants and acting reasonably in providing them with opportunities to agree local offers for service delivery
- providing tenants with a range of opportunities to influence how providers meet all the TSA's standards and to scrutinise their performance against all standards and in the development of the annual report
- providing support to tenants to build their capacity to be more effectively involved.

#### **Specific expectations**

Registered providers shall consult with the tenants on the desirability and scope of local offers in relation to services to meet the following TSA standards: tenant involvement and empowerment, home and neighbourhood and community. In providing opportunities for tenants to agree local offers by no later than 1 April 2011 they shall offer commitments on:



- local standards for performance.
- how performance will be monitored, reported to and scrutinised by tenants.
- what happens if local offers are not met (including procedures of redress).
- arrangements for reviewing the local offers on a periodic basis.

Registered providers shall enable tenants' opportunities to scrutinise the effectiveness of their policies in relation to tenant involvement.

Registered providers shall inform tenants about the results of their consultations on issues related to the standards.

Registered providers shall consult with their tenants, setting out clearly the costs and benefits of relevant options, if they are proposing to change their landlord or when proposing a significant change in their management arrangements.

Registered providers shall consult tenants at least once every three years on the best way of involving tenants in the governance and scrutiny of the organisation's housing management service. They shall ensure that any changes to tenant involvement in governance and scrutiny leads to an enhancement of the overall effectiveness of their approach.

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

#### **Required outcomes**

Registered providers shall:

- treat all tenants with fairness and respect
- demonstrate that they understand the different needs of their tenants, including in relation to the seven equality strands and tenants with additional support needs.

#### **Specific expectations**

Registered providers shall demonstrate how they respond to tenants' needs in the way they provide services and communicate with tenants.

## Our service standards - Customer service

We will . . .

- keep our reception areas staffed during opening times, tidy and well stocked with up-to-date, relevant information
- treat all customers fairly according to their individual needs, and provide an interpretation service if English is not the first language
- always be professional and courteous, and ensure that our staff are wearing a name badge.

## Correspondence

We will . . .

- aim to respond to letters and emails within 10 working days. Sometimes this is not possible and in these instances we will acknowledge your correspondence within five days, telling you who is dealing with your enquiry and the likely response time.

## Reception waiting time

We will . . .

- aim to see you within five minutes of your arrival
- aim to keep all appointments.

## Telephone response

We will . . .

- aim to answer the phone within five rings during office opening hours
- ensure that staff give their name and unit name when answering the phone.

## Access to our service

We will . . .

- aim to provide an easily accessible service
- provide direct dial phone numbers to make it easier to contact our staff.

## Access to personal information

The Data Protection Act 1998 gives you the right to access your own personal data. If you wish to make a request for information, you will need to do so in writing, by email, fax or letter. Please send the request to Wiltshire Council's Corporate Information Team and please provide a clear description of the information you require, your name and contact details. If you need advice or assistance in making a request, please contact the information team using the details below. A charge may be made. Email: [foi@wiltshire.gov.uk](mailto:foi@wiltshire.gov.uk) Telephone: 01225 713643 Fax: 01225 718399 Address: Corporate Information Team, Wiltshire Council, County Hall, Trowbridge, Wiltshire BA14 8JN

## Our service standards - Compliments and complaints

### Complaints

We work hard to avoid complaints, but when they do arise we use the council's corporate complaints procedure, which can be viewed on the council's website or is available in printed form on request. If you are unhappy with the outcome of your complaint, you can write to the Wiltshire Council's Corporate Complaints Team for a review of your complaint.

We will . . .

- apologise if we get things wrong or make a mistake
- strive to improve our service by learning from our mistakes and making sure they do not happen again
- respond to complaints within 15 working days.

If you need to take your complaint further, we can provide forms for you to take your complaint to the Ombudsman.

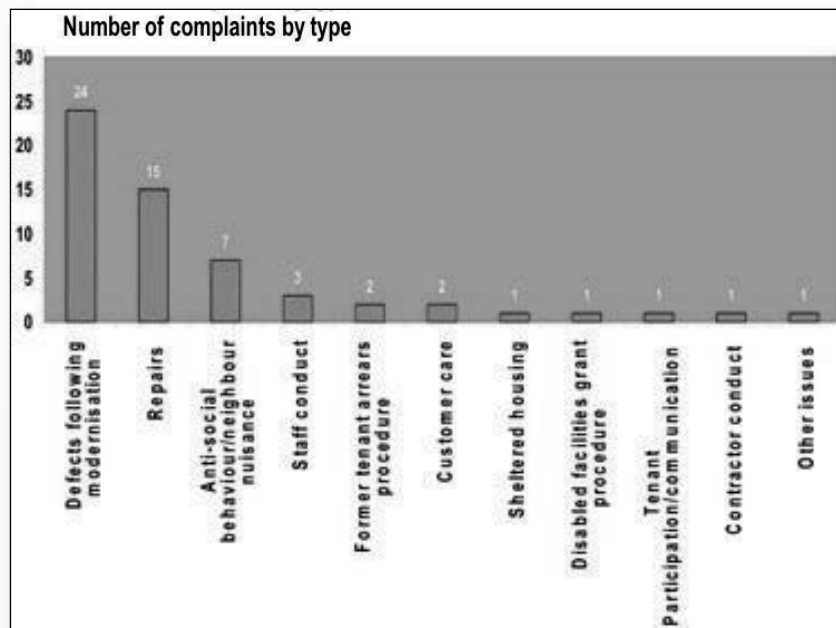
## Customer care

We are striving to improve our customer care by having monitored performance for telephone answering and letter response times. We also aim to see any customer in our reception within five minutes of their arrival. Our new reception area at Milford Street has improved access for disabled people. We are also trying to improve our information on any particular communication needs you may have by building a comprehensive 'customer profile'.

Another improvement we are working on in particular is to have a better appointment system for repairs so we can make our visit to you at a convenient time.

## Complaints

During the year 2009/2010 we received 58 complaints. While this is a relatively high level of complaints, 24 related to issues arising from modernisation work, some of which concerned initial minor defects that might be expected when extensive work is done, for example to a new kitchen or bathroom, and there is some discussion around what the definition of a complaint is in these circumstances. The next highest category was of complaints about the main responsive repairs service, which might be expected as it is the service most used by our tenants. We endeavour to get every repair 'right first time'. These complaints can be broken down into categories to show what complaints were about-



An analysis of trends and research into the causes of complaints was provided to the Tenants' Panel at their Annual General Meeting in April 2010, and we are keen to learn lessons from complaints that are received. For example as a result of one complaint we have introduced a new procedure to check with every "keyholder" acting on behalf of sheltered housing tenants, to ensure that they are aware of the duties of a keyholder and have given their consent to taking on this role. Our Handyperson service, introduced following customer feedback, is proving very popular. We have introduced a regular feature in our "Housing Matters" magazine entitled "You Said, We Did" to show how we try to learn from complaints and improve our service.

