

Housing Management Annual Report for 2010-2011



1



2



3



4



5



6



7



8

Front cover photos: **numbered from left to right down the page**

- 1 – An estate inspection on The Friary
- 2 – A thank you card from a happy tenant!
- 3– The empty property team receive a corporate award for improving performance
- 4- The Sheltered Housing Forum in action
- 5- Tenants receiving certificates for their participation
- 6- Mere residents enjoying a cuppa!
- 7 – The Friary “Fun Day”
- 8 – Tenants receiving keys to a newly built home

Production team:

This report was produced with the kind assistance of a group of tenant volunteers: Anne Knight (Chair of Tenants’ Panel), Joyce Amphlett (Vice-Chair), Yulin Moore, John Todman, Liz Culver-James, and Joyce England

Get involved!

We are always keen to involve more tenants in shaping our services, and in a wide range of activities including our Tenants’ Panel, Sheltered Housing Forum, residents’ associations, the editorial panel for our magazine “Housing Matters”, or as a reporter, in estate inspections, scrutiny, reviewing our literature such as this report, and a range of other opportunities. If you would like to get involved please contact our tenant participation team on tel. 01722 434482.

Published on 1st October 2011

To comment on this report or request a further copy:

Business Improvement Manager,
Housing Management,
Department of Community Services,
Wiltshire Council,
P.O Box 2281, Salisbury,
Wiltshire SP2 2HX
tel. 01722 434347
john.pearce@wiltshire.gov.uk
www.wiltshire.gov.uk

Website address to view the Annual Report online-

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

Contents

- 4 - Foreword by Councillor John Thomson, Deputy Leader of the Council
- 5 – Foreword by Anne Knight, Chair of the Tenants’ Panel
- 6 – Introduction
- 7 – Mission statement
- 8 – The standards framework
- 9 -13 - Standard one – tenant involvement and empowerment
- 14-16 - Standard two – home
- 17-18 – Standard three – tenancy
- 19-21 – Standard four – neighbourhood and community
- 22-23 - Standard five – value for money
- 24-25 - Standard six – governance and financial viability
- 25-26 - Annual Report improvement plan
- 26 – Conclusion
- 27-28 – Glossary
- 28 – Accessibility statement

Foreword by Councillor John Thomson, Deputy Leader of the Council



I share with our tenants an ambition to see Wiltshire having the best council housing service in the country. In the past year we have begun a very challenging plan for improvement throughout the service.

An important start was setting up a Housing Commission to make sure our improvement plan really benefits tenants. The Commission is made up of councillors and tenants, and some external experts. As a result there has been much better performance in areas such as re-letting empty properties quickly, and find out more about tenants' individual needs, and real practical changes in better information and access to services. We have developed a set of service standards and in 2012 we are looking to build on these by developing a comprehensive new offer about the level of service we will provide, that will be planned with tenants.

I have thoroughly enjoyed working with tenants, and I know that with the election of Anne Knight to the Chair of the Tenants' Panel, the tenants of Wiltshire have an able champion. I look forward to working with her and other tenants as we take our service to the next level and putting tenants at the centre of all we do. We felt that it was vital to have an external view of the progress we have made, and in June 2011 we invited "Consult CIH" to carry out a Quality Audit of the service. It is pleasing to note that they have found there is clear evidence of improvement in most areas.

However I know that the journey has only just started. We believe we now need new arrangements to replace the Housing Commission to take the housing service forward, and are working with tenants' representatives to decide what this should be. We have some exciting challenges ahead in giving tenants a bigger say in monitoring the standard of our service, that you may see referred to as "scrutiny", and a new business plan that makes the most of the opportunities for how we manage our finances.

Many of our biggest challenges are in the coming year. We are also in a period great change in the way we are monitored. The Audit Commission has handed regulation to the Tenant Services Authority (TSA) and the TSA are about to become part of the Homes and Communities Agency. These are exciting times, and we are optimistic that we can continue to improve the service we offer you.

Foreword by Anne Knight, Chair of the Tenants' Panel



I have only been in this position for a few months, but have been involved in tenant participation for a number of years and have seen the way Wiltshire Council has, and is, dealing with its housing stock.

The carrying out of repairs has always been of a very high standard and continues to be so, and this year is seeing an assessment of the future of the way in which the repairs are carried out, either by a Council directly employed team of tradesmen or by an outside contractor. Tenants have been consulted and involved in many of the meetings, visits and discussions about the subject.

There has also been a dramatic decrease in the time vacant properties are left empty which obviously leads to increased efficiency in the running of the service.