## Compliments

25 significant compliments were also recorded during 2009/10. The great majority were regarding the repairs, handyperson and modernisation services.

## New standards – As part of our Improvement Plan we will –

- Ensure that we can assist people with specific communication needs, for example people with limited vision or hearing
- Ensure that all our new public reception areas are fully accessible to disabled people
- Offer appointments and home visits
- Provide local services at our estate offices on Bemerton Heath and The Friary

## Our service standards - Sheltered housing

The council has 23 sheltered schemes for elderly people who are able to live independently, but may need some support. The schemes are linked to our Careconnect centre to provide emergency cover 24 hours a day and are located across south Wiltshire.

We will. . .

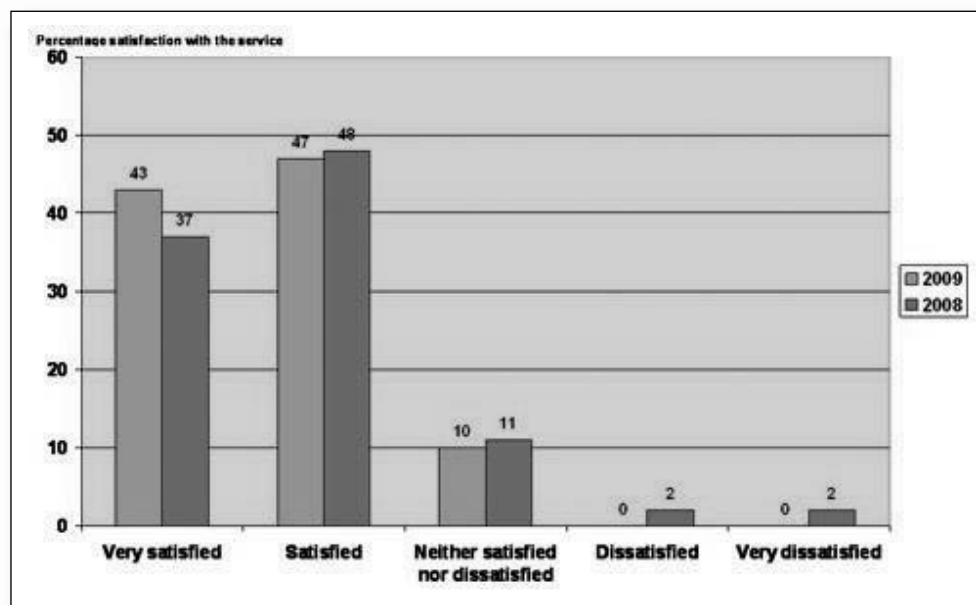
- work in partnership with other support or care agencies on behalf of residents to provide a safe and attractive environment for residents to live in
- provide opportunities for resident involvement and social activities
- aim to achieve a level of satisfaction with the sheltered housing service of over 85%.

## Our Service Standards - Providing Support

We provide an alarm service, connecting vulnerable people in the community to the council's Careconnect centre. We will work with Social Services to provide support to people who are vulnerable or who need assistance.

Every year we carry out a survey of our sheltered housing tenants and ask the following question, with the results of our 2009 survey shown below:

**How satisfied are you with the overall service provided by the Housing Department to residents in sheltered housing?**



## Involvement and empowerment

### Our service standards - Consultation

We will . . .

- work with residents to improve the service, including the tenants' panel, sheltered housing forum, leaseholder panel and residents' associations
- publicise the dates and venues of meetings at least a month in advance
- actively seek your opinions, views and ideas on how we can improve our service
- promote new methods of participation to seek involvement from all sections of the community
- ensure tenants receive our magazine 'Housing Matters' four times a year
- work with other statutory and voluntary agencies to identify housing needs and develop plans and strategies to meet them
- make information available across a range of formats including email, letter, text, phone, council website and newsletter
- encourage tenants' participation to seek their views on our service, so that over 85% of tenants are satisfied with their opportunities to participate.

In our annual survey we ask tenants how satisfied they are with opportunities to participate and the results of the latest survey are shown below. The figures show some improvement over the previous survey, but clearly there is considerable work to do. We have started implementing the council's agreed Tenant Participation Strategy. We have employed a new member of staff as a Tenant Community Development Officer, and as a result of her work and that of the Tenant Participation Officer, the numbers of tenants getting involved has increased considerably, and satisfaction on opportunities to participate has increased from around 50% to 55%.

Tenants have been joining working groups, undertaking training, working on pilot projects such as "Neighbourhood Voices", joining the editorial board of Housing Matters or helping as reporters, helping on service review groups, and undertaking training. We have gone from have around 40 "involved" tenants to over 300.

We have begun a programme of regular estate inspections and invite local residents and their representatives to participate. We have also begun a programme of regular "mystery shopping" to test our service having recruited and trained a team of tenant volunteers. We will be inviting tenants to take part in field trips to learn from housing organisations identified as following best practice, and continue to involve them in the inspection of our service.

## Satisfaction with our service

We carry out surveys every year of overall satisfaction with our service. These surveys ask many questions about aspects of the service however the overall satisfaction figures have been as follows:

### All homes-

#### Overall, how satisfied or dissatisfied are you with your home?

Satisfied 79.62% (77.54%)

Neither satisfied nor dissatisfied 15.24% (16.47%)

Dissatisfied 5.14% (5.98%)

*previous year figures in brackets*

**Performance target:** our target is to achieve 85% or higher satisfaction with our service by March 2012

#### New standards – As part of our Improvement Plan we will -

1. Work with the new "Wiltshire Tenants and Residents' Voice" organisation
2. Work in partnership with tenants on the "Wiltshire Housing Partnership"
3. Include tenants on the new "Housing Commission"
4. Involve tenants in the "Tenants Improvement Steering Group" that is monitoring the implementation of the Improvement Plan
5. Continue to include tenants on the editorial board for "Housing Matters"
6. Invite tenants to take part in service review groups
7. Establish "Finger on the Pulse" – a pilot group for tenants with mental health support needs
8. Feature tenant consultation on the development of our housing strategy
9. Ensure that there is tenant consultation on the review of the corporate approach to domestic abuse.
10. Involve tenants in equality impact assessment panels for new policies

## Understanding and responding to diverse needs of tenants

### Equal opportunities - Our service standards

We are committed to the principles of equality and diversity in employment and the delivery of services, and opposed to all forms of unlawful and unfair discrimination or harassment.

We will. . .

- make services accessible to all
- treat all people fairly
- provide services and employment in an environment which promotes equality, values diversity and celebrates excellence.

#### New standards – As part of our Improvement Plan we will –

- Ensure that we can assist people with specific communication needs, for example people with limited vision or hearing
- Ensure that all our new public reception areas are fully accessible to disabled people
- Ensure that our leaflets are available in other formats to assist people with specific communication needs such as limited sight or hearing, or who need them translated
- Build and maintain a "profile" of our customers so that we are aware of your communication needs and preferences
- Carry out equality impact assessments of new policies before they are introduced

One of the key findings of the Audit Commission inspection was that we need to improve our service to take greater account of equality and diversity issues, and understanding the “profile” of our tenants, so that we have a better idea of your individual communication needs. As a result all staff have done a full day of Equality and Diversity training during 2010, and front-line staff have also carried out training on dealing with Hate Crime. We are currently building up a confidential database of your communication needs using the information from the annual STATUS survey, followed up by a telephone survey when forms have not been returned.

**Performance target:** Our target is to have profiling information on at least 50% of our tenants by March 2012

## Our service standards - Disabled facilities grants

We will...

- acknowledge requests within five working days
- work with occupational therapists to assess the need for adaptations for disabled people and assist residents to apply for means-tested grants
- organise and supervise work that is carried out
- aim to process the means-testing part of applications within the statutory guideline times of less than six months and to complete work within one year, subject to a budget for the work being available.


### Self Assessment and Improvement Plan on Standard 1

On customer service we believe that we offer a good and improving service to our tenants that has high levels of satisfaction around areas of key importance, particularly repairs and decent homes. We recognise that we have more to do to address the individual communication needs of tenants and are taking immediate steps to address this. We aim to learn from any complaint and improve our procedures when appropriate.

On co-regulation we work with the Tenants’ Panel and Sheltered Housing Forum to give opportunities to get involved in the management of our housing, and influence strategic priorities through these groups and through invitations to get involved printed in “Housing Matters”. We recognise the need to make the Panel and Forum more democratic and representative and to involve leaseholders more. We also need to take more budgetary and value for money issues to these groups.

We give the Panel and Forum the opportunity to formulate policies, but would like to attract and involve a wider range of tenants. We also involve tenants in formulating how we deliver our services via service review groups, repairs satisfaction cards, a letters page in magazine, estate inspections, complaints procedure, mystery shopping. However we still need to expand the range of services that we review with tenants and develop infrastructure to support tenants in their involvement.

On consulting with tenants and acting reasonably in providing them with opportunities to agree local offers for service delivery, we do this by publishing our service standards, performance information and invitations for feedback and involvement. However we need to provide more



comparative performance information from other social landlords. We also need to measure how satisfied tenants are with the opportunities to influence service delivery and involve them in decisions about new methods of involvement. We also aim to address our local offer more specifically by engaging in a programme of consultation to tailor our services to local needs and involve tenants in the implementation of changes.

We provide tenants with a range of opportunities to influence how providers meet all the TSA's standards, via the Tenants' Panel, Sheltered Housing Forum and service review groups. However we need to expand and develop our involvement opportunities for this purpose, including non-traditional or unorthodox ways of engaging difficult to reach groups, and to assess the impact of each. We aim to increase tenant satisfaction with involvement opportunities to 80%.

We scrutinise performance against all standards and in the development of the Annual Report through the Tenant's Panel, Sheltered Housing Forum and service review groups, and by consulting a tenants' focus group on the Annual Report. However we need to help more tenants to scrutinise and understand performance information, challenge managers, and hold the service to account. We also need to develop tenant inspection activity, and have started this by training a team of "mystery shoppers" who have completed their first exercise.

We support tenants to be more effectively involved via in-house training workshops. However we need to publish the impact assessments of the training we have provided, and to make the 'core development programme into a systematic annual programme. We also need to expand the specialist skills development and support opportunities into a more responsive, varied and flexible programme. We also need to involve tenants more in the decisions on the content of training, its value for money and delivery.

We also need to do equality impact assessments for all tenant participation activity, and embed participation in all operations of Housing Management, and increase understanding of the importance of tenant participation throughout the organisation. To help implement our Improvement Plan a new Equality and Diversity Officer has been recruited



## TSA Standard 2 - Home

- quality of accommodation
- repairs and maintenance

The TSA required outcomes:

### Quality of accommodation

Registered providers shall:

- ensure that tenants' homes meet the standard set out in section 5 of the Government's Decent Homes Guidance by 31 December 2010 and continue to maintain their homes to at least this standard after this date
- meet the standards of design and quality that applied when the home was built, and were required as a condition of publicly funded financial assistance, if these standards are higher than the Decent Homes Standard
- in agreeing a local offer, ensure that it is set at a level not less than these standards and have regard to section 6 of the Government's Decent Homes Guidance
- new standards – as part of our Improvement Plan we will ensure that once we meet the Decent Homes for 100% of our housing stock we then maintain them all at this standard in future.

### Repairs and maintenance

Registered providers shall:

- provide a cost-effective repairs and maintenance service to homes and communal areas that responds to the needs of, and offers choices to, tenants, and has the objective of completing repairs and improvements right first time
- meet all applicable statutory requirements that provide for the health and safety of the occupants in their homes:

## Our service standards - Quality of accommodation

### Planned maintenance

We aim to ensure that 100% of the council's housing stock meets the decent homes standard.

As a result of the work carried out over many years to improve our housing stock we are on target to meet the Government's Decent Homes Standard by the end of 2010. At 31st March 2010, 98.3% of our housing stock met the decency standard. Our planned maintenance programme has been published in our "Housing Matters" magazine, and on the council's website.

Planned maintenance programme carried out during 2009-10		
Type of work	Actual completion	Approximate value
Kitchens	174	861,000
Bathrooms	193	431,000
External doors	178	223,000
Replacement heating	178	360,000
Rewires	19	38,000
Roofs	88	410,000
Windows	38	57,000

## Our service standards - Energy advice

We will . . .