Following the disappointing inspection by the Audit Commission in 2010, this year has been a time to rectify the adverse reports made by the Commission and the suggested changes are taking place. Examples can be seen in the Annual Report Improvement Plan on page 25.

Finally as Chair of the Tenants Panel, as well as a tenant, I must express my hope for the coming year that there are even greater improvements in tenant matters whereby tenant participation becomes active tenant involvement and empowerment, with tenants working in knowledgeable partnership with their landlord – Wiltshire Council. This can only work to the benefit of everybody.

Your report – giving you information on your service

This report will give you some important information and facts about the standards of service you can expect from Wiltshire Council and it will also show how the landlord service has been performing over the period from April 2010 to March 2011.

Tenants who have worked on this report, wanted it to be short and to the point. They wanted you to be able to have this as a useful tool to show you quickly and easily, what the service to you should be, and how the council has been performing.

We have used the groups of standards suggested by the Tenant Services Authority (TSA), the body set up to raise the standards of services for affordable-housing.

There is a section in this report on each of these areas, and it shows how the council has performed over the last year, and will also tell you about plans for future improvement and there is a lot to tell you about. Since May 2010 the Wiltshire Housing Commission, made up of councillors, tenants and independent experts, has been overseeing an ambitious improvement plan to deliver big improvements in the service. The council's [Improvement Plan](#) can be seen on the council's website on the following page at:

<http://www.wiltshire.gov.uk/housing-mgt-d138-wc-landlord-service-improvement-plan.pdf>

Alternatively a copy can be requested from our main office.

Tenants have been involved in this improvement programme in a big way, not only on the Commission but also in a Tenants' Improvement Steering Group, carrying out estate inspections and as mystery shoppers testing how we deal with your enquiries and problems. Tenants have had a big say in how this report has been put together.



Photo: some of the tenant volunteers at work on the Annual Report, assisted by tenant participation officer Janette Whittley

Housing Management Mission Statement

“Working together with Wiltshire Council tenants we will provide a Decent Home to all our tenants and will continually aim to improve housing services.”

Objectives

- Provide customer-focused, high quality services to our residents.
- Maintain the ‘Decent Homes’ standard across the housing stock.
- Provide energy-efficient, comfortable homes that residents are proud to live in.
- Ensure all targets agreed with the Council are achieved.
- Support and contribute to the Council’s strategic priorities.
- Ensure effective communication and consultation using plain English.
- Make services available and easily accessible to all in the local community, including ‘hard to reach’ groups.
- Work with and involve residents to provide excellence in service delivery.
- Maximise choice and value for money for residents.
- Empower and encourage residents to participate in and shape the services they receive.
- Consult on and publish clear and measurable standards for all service areas.
- Recognise the central role of our staff in delivering services
- Enable a motivated and focused staff through empowerment, team building, training and effective appraisal
- Provide innovative, flexible and responsive housing management and maintenance services.
- Work with all our partners to provide best value, quality solutions and continuous improvement across all services.
- Be an outward-looking, learning organisation at the forefront of innovation and development in the housing sector.
- Use complaints and customer feedback positively to learn and improve services



Photo: the Tenants’ Panel toasting a year of achievement

The Standards Framework

The layout of our Annual Report is based around the Tenant Services Authority (TSA) standards. The six standards cover:

1. **Tenant involvement and empowerment** –customer service, choice and complaints; involvement and empowerment; and understanding and responding to diverse needs of tenants.
2. **Home** –quality of accommodation, repairs and maintenance
3. **Tenancy** –allocations; rent; and tenure
4. **Neighbourhood and community** –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 therefore covered in less detail 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. We have also started looking at “tenant scrutiny” and self-regulation, i.e. involving you in monitoring and supervising our service.




When assessing how we have performed against the standards, we have compared against our service standards that can be viewed on this link, and copies are available from our Milford Street reception-

<http://www.wiltshire.gov.uk/housing-mgt-d4-housing-customer-charter.pdf>

We have also compared actual performance against our performance targets that can be viewed on this link:

<http://www.wiltshire.gov.uk/housing-mgt-final-version-2010-11-year-end-report.pdf>

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, and our literature review group. You will see that in the tables included in this report we have used a “traffic light” system when comparing performance against targets-

	Behind target – improvement essential
	Close to target but improvement still necessary
	On target

Last year we also carried out a “mystery shopping” exercise 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 will be repeating this to assess the impact of the improvements we have been making. Over the coming months we aim to develop the Local Offer (a commitment about the standard of service) further into a full prospectus regarding our service. This is an ambitious project that will bring together in one document the services and standards that you can reasonably expect and also a plan for investment that will take us on from the Decent Homes Standard.