- aim to ensure that the council's housing stock is energy efficient in order to minimise greenhouse gas emissions, in line with the council's environmental policy
- aim to keep the Standard Assessment Procedure (SAP) rating in the upper quartile of all local authorities
- promote energy efficiency advice included in our housing magazine and work towards the eradication of fuel poverty

### SAP Rating for energy efficiency of housing stock

All council's rate the energy efficiency of their housing stock using a system know as "SAP" which stands for Standard Assessment Procedure. The SAP rating for Wiltshire Council stock increased over the year from 67.12 to 68.35.

**Comment:** Our target for the SAP rating is 72.8 which is upper quartile of local authorities. We have already double glazed our housing stock and fitted loft insulation wherever appropriate, so improvements now concentrating on the scope for using renewable energy such as solar panels or heat pumps. Trials of these measures have already started to see whether they can deliver the service we expect at reasonable value, and where these criteria can be met we hope to improve the SAP rating further.

## Our service standards - Repairs

We provide a comprehensive repair and maintenance service to our housing stock, covering responsive repairs, and servicing of gas appliances and hardwired smoke detectors. A list of the repairs the council is responsible for is contained in the tenancy pack issued to all new tenants.

We will. . .

- ensure that repairs are carried out by trained staff who are polite and courteous
- inform you of the target time for every repair and who the contractor will be
- provide a freephone repairs number to report repairs
- aim to carry out over 90% of all repairs within the target time
- aim to carry out over 98% of urgent repairs within the target time
- aim for a repairs service satisfaction level of over 90%
- aim to get every repair right first time and monitor performance on this target
- aim to keep over 99% of appointments
- provide a pre-paid satisfaction survey card with each repair ordered
- post-inspect work, when cost-effective, to ensure excellent service
- service all gas appliances provided by the council on an annual basis using 'Gas Safe' registered contractors
- service all smoke detectors provided by the council on an annual basis
- leave your home clean and tidy after the work
- offer appointments whenever possible at a time convenient to our tenants.

## Repairs and maintenance

The council has a duty to carry out certain repairs to its properties. The type of repair and cost can vary greatly. Generally there are four main types of work carried out by the council, these are:

### *Day to day repairs*

Tenants contact Housing staff to report any minor or emergency repairs, which require attention at home or in communally shared areas.

### *External redecoration*

The council maintains the appearance of its stock by painting the exterior of houses and flats usually on a 6 yearly cycle. We do this in partnership with good quality contractors to ensure a good quality finish.

### *Planned maintenance*

The planned maintenance programme is determined by the need to meet the Decent Homes Standard and the council's desire to exceed it.

### *Preventative maintenance*

Contactors are employed by the council to regularly service and replace gas boilers; the service also extends to checking solid fuel, LPG, and oil-fired central heating. The council also ensures that gas and electrical tests are carried out prior to a tenant moving into a council home, and that electric systems in communal areas are tested frequently. In addition to this septic tanks are regularly emptied and maintained.

### *Day to day repairs*

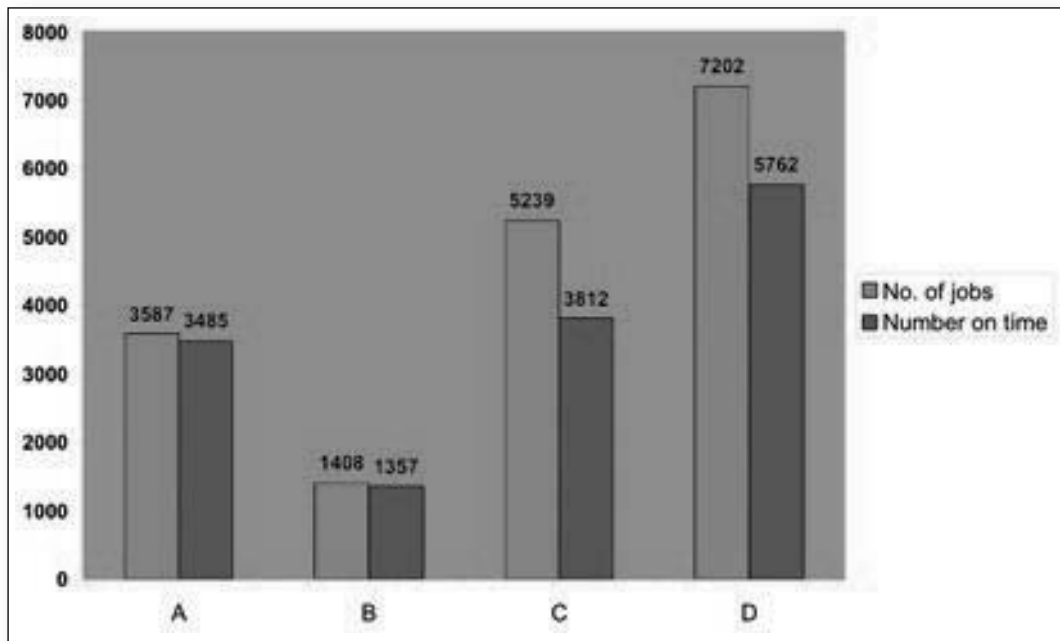
Every repair is given a priority – a target time within which it should be completed. These are as follows:

- A- immediate response
- B- within 24 hours
- C- within 5 working days
- D- within 20 working days

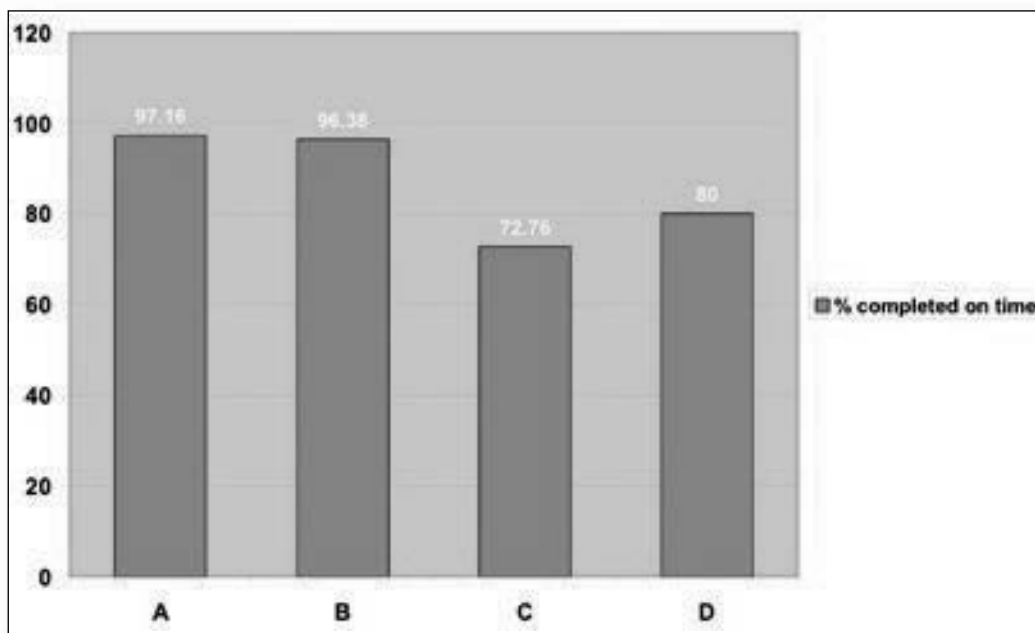
## Day to day repair orders issued

Day to day repairs	2009-10
Total jobs	17,436
Actual dwellings where repairs were carried out	4,352
Expenditure	£2,290,356.52
Average job	£126.81
Average for job in council ownership	£112.33
Average per actual dwelling where repairs were carried out	£187.03

## Number of repairs completed on time



## Percentage completed on time by category of repair



**Comment:** Our target for all repairs completed on time is 90% which is upper quartile for stock retained local authorities. We achieved a figure of around 83% during 2009/10. We are trying to improve all our processes to meet the target by either measure during the current financial year. Our target for urgent repairs is complete 98% on time, again an upper quartile figure, and our performance at 97.16 is close to achieving this figure which we hope to reach during 2010/11.

### **Results summary**

In order for us to monitor the quality of the responsive repairs service we send out a satisfaction survey with every repair ordered. To help us to continue this quality control of repairs we would encourage tenants to return their cards. The table below shows the average level of satisfaction for each question asked by the council on job tickets, which were sent out.

Question	Level of satisfaction as a percentage		
	2009/10	2008/09	2007/08
Was the repair to your satisfaction	96.49	96	96
Was the contractor tidy in his work?	98.45	99	98
Was the contractor polite?	99.05	99	99
Was the repair carried out on time?	91.50	90	90
Were the housing staff helpful and polite?	98.48	98	98

**Comment:** We are very pleased with the high level of satisfaction with the repairs service which is upper quartile for stock retained local authorities.

**Gas servicing** – as an issue involving health and safety we give this area of work the highest priority, and achieved 100% of appliances serviced for the year.

### **Self Assessment and Improvement Plan on Standard 2**

We believe we offer a good standard of service on repairs that is reflected in high levels of satisfaction amongst tenants. From the inspection by the Audit Commission we recognise that we need to improve the value for money of our service by doing a lower level inspection of repairs. To assist with this we have issued every tenant with a repairs diagnostic booklet, and are amending our repairs survey to record the percentage of jobs completed “right first time”.

We are very pleased to be approaching 100% of homes meeting the Decency Standard, and 100% of homes with gas having their annual service.

## TSA Standard 3 - Tenancy

- allocations
- rent
- Tenure

The TSA required outcomes:

### Allocations

Registered providers shall let their homes in a fair, transparent and efficient way. They shall take into account the housing needs and aspirations of tenants and potential tenants. They shall demonstrate how they:

- make the best use of available housing
- are compatible with the purpose of the housing
- contribute to local authorities' strategic housing
- function and sustainable communities
- There should be clear application, decision-making and appeals processes.

### Rents

- Registered providers shall charge rents in accordance with the objectives and framework set out in the Government's Direction to the TSA of November 2009.

### Tenure

- Registered providers shall offer and issue the most secure form of tenure compatible with the purpose of the housing and the sustainability of the community. They shall meet all applicable statutory and legal requirements in relation to the form and use of tenancy agreements.

## Our service standards - Allocations

Allocating empty properties and helping you move

We will. . .

- issue a housing register application form to join the Homes4Wiltshire register
- issue Choice Based Lettings (CBL) application forms
- maintain a 'mutual exchange' register
- provide advice on the 'home-swapper' scheme
- acknowledge your completed application form within five working days
- give you an opportunity to view property that is offered to you.

This report covers the first year of the operation of the new county-wide Choice Based Lettings system operated by Homes4Wiltshire. The figures below show the breakdown of letting during the year. Number of properties that became available to let in 2009/2010 = 300.

Dwellings let to existing tenants	45
Dwellings let to existing tenants of another local authority	10
Dwellings let to existing tenants of registered social landlords	20
Tenant moving across Local Authority boundaries (ie cross-boundary exchanges)	11
Total	86
of which:	
Tenant has moved from outside of Wiltshire	21

## Dwellings let to new tenants to social housing.

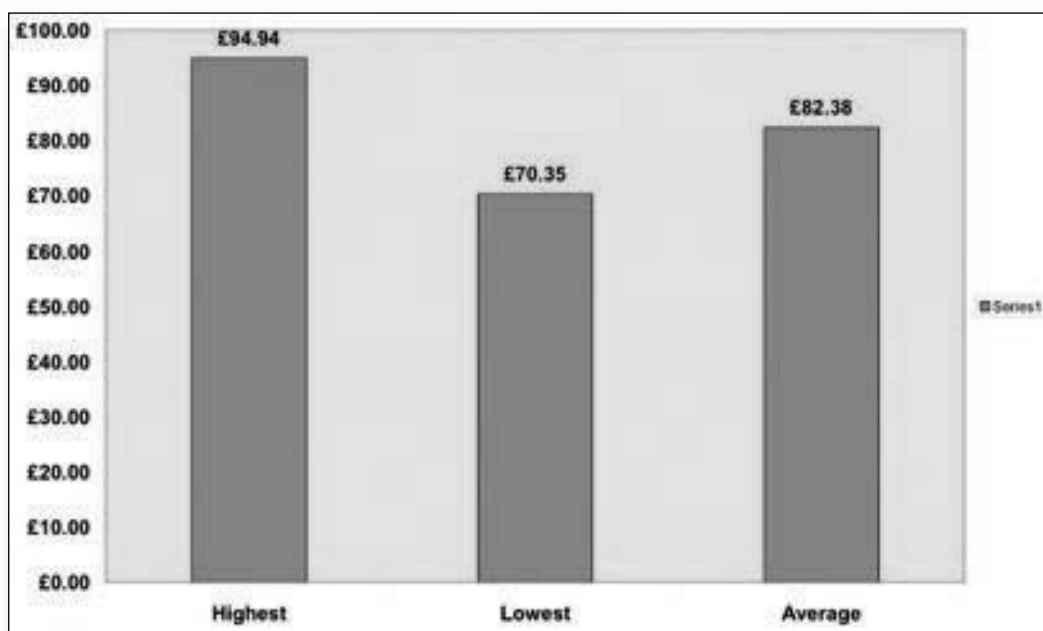
Dwellings let to new tenants on secure tenancies	51
Dwellings let to new tenants on introductory tenancies	249
Total	300
of which:	
Tenant has moved from outside of Wiltshire	33

## Our service standards - Rent

We will. . .