1 Tenant involvement and empowerment

Customer Service and Choice

What is expected - provide choices, information and communication that is appropriate to the diverse needs of tenants in the delivery of all standards

- Our new main reception area now provides a range of services at Milford Street with improved access for disabled people.
- Tenants have worked with us to completely update our website and also helped to redesign our full suite of leaflets and a new tenants' handbook
- Following a decision by the Tenants' Panel to make available cleaning services to communal areas in all flats, we are now working on options for cleaning standards that can be offered to tenants.
- 90% of sheltered housing residents were satisfied with the overall service they are receiving.

Standards in Action



Photo: redecoration in progress on the Friary where we consulted with residents over their choice of colour scheme

Complaints

What is expected - an approach to complaints that is clear, simple and accessible that ensures that complaints are resolved promptly and politely.

- During the year we received 18 formal complaints. The largest category of complaints arose from planned modernisation work.
- We are keen to learn lessons. For example this year we learnt from a complaint about the condition of a property that it would be helpful to have a mechanism to identify properties where, for whatever reason, repairs are not getting ordered. These addresses are ones which are potentially getting neglected. We set up a programme to target them for inspection.

- 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.
- 34 compliments were also recorded during 2010/11. The great majority were regarding the repairs, handyman and modernisation services.

Involvement and Empowerment

- ***What is expected*** - to offer 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

- The numbers of Wiltshire Council tenants getting involved has increased considerably during 2010-11 to around 460.
- Tenants have been joining working groups, undertaking training, joining the editorial panel, reporting for “Housing Matters”, and helping on service review groups.
- Tenants and officers have been learning about a new scrutiny role, and undertaking training and mystery shopping.
- Tenants have been part of the Housing Commission – taking ownership alongside councillors and independent experts of the improvement plan
- Tenants took part in visits to leading landlord services and also in a major conference with councillors and officers to share learning from the visits

Standards in Action



Tenants’ workshop planning procurement of the maintenance service

Signs of improvement

The following quotes come from residents on the Friary estate where we have been running a pilot improvement project:

“The estate has really improved recently. It is much cleaner. I have noticed a real difference.”

Another Friary resident commenting on a meeting to launch the new gardening club:

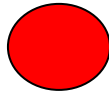

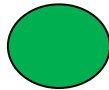
“I haven’t had such a good afternoon in years!!!!”

Equal opportunities

What is expected - demonstrate an understanding of the different needs of tenants, including in relation to the seven equality strands and tenants with additional support needs

- All staff have had Equality and Diversity training during 2010-11.
 - Front-line staff have also carried out training on dealing with hate crime and domestic abuse. This will help improve our service to everyone.
 - Our mental health support worker has developed a successful “Finger on the Pulse” project to bring tenants with mental health issues together.
 - We have gathered extensive profiling data for the majority of tenants including data related to the main strands of equalities.
 - We have ensured that all our public reception areas are now accessible for people with mobility needs.
 - We offer face to face service at our Milford Street reception.
 - We offer home visits to make our service more accessible.
 - We publish phone numbers in our tenant magazine.
 - We provide free internet access to our service in libraries.
 - We have equipped our website with “Brousealoud” software that reads website content to you.
 - We offer publications in other formats such as Braille, audio, large print and other languages.
 - We have modernised our estate offices at Bemerton Heath and the Friary to be compliant with suitable standards for disabled people.
 - We have worked with tenants to review all our leaflets and produce improved versions which are available in our reception areas and on the council’s website. Permanently on display in Milford Street are leaflets on:
 - how to make a complaint
 - our service standards
 - the choice-based letting system
 - our repairs reporting diagnostic guide
 - the handyperson scheme
 - gas servicing
 - help with rent arrears
 - hate crime and harassment
 - moving home
 - neighbour nuisance and anti-social behaviour
- There is a full range of other leaflets available on request.

How are we doing?

Our target	How we performed	Traffic light	How do we compare
Satisfaction with opportunities for participation	52%* satisfaction		Top quarter performance is 71%. Action: Since the survey* we have doubled the numbers of tenants involved.
95% of tenants with a profile of their needs and details (particularly any individual communication needs like translation, Braille or signing)	64%* of all tenants have profile		Poole Housing achieved 95%. Action: Since this result* we have improved to over 80%.
We aim for over 85% satisfaction of tenants with Wiltshire Council as a landlord	88% satisfaction		Top quarter performance is 85% satisfaction

Note: Roughly half of all our tenants responded to the survey these results are based on.

Self Assessment and Improvement Plan on Standard 1

On customer service we believe that we offer a good and improving service to our tenants. There are high levels of satisfaction around areas of key importance, particularly repairs and decent homes. We are addressing the individual communication needs of tenants. We use the council's corporate complaints system to record and respond to complaints, and 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 are in the process of setting up a system of scrutiny and co-regulation. We also need to take more budgetary and value for money issues to these groups, and this has included a presentation to the Tenant's Panel, and co-opting our accountant.

We also involve tenants via service review groups, repairs satisfaction cards, a letters page in our magazine, estate inspections, the complaints procedure, and mystery shopping, and have new opportunities to get involved. We aim to increase tenant satisfaction with involvement opportunities to a top quarter level of 71%.

We consult tenants and provide opportunities to agree our local offer, 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. During 2010 we improved our service standards to build them into our local offer, which will be developed further into a full prospectus on service development once the implications of self-financing become clearer.

We scrutinise performance through the Tenant's Panel, Sheltered Housing Forum and service review groups, and by consulting a tenants' focus group on the Annual Report. We are developing tenant inspection activity, and have started this by training a team of "mystery shoppers" who have completed their first exercise. We also have a programme of estate inspections. We support tenants to be more involved via in-house training workshops. However we need to publish the impact assessments of the training, and to make the 'core skills' development programme into a systematic annual programme. We need to expand the specialist skills development and support opportunities into a more responsive, varied and flexible programme. We need to involve tenants more in the decisions on the content and delivery of training, and its value for money.

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 participation throughout the organisation.

- Our target for 2010-11 was to have profiling information on tenants' details and needs, to improve our communications, on at least 50% of our tenants by March 2011. We started from a low base of only around 2% actually on our computer records. We exceeded this and achieved 64%. At the time of publication we have achieved over 80% and are now aiming for 95% of profiles by March 2012. This will help us know e.g. customers with a need for larger type, audio format, Braille, or a translator.
- Another improvement we are working on in particular, is to have a better appointment system for repairs so we can make our visits to you at a convenient time.

Standards in Action



Photo: an estate inspection on the Friary in progress, involving residents, staff and local councillor, John Brady

2 – Home

Planned maintenance

What is expected – all tenants should have a home that meets the Decent Home Standard.

We met the Government's Decent Homes Standard by the end of 2010. At 31st March 2011, 99.91% 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.

Tenant quotation:

"I am writing to say a big thank you for the exceptionally professional service provided."

SAP Rating for energy efficiency of the housing stock

All councils rate the energy efficiency of their housing stock using a system known as "SAP" which stands for standard assessment procedure. We have already double-glazed our housing stock and fitted loft insulation wherever appropriate. We have been investigating solar panels and the "feed-in" tariff, and carried out trials of heat pumps to see if there is a cost effective way of improving our rating further. You may be interested in our energy-saving tips in one of the back issues of "Housing Matters":

<http://www.wiltshire.gov.uk/housing-matters-2009-2010-winter.pdf>

Repairs

What is expected – a good value service that is responsive to tenants' needs, aims to get repairs right first time, and makes a priority of health and safety.

Our target for **all** repairs completed on time is 85% which is the top quarter figure for local authorities. We achieved a figure of 96.15% during 2010-11 from the responses to our satisfaction survey. Our target for **urgent** repairs is to complete 98% on time, again in the top quarter, and our performance at 97.51% is close to achieving this figure which we hope to reach during 2011-12.

Housing repairs quotations:

"Repairs are always really prompt, really good and I have never had a problem with them. We are very lucky people and very happy with the service you provide. We feel very lucky to have a Wiltshire Council roof over our heads. The service we receive from you has always been an A1, 5 star service and the operatives are always clean, polite and pleasant. We are very well satisfied with the service we receive. Thank you very much".

Mrs Dawson, Downton

"You cannot improve the service from your plumber, it was excellent"

“This man was outstanding 10/10 his work was great - won't find better.”

Standards in Action

Annual servicing of all heating appliances



We have a feature on gas servicing in every issue of our magazine “Housing Matters”, and there was a special feature in our summer 2011 issue:

<http://www.wiltshire.gov.uk/housing-matters-2011-summer.pdf>

How are we doing?