- provide you with a rent payment card at the start of your tenancy
- continue to offer flexible options for rent payments including direct debit, payments at the Post Office ,over the phone, or via the internet
- provide you with a rent statement four times a year.

## Weekly rent of a 3 bedroom home



## How much rent do we charge?

	2009/10	2008/09	2007/08
Average rent for all properties	£76.46	£74.74	£71.78

## Rent Increase

Set out below is a comparison of rent increases over recent years. Under the government's restructuring system for setting rents, which applies to all social landlords and requires them to meet a target rent by 2017, there is little discretion in how much the rent is increased by.

	2009/10	2008/09	2007/08	2006/07
<b>Average rent increase</b>	1.83%	2.35%	3.86%	3.57%

## Other rent figures

(to nearest £000)

Total rent received for 2009/10	£21,680,000
Rent received as a percentage of total rents due for payment	98.58%
Rent lost through dwellings being vacant	£496,000
Of total rent received, amount received in Housing Benefit	£10,836,000
Total amount of rent written off	£10,836,000

## Comparison of rent collected

	2009/10	2008/09	2007/08	2006/07
<b>Rents collected as a percentage of rent due</b>	98.58	98.04	98.61	98.24

**Comment:** Our target for this performance measure is 99% which is upper quartile for stock retained local authorities. At the present time our performance is average but we will be seeking to achieve the 99% target by the end of the financial year 2010/11.

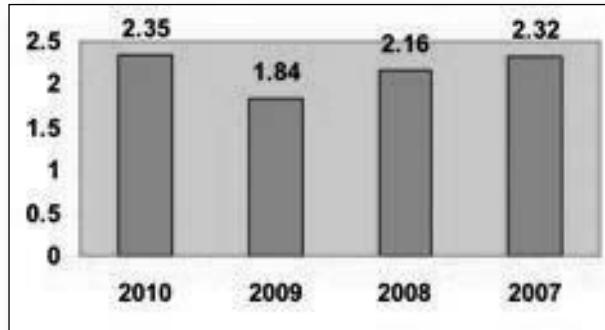
## Our service standards - Rent arrears

We will aim to keep rent arrears at less than 2% of the amount due.



An important performance measure is rent arrears. The lower we keep this figure, the more we keep our costs down. The figures shown below are a percentage of the total that should be collected.

### Rent arrears as a percentage of what is due



**Comment:** Our target for this performance measure is to reduce arrears to lower than 1.72%, which is upper quartile, to be achieved by the end of financial year 2010/11.

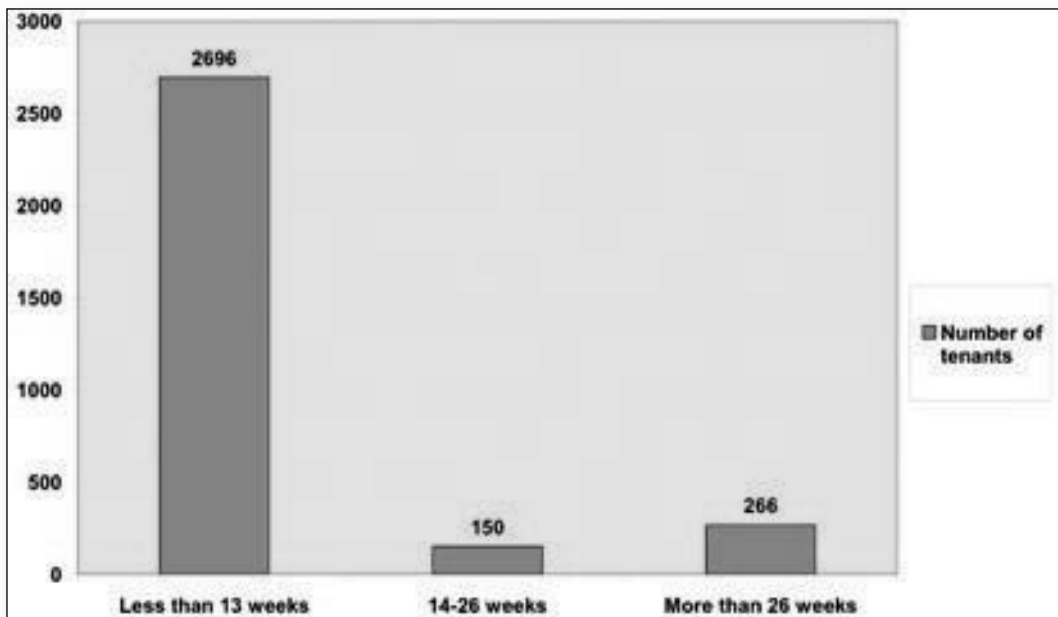
## Arrears Statistics

On 31 March 2010 there was £508,682.18 rent arrears owed by current tenants and £229,115.16 by former tenants. Current tenant arrears can be broken down into the following to show the number of tenants owing different amounts:

### Amount in arrears



### Time in arrears



## Housing Benefit

The total number of council tenants in receipt of Council Tax Benefit as at 31 March 2010 was 3197 compared to 3174 in receipt of Housing Benefit for the previous year.

## Our service standards - Empty properties

We will. . .

- aim to re-let empty properties in an average of less than 25 days
- ensure that when we re-let a home it meets our published property letting standard.

Empty properties at 31 March 2010 = 54

Vacant properties are an important issue because of lost rent income and families not being housed. There are two different types of empty property.

### **Long term vacancies**

These are properties which are either undergoing major repairs or are being used as temporary homes for tenants whose own homes are undergoing major repairs or awaiting demolition. Comparable figures are set out below on the basis of the number of long term vacant properties, expressed as a percentage of the total homes owned by the council.

**Long-term vacancies at 31 March 2010 – 1**

### **Short term vacancies**

The second kind of empty property is vacant during the period when the previous tenant moves out and a new tenant moves in. Safety checks on gas and electric supplies are carried out on all such properties, and for some properties minor repairs or redecoration may be needed. Comparable figures are set out below on the basis of short term vacant as a percentage of the homes owned by the council.

**Short term vacancies at 31 March 2010 – 53**

	31 March 2010	31 March 2009	31 March 2008	31 March 2007
Short-term vacancies as a % of the housing stock	0.98	1.13	1.00	0.87

### *Short-term vacancies – how long are these properties empty?*

#### Average reletting times

	2009/10	2008/09	2007/08	2006/07	2005/06
Average number of week / days each property was empty	6.14 weeks 43 days	4.37 weeks 30.64 days	4.71 weeks 33 days	4.7 weeks 33 days	5.43 weeks 38 days

**Comment:** The upper quartile for stock retained local authorities is an average reletting time of 24 days. We are very conscious that this is our worst area of performance and are taking steps to improve as quickly as possible, with a target of being within the upper quartile by March 2012 or sooner, and reducing the average time by a day a month or more in the interim period.

- We have set up an empty property working group to look at how to improve our processes and brought in an external consultant to look at best practice and ideas from top performing organisations.
- We are receiving advice from the “3 star” organisation Poole Housing Partnership, and are working with them to learn from best practice and how to improve our own processes, including a visit to their offices.
- We have employed a new Empty Property Co-ordinator to ensure that there is someone with the dedicated role of improving performance in this specific area
- We are working on producing new policies, procedures and standards for dealing with empty properties.
- We are looking at the properties that suffer from low demand to see what action needs to be taken to make them more attractive to let how to make best use of them as an asset if letting proves too difficult.

### Self Assessment and Improvement Plan on Standard 3

**Allocations** – We have adapted well to the new system of Choice Based Lettings after initial teething problems, but recognise that there is more work to do to make it easier for tenants to understand the new system and bid.

**Rents** – We collect a high percentage of rent due, and aim to reduce the level of rent arrears further to achieve an upper quartile performance.

**Empty Properties** – This is our weakest area. We believe that performance in reletting empty homes has suffered because of the changes to our procedures under choice based lettings, and some homes becoming difficult to let. We are seeking to address these issues and also to ensure that the repair part of the process is speeded up to ensure that reletting times are in the upper quartile by March 2012.

## TSA Standard 4 - Neighbourhood and community

- neighbourhood management
- local area co-operation
- anti-social behaviour

### **Neighbourhood management**

Registered providers shall keep the neighbourhood and communal areas associated with the homes that they own clean and safe. They shall work in partnership with their tenants and other providers and public bodies where it is effective to do so.

### **Local area co-operation**

Registered providers shall co-operate with relevant partners to help promote social, environmental and economic well being in the areas where they own properties.

### **Anti-social behaviour**

Registered providers shall work in partnership with other public agencies to prevent and tackle antisocial behaviour in the neighbourhoods where they own homes.

### **Neighbourhood management**

## Our service standards - Enforcement

The council's neighbourhood managers are responsible for . . .

- limiting rent arrears
- trying to resolve neighbour disputes
- ensuring tenants keep their homes maintained by reporting repairs and that other tenancy conditions are kept to
- liaising with the police and other agencies to tackle problems of anti-social behaviour in terms of specific targets.

### **Local area co-operation**

There are many areas of our work in which we work in partnership with other service providers. For example we work with other parts of the council in providing grounds maintenance and waste collection. We also work extensively with external partners like the Police, Probation service and social services, when tackling anti-social behaviour and attend multi-agency groups to co-ordinate our response. In providing support to vulnerable residents we work closely with social services, care providers, and health professionals. In providing support to tenants with financial or other difficulties we work with groups like Community 4, the Citizens' Advice Bureau and other money advice agencies.

## Anti-social behaviour

# Our service standards - Neighbour nuisance

We will aim to contact both the complainant and the alleged source of nuisance within five working days and within 24 hours in the most serious cases.

## Anti-social behaviour

We will . . .

- promote estate walkabouts with tenants' representatives to identify areas for improvement
- maintain a database to record all significant reports of anti-social behaviour affecting our tenants
- make contact with complainants within 5 days of their complaint and keep them informed at least every 4 weeks
- remove graffiti within five working days; racist, homophobic or other offensive graffiti will be removed within 24 hours
- seek to remove abandoned vehicles quickly within the permitted timescales
- seek to remove any dumped rubbish or appliances within five working days
- where necessary take firm action to control anti-social behaviour, including the use of injunctions, acceptable behaviour contracts, parenting orders and anti-social behaviour orders.

## The respect standard

Earlier this year we signed up to the Government's Respect Standard for Housing Management. The Respect Standard was introduced by the Government in 2006 as a means to tackle anti-social behaviour. Landlords who are committed to playing their part can sign up and show their support for this drive to improve residents' lives. The Respect Standard is based around 6 key areas:

- 1. Accountability, leadership, and commitment**
- 2. Empowering and reassuring residents**
- 3. Prevention and early intervention**
- 4. Tailored services for residents and provision of support for victims and witnesses**
- 5. Protecting communities through swift enforcement**
- 6. Support to tackle the causes of anti-social behaviour**

Wiltshire Council is fully committed to working with residents to tackle anti-social behaviour, and has been involved with a review group of tenants looking at our procedures and how we can improve them. This has resulted in a new computer database to record and monitor cases, and a number of other measures. These include making sure we respond quickly when new cases are reported to us, and also keep in contact with complainants.

We now have an Anti-social Behaviour Reduction Officer based in our offices, and report on progress to every meeting of the Tenants' Panel. Our officers attend a multi-agency Anti-Social Behaviour Panel to make sure we are working effectively with other organisations.

Respect is about all the common-sense things that make everyone get on better. Treating other people as you would like to be treated yourself, and thinking about the effect our actions have on other people.

Further information on the Respect Standard for Housing Management can be obtained from the Government's Department for Communities and Local Government website:

<http://www.communities.gov.uk/housing/housingmanagementcare/antisocialbehaviour/publication/santisocial/respectstandard/>

Our main target for performance on anti-social behaviour is to respond to the initial complaint with 5 days, and this is being met in around 95% of cases. We monitor all cases using a new computer database which can also be used to look at other performance information, and analyse patterns of complaints by type and area.