Our target	How we performed	Traffic light	How do we compare
100% of our homes should meet the decent homes standard	99.91% of homes met the standard		The top quarter performance target is 100%
Satisfaction with planned maintenance over 90%	96% satisfaction		A top quarter figure is being researched
Satisfaction with the repairs service over 95%	96% satisfaction		Top quarter performance is 95%
Over 90% of repairs done right first time	88%		A new measure and comparison not yet available. Action: The latest figure is over 90%.
Over 98% of urgent repairs on time	99%		Top quarter is 98%
Keeping over 95% of appointments	96%		Top quarter is 95%
100% of homes with a gas safety certificate	99.8%		Since this figure we have been achieving 100%
Energy rating (SAP) over 72.4	68.49		Top quarter is 72.49. Action: We are looking at renewable energy.

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 less inspection of repairs. To assist with this we have issued every tenant with a repairs diagnostic booklet, and have amended our repairs survey to record the percentage of jobs completed “right first time”. The number of “pre-inspections” has been reduced from around 90% to under 10%. The repairs administrators have had extra training to help them adapt the service for vulnerable tenants. We have also introduced profile “flags” on our computer system to alert staff to individual callers having particular communication needs.

We are very pleased to be approaching 100% of homes meeting the Decency Standard, and virtually 100% of homes with gas having their annual service. We have a five-year planned maintenance programme that was agreed in consultation with our tenants, and published in our magazine to tenants, and is on our website:

<http://www.wiltshire.gov.uk/housing-mgt-d33-pm-pm-prog-yrs-1-5-2008-2013.pdf>

As part of our improvements to services we visit every new tenant to provide information such as where the stop tap is, and how to operate the central heating. This helps new tenants and releases pressure on our repairs department, therefore offering good value. A review group of staff and tenants has been looking at our repairs service to agree new service standards, reconsider landlord versus tenant responsibilities, and the priority categories and response times.

Our repairs service is operating well with 97% of appointments made being kept, 88% of repairs completed right first time, 96% of repairs done on time, and 96% of tenants satisfied with their repairs. On health and safety we have developed strategies on asbestos and fire safety, carry out surveys to protect against legionella, started an asset management survey, and appointed a health and safety advisor.

3 - Tenancy

Rent:

What is expected – an efficient service that collects rent that is due, and keeps arrears low and deals with them in a firm but fair way.

Our target for this performance measure is to reduce arrears to lower than 1.72%, which is in the top quarter of local authorities, to be achieved by the end of financial year 2011-12.

Arrears Statistics: On 31st March 2011 there was £457,003.96 rent arrears owed by current tenants and £191,241.39 by former tenants. These arrears are being pursued vigorously in a firm but fair way by our staff.

Tenant quotation: “Kim is great - she is always helpful and knows us well.” (Kim Johnson is one of our neighbourhood managers)

Allocations:

What is expected – a fair and efficient allocation service.

This report covers the second year of the operation of the new county-wide choice based lettings system operated by Homes4Wiltshire. During 2010/11 there were 319 lettings of council accommodation, 250 of which were to new tenants, the others being transfers or nominees from housing associations.

The top quarter average re-letting time for local authorities is 24 days. Over the financial year we improved by from 43 days to 24 days at 31st March 2011. The measures we took were as follows:

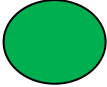
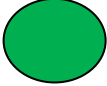
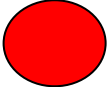
- We set up an empty property working group to look at how to improve our processes and brought in an external consultant to look at best practice and ideas from top-performing organisations.
- We sought advice from the “3 star” organisation Poole Housing Partnership, and worked with them to learn from best practice and how to improve our own processes, including a visit to their offices.
- We employed a new Empty Property Co-ordinator to review and recommend changes to our processes
- 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.

Standards in Action



Photo: the new team specialising in preparing empty properties for re-letting receive a council award

How are we doing?

Our target	How we performed	Traffic light	How do we compare
To re-let homes within 24 days	24 days		We are in the top quarter
Over 95% satisfaction with new lettings	97%		We are in the top quarter
Rent arrears under 1.72% of what is due	2.06%		We are around average. Action: We are seeking to improve through targeting resources and offering benefits and debt advice.

Self Assessment and Improvement Plan on Standard 3

Allocations – We have adapted well to the new system of choice based lettings, but recognise that there is more work to do to make it easier for tenants to understand the new system and bid. There is a published policy which is available in a picture format to make it easy to understand. It has a banding structure including categories for under-occupancy and overcrowding.

Rents – We collect a high percentage of rent due, and aim to reduce the level of rent arrears further to achieve top quarter performance. We comply with the objective and framework set out in the Government’s direction to the TSA. We have reduced rent arrears from 2.35% in 2009/10 to 2.06% in 2010/11.

Empty Properties – we aim to ensure that re-letting times remain in the top quarter of performance for local authorities.

Tenure - We use 12 month introductory tenancies followed by a secure tenancy upon compliance with the tenancy agreement. We have a new sign-up procedure, a new handbook, and a post tenancy support visit to sustain tenancies and maximise income.

Partnership working - We have an in-house housing options department that deals with potential homelessness of tenants in debt. We work with other organisations such as “Community 4” to provide support services to our tenants in need. We have an in-house mental health support worker linking with the community mental health team. We have an anti-social behaviour reduction officer based among housing management staff to achieve sustainable communities. We submit continuous recording (CORE) forms on new lettings to allow analysis of our lettings process.

4 – Neighbourhood and community

What is expected – to work in partnership with other agencies to provide a clean and safe environment.

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.

Tenant quotation:

“I can’t thank you enough for giving up your free time to help out and support the event.”

Improving neighbourhoods and communities

Anti-social behaviour (ASB)

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.

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.

The Respect Standard



During 2010 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

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:

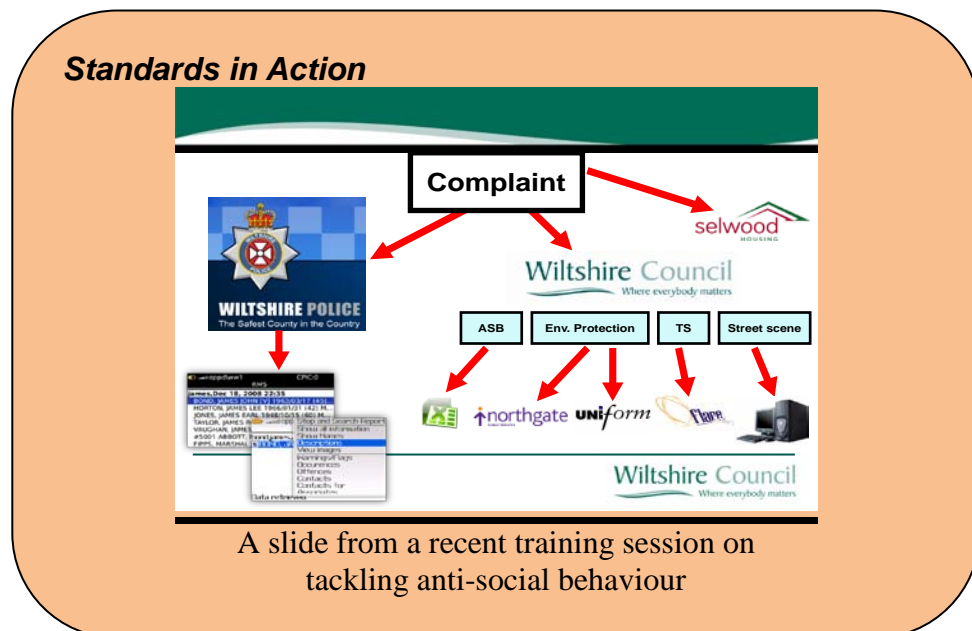
<http://www.communities.gov.uk/housing/housingmanagementcare/antisocialbehaviour/publicationsantisocial/respectstandard/>

The Respect Standard was recently replaced by the [Anti-Social Behaviour Charter for Housing](#), and we have already signed up.

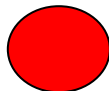
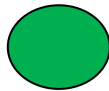


Tenant quotation:

“The lady I called at the council was really nice and helpful. She understood what I was trying to say and did not hurry me.”



How are we doing?

Our target	How we performed	Traffic light	How do we compare
Satisfaction with how anti-social behaviour is dealt with over 95%	43%		Top quarter performance is 78%. Action: We are employing staff, re-writing our policy, and doing extra training
Regular estate inspections	We carried out a regular programme with an inspection each month.		No comparable data, but our inspections are best practice

Self Assessment and Improvement Plan on Standard 4

Neighbourhood Management

- We carry out regular risk assessments of all communal areas.
- Communal areas are already cleaned on the Friary and Bemerton Heath.
- Tenant consultation – tenants have expressed a wish for a cleaning service to all blocks of flats with further consultation required on the allocation of costs .
- A programme of estate inspections has been established including tenants, leaseholders, housing officers, anti-social behaviour reduction officer, councillors, police and parish representatives. Programme involving tenants advertised six months in advance in every edition of “Housing Matters”
- We have carried out a trial of “neighbourhood voices”, which involves a local representative acting as a contact between the council and local residents.
- Friary pilot project – an intensive programme has seen improvements in cleanliness of the communal areas, renovation of the games area, recycling bins for all residents, and good work with local residents has seen the formation of a new residents’ association, and improved co-ordination of council services such as grounds maintenance and street sweeping.