#### **Self Assessment and Improvement Plan on Standard 4**

On neighbourhood management we have started a programme of estate inspections involving residents, councillors and other involved agencies. We have also carried out a trial of "Neighbourhood Voices", which involves a local representative acting as a point of contact between the council and local residents. We have more work to do in this area but have made a good start.

On nuisance and anti-social behaviour (ASB), our ability to record and monitor has been improved by the ASB database we use, and we have carried out Equality and Diversity training for all staff, including on the reporting of hate crime. We have also signed up to the Government's Respect Standard. We recognise that ASB is an area where we have scored poorly in the annual tenant satisfaction survey, and are arranging further staff training in the Autumn and improvements to our policies and procedures.

# TSA Standard 5 - Value for money

## The TSA expectation:

In meeting all TSA standards, including their local offers, registered providers shall have a comprehensive approach to managing their resources to provide cost-effective, efficient, quality services and homes to meet tenants' and potential tenants' needs.

## Our service

### *Value for money*

The number of full-time equivalent persons employed by the council in relation to its functions in Housing Management is 73. The cost of providing housing management services to our tenants during 2008/09 was an average of £10.26 per dwelling per week. When we carried out detailed benchmarking of our service using the organisation Housemark, our management costs were recognised as being the lowest with other councils still managing their own housing stock. Our aim is to improve performance while keeping our costs low.

We do all the obvious things to obtain best value, like tendering contracts competitively when appropriate, or partnering with established contractors where this offers improved benefits to our tenants. We also look for other less obvious savings, like trying to mail rent statements with our housing magazine to save postage when possible, and introducing electronic systems to save paper. We thought about the best way to publish our Annual Report and considered just publishing it on the internet, but rejected this for the time being as we know from our annual survey that many tenants don't use the internet.

### Self Assessment and Improvement Plan on Standard 5

We recognise that there is more work to do on ensuring that we provide value for money and we are working with a consultant on a new range of indicators to monitor this issue.

### **Self Assessment against the standards**

In assessing whether our service meets the standards we have sought the views of a range of tenants including members of the Tenants' Panel and Sheltered Housing Forum, our literature review groups, and also carried out a "mystery shopping" exercise over the summer to test our service. A consultant worked with a group of volunteer tenants to test the full range of our service and provided a report with the group's findings. This has helped us get extra feedback and identify areas of weakness where we need to improve. We have also circulated drafts of this report to Poole Housing Partnership to seek "peer review" of our performance. The self assessment against each standard has been included at the end of each standard during this report.



## Annual Report Improvement Plan

Many of the areas of weakness in our service were identified earlier in 2010 during our inspection by the Audit Commission. As a result a lot of improvements to our service have been delivered over the past year, with more to follow. We drew up a detailed Improvement Plan, and therefore we already have a clear strategy that is being delivered. Examples of specific improvements we have made in the past eight months are:

- Established a new Commission involving tenants, councillors and representatives from other housing partners to ensure that tenants are getting the best deal possible.
- Established a Steering Group to ensure that the Audit Commission Improvement Plan is delivered.
- We are working with a newly employed Equality and Diversity officer based in Housing Services to ensure our service meets the needs of the whole community.
- We are making plans to move to new offices at Bourne Hill in November that comply with the Disability Discrimination Act, and our new customer reception at Milford Street is fully accessible for disabled people.
- We have started building an extensive "profile" of our tenants' communication needs and preferences, so that we can, for example, arrange for information to be translated or provided in different formats when needed.
- We are amending our repairs satisfaction survey so we can monitor if repairs are being done right first time.
- We have delivered a repairs diagnostic booklet to every tenant to help identify repairs correctly, and loaded it on our website
- We have trained all staff on Equality and Diversity issues, and also trained front line staff on how to recognise and report Hate Crime
- We have held a staff conference to explain our response to the Audit Commission inspection and the Improvement Plan
- Arranged a programme of visits to other organisations to learn from those identified as following best practice
- We have signed up to the Government's "Respect Standard for Housing Management" as part of our commitment to tackling and reducing anti-social behaviour
- We are reviewing all our policies, procedures, literature, in partnership with tenant volunteers
- A working group is producing a draft of a new tenant handbook to be agreed by the Tenants' Panel.
- We have completed a mystery shopping exercise using a team of specially trained tenants, some of whom also gained a certificate for use as a new qualification
- We have produced and published a new set of service standards in consultation with tenants.
- We have analysed the reasons behind our performance on reletting empty properties and are developing a new staff structure to deliver improvements
- We have provided training for the Repairs Inspectors around the voids standard
- We have improved our referral procedures for Disabled Facilities Grants.



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## Conclusion

In conclusion, it would be fair to say that the audit commission's assessment of our service in February 2010 came as a great disappointment, but it has served to galvanise staff into delivering the detailed Audit Inspection Improvement Plan that has produced major improvements to our service over the past eight months, monitored by the new housing commission, and a steering group set up to deliver it. We aim to continue this improvement to become a high performing landlord over the next 18 months, but more importantly, to offer you the best possible service. The journey from being an organisation rated as offering poor service to being a top performer over a short period of time is a tough one, but we look forward to working with you to achieve this.

# Glossary

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**Audit Commission** – the government controlled organisation that ensures that publicly funded organisations like councils are subject to proper financial controls and offer value for money

**Benchmarking** – Comparing performance and costs with similar organisations – we use an organisation called “Housemark” to help with this

**Housing Commission** – set up by Wiltshire Council and includes councillors, tenants, staff, and representatives from other local housing organisations including the ‘three star’ Poole Housing Partnership, to provide strategic direction to our service

**Sheltered Housing Forum** – the Wiltshire Council organisation made up of elected representative tenants from the sheltered schemes for elderly people

**Steering Group** – set up by Wiltshire Council to make sure our Audit Inspection Improvement Plan is delivered

**Social Housing** – housing provided by Local Authorities or housing associations

**Tenants’ Panel** – the Wiltshire Council group consisting of 15 elected tenant representatives and five councillors, with five other co-opted tenants including a member of the Sheltered Housing Forum

**TSA** – the Tenant Services Authority, which is the organisation that is responsible for regulating social housing in England

**Upper quartile** – in the top quarter or 25% of organisations compared with other authorities that have retained their council housing

If you wish to comment on this report please write to:

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Date: 1 October 2010

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