Anti-social behaviour (ASB)

- We have an ASB panel with representatives from the council’s housing and social services sections, the youth and probation services and the police.
- We have signed up to the Respect Standard and new ASB charter for housing
- We attend multi-agency meetings at the Bemerton Heath Centre
- We have a partnership with Salisbury City Council at the Bemerton Heath residents’ association with regular features in the tenant magazine
- Our ability to monitor has been improved by our ASB database
- We have carried out equality and diversity training for all staff, including on the reporting of hate crime.
- We recognise that ASB is an area where we have scored less well in the annual tenant satisfaction survey, and we are working on a new policy, and procedure.

5 - Value for money

What is expected: a cost-effective, efficient, quality service that meets tenants' needs.

The number of full-time equivalent persons employed by housing management is 73. The cost of providing housing management services to our tenants during 2010/11 was an average of £11.72 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 compared 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 decided to make it available at our offices and on request, rather than distribute it to every tenant, to make the best use of resources. The report is available the council's website –

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

Delivering services efficiently

Achievements and compliance to date –

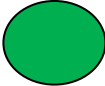
- A lean review of the efficiency of the repairs service has been carried out and its findings are being considered and implemented.
- A value for money audit by consultant "Plan2Do" found that we are top in the top quarter for cost of service with average or better performance.
- A report on our direct labour organisation (DLO) by ConsultCIH found that it is low risk and offers good value for money.
- Value for money training has been provided to all staff and the Tenants' Panel
- Pre-inspections on responsive repairs have been reduced from 90% to under 10% without a reduction in the number of repairs being done "right first time", as measured by our improved repairs satisfaction survey, with the number of repairs inspectors needed in this area of work being reduced.
- The time taken on average to re-let an empty property has been reduced from 43 days in March 2010 to 24 days which is "top quarter" performance.
- We have a new procurement strategy for future responsive and planned maintenance contracts.

Tenant quotation:

"Having lived in Wiltshire Council accommodation for some six years now and had various dealings with their offices, reference repairs and upgrades to this property, I can categorically say that the service has been second to none.

The staff in whatever capacity have always been polite, professional and very keen to provide a really good customer service – in other words value for money with the public purse."

How are we doing?

Our target	How we performed	Traffic light	How do we compare
To keep management costs low and performance high	An average cost of £11.72 per property per week		Our management costs are very low compared to most providers

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.

To achieve fuller compliance regarding value for money:

- We will review the structure of the housing landlord service in light of our internal service reviews and external commissioned assessments to meet tenant and best value priorities.
- We will continue in our procurement of a new housing IT system to support our delivery of a more efficient and customer focused service.

6 Governance and financial viability

What is expected – an effective, accountable and transparent system of governance.

This standard does not strictly apply to local authority landlords. However we feel that in the new world of “self financing” it is good for a local authority landlord to be aware of it, and ensure that robust and accountable arrangements are in place, that will allow local decision-making for housing investment, whilst ensuring viability in both the short and longer term.

On governance the required outcomes include that registered providers shall ensure effective governance arrangements that deliver their aims, objectives and intended outcomes for tenants and potential tenants in an effective, transparent and accountable manner. Clearly in a local authority there is well defined legislation setting out the arrangements and responsibilities for decision making. Wiltshire Council has a history that includes a beacon role in involving localities in shaping the way services are delivered. The council has been well-regarded for the way it has introduced area boards and we are able to now use that experience and ethos to support the development of new governance arrangements for council housing.

We are committed to:

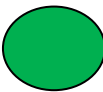
- Exploring with tenants the possibility of a future governance arrangement that builds on the successful work of the tripartite Housing Commission Board. In particular we would like to examine the option of councillors involving tenants and external expertise to plan the strategic management of the service.
- Developing new and robust arrangements for customer scrutiny. Currently the Tenants’ Panel has worked on the development of service standards and performance is reported to the panel regularly. We now want to investigate with tenants the significant strengthening of arrangements, including the possibility of a dedicated trained team of tenants with powers to investigate and challenge, and commission research and reports.

Standards in Action



Photo: working in partnership with the Sheltered Housing Forum

How are we doing?

Our target	How we performed	Traffic light	How do we compare
To work in an effective partnership with the Tenants' Panel, Sheltered Housing Forum and other tenant groups	Regular meetings have been held, new tenants involved, and there is more representative membership		We have worked with the Tenants' Panel and Sheltered Housing Forum for many years, and are planning to set up scrutiny in line with best practice.

Annual Report Improvement Plan

A lot of improvements to our service have been delivered over the past year, with more to follow. We followed a detailed Improvement Plan, and have a clear strategy that is being delivered, backed up by our recent quality audit by "ConsultCIH". Examples of specific improvements we made during 2010-11 are:

- We established a new Commission involving tenants, councillors and representatives from other housing partners including the "three star" Poole Housing Partnership, to provide strategic direction to our service to ensure that tenants are getting the best deal possible.
- We 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 we serve the whole community.
- We moved to new offices at Bourne Hill in November 2010 that comply with the Disability Discrimination Act, and our new customer reception at Milford Street is fully accessible for disabled people.
- We are 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 amended the 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 introduced an improved handbook format for new tenants
- 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 staff conferences 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 and started implementing some of the best things we saw.
- 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, and literature, in partnership with tenant volunteers.
- 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 published a new set of service standards in consultation with tenants.
- We analysed the reasons behind our performance on re-letting empty properties, developed a new staff structure to deliver improvements, and reduced average re-letting times from 43 to 24 days.
- We have provided training for the repairs inspectors around the empty property standard.
- We have improved our referral procedures for aid and adaptations.
- We have produced a range of new fact sheets in consultation with tenants
- We have a new database of tenants interested in getting involved in our service
- We successfully met the Decent Homes standard for all our housing stock
- We have carried out a full quality audit of our service with the assistance of “ConsultCIH” that found improvements in most areas of our service.
- We have been working with tenants to look at how to introduce tenant scrutiny of our service.

Conclusion

The past year has seen major improvements to our service that have monitored by the Housing Commission, and officer and tenant steering groups set up to deliver it. We aim to continue this improvement to become a high performing landlord over the coming 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 has been a tough one, but we are enjoying working with you, our tenants, to achieve this. The [New Plan for Improvement](#) builds on the progress already made, and we hope in our next Annual Report to give information on how we moved from being a poor performer in February 2010, to among the top performers in 2012.

Glossary

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.

BSL – British sign language

Choice-based lettings (CBL) – a way of allocating properties where applicants bid themselves for addresses they are interested in being allocated.

Consult CIH – the research, consultancy and business support arm of the Chartered Institute of Housing (CIH).

Co-regulation – when tenants are involved in the monitoring and supervision of services.

DDA- Disability Discrimination Act

Decent Homes Standard – a Government standard that specifies the minimum quality that social housing must exceed, including for example the maximum age of a kitchen or bathroom

DLO – Direct Labour Organisation – the repairs operatives employed by the council

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.

HCA – Homes and Community Agency – the government agency that is replacing the work currently done by the Audit Commission and the Tenant Services authority, that both funds new housing, and provides regulation.

HRA - Housing Revenue Account – this is the account into which rent and other income is paid, and in turn pays for the delivery of services. It is ring-fenced, i.e. money can only be spent on services for tenants

IT – Information technology, i.e. computers

Local Offer – under the regulations of the Tenant Services Authority, councils must produce a clear prospectus of the service they will offer, and the standards they will meet, in consultation with local residents.

SAP rating- Standard Assessment Procedure – an energy efficiency rating

Scrutiny – involving tenants in monitoring performance

Glossary (continued)

Self-financing – a complicated one! Councils will soon be able to borrow to pay off their historic debts and then have greater freedom on how they spend their income in future. It means we won't any longer have to hand over a large proportion of the rent the council receives to the Government from next year.

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

Stakeholder – someone involved in a service or process

Steering Group – set up by Wiltshire Council to make sure our 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 5 councillors, with 5 other co-opted tenants including a member of the Sheltered Housing Forum

Tenant scrutiny - when tenants are involved in the monitoring and supervision of services.

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

Top quarter – in the top quarter or 25% of organisations we compare ourselves with, i.e. other local authorities that have kept their own housing stock. Sometimes referred to as “upper quartile”.

Information about Wiltshire Council services can be made available on request in other languages including BSL and formats such as **large print** and audio. Please contact the council by telephone 0300 456 0100, by textphone 01225 712500, or email customerservices@wiltshire.gov.uk