



Durham City Homes

Annual Report 2009/10

Altogether better council housing in Durham City



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Picture by Elizabeth Griffiths,
Kelloe Primary School

Introduction

Welcome to the first annual report of Durham City Homes, the part of Durham County Council that manages council housing in the Durham City area. It contains information about:

- ✓ how we performed last year
- ✓ how we compare with other housing providers
- ✓ what we did to improve services
- ✓ how we plan to improve services in the future
- ✓ what we spent and what our spending priorities are for the future.

This has been a time of change for all of us in County Durham, not just for staff as we establish the new County Council, but for all our customers as we work to transform the services that we deliver, improving the quality, impact and outcomes of what we do. Everybody at the Council and all of our partners are working together to deliver our shared vision of making Durham “an altogether better place which is altogether better for people”.

We here at Durham City Homes and the other teams that deliver services to Council tenants in Durham City are committed to doing our bit to making this vision a reality. We are pleased with our progress and hope that you’ve noticed a difference in the services that you receive from us.

We recognise that excellence won’t be delivered overnight and that we have a significant job ahead of us in the years ahead, across all our services. However, we are committed to working with tenants to deliver better services and improved choice to meet the changing needs and aspirations of you, our customers. Improving tenant involvement is one of our big priorities; involving you in developing new services, improving existing ones and checking to see that we’re delivering what we say we are.

We’d like to thank everybody that has contributed to shaping and improving our services and particularly the Durham City Tenants Panel and all the hard work that they have put in to help steer our improvement work.

We hope you that you find this summary of our activities useful and interesting and agree with us when we say that we’ve made a good start in delivering “altogether better council housing in Durham City”.

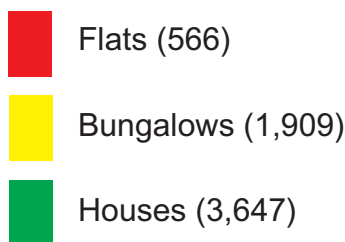
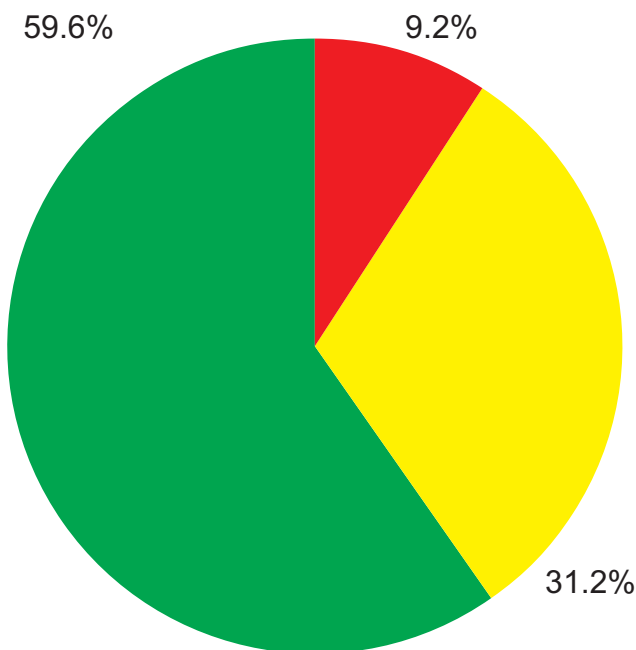


Durham City Homes - facts and figures



Durham City Homes
Council housing numbers by village

Of the 6,122 Council-owned homes in the former district as at 1 April 2010, there are



- ✓ 566 flats (9.2% of the total number of council homes in Durham City)
 - 66.6% are one bedroom
 - 22.3% are two bedroom
 - 4.2% are 3 bedroom
 - 6.9% are bedsits.
- ✓ 1,909 bungalows (31.2%),
 - 63.44% are one bedroom,
 - 35.2% two bedroom
 - 1.4% three bedroom.
- ✓ 3,647 houses (59.6%),
 - 60% are two bedroom
 - 37.6% are three bedroom
 - 2.4% are four bedroom
 - 0.02% are five bedroom.

Durham City Average Rents 2009/10

Bedrooms	Average Rent
Bedsit	£32.05
1	£49.02
2	£54.96
3	£60.61
4	£65.16
5	£68.76
Average rent	£55.35

Customer service, involvement and empowerment

Our customers are at the heart of everything we do. We want to provide excellent services that meet the range of needs that exist across the different communities that live in Durham City, that respond to people's changing circumstances and that provide people with the ability to choose a high quality housing service that suits them, when and where they want it.

In delivering this we want to involve you, our customers. We want to make sure that what we deliver meets your needs and expectations and we want to involve you as we improve our services and develop new ones. We also want to hear from you if we fail to meet these high standards, so that we can take action to put things right.

What we want

- ✓ Excellent customer service
- ✓ A wide range of service choices, meeting the different needs of the different communities we serve
- ✓ Involving and enabling customers to make a difference to the services we deliver.

What did we improve in 2009/10?

- ✓ We replaced the phone service in the Durham City area, providing better customer service by phone
- ✓ Extended the freephone number across all our services, not just repairs
- ✓ We produced our first newsletter, Tenant Matters
- ✓ Consulted widely with tenants on a set of new, comprehensive service standards.

How did we perform?

Satisfaction with overall service (2008*)	79.8%
Satisfaction that landlord takes views into account (2008*)	58.6%

* These surveys are only carried out every two years

How do we compare?

Where possible, we have tried to compare our performance last year to other housing providers.

Compared to all other housing providers in the country, for both measures of satisfaction, we are classed as "lower middle" – this means we were lower than average, but not in the bottom 25%.



What are our priorities for 2010/11?

- ✓ Publish and start monitoring our local service standards
- ✓ Continue to improve the telephone service
- ✓ Improve the quality of information about Durham City Homes on the council's website
- ✓ Issue a new Tenants Handbook and an updated Repairs Handbook to all tenants
- ✓ Produce a range of information leaflets and posters
- ✓ Ask all tenants to fill in our "all about you" questionnaire and use the information to deliver improved services to customers
- ✓ Develop more opportunities for people to get involved in their housing service, including service improvement groups and mystery shopping
- ✓ Improving the way we learn and change services as a result of customer feedback, including complaints.

Local service standards

In April 2010 we agreed these service standards which apply in this area:

- ✓ Customer Service (council-wide)
- ✓ Complaints (council-wide)
- ✓ Involvement.

We will monitor how we perform against these standards and report on this every three months and in next year's annual report to tenants.



Did you know?

48 people attended consultation events to shape our new customer service standards
We received 31 formal complaints last year



Your home

We know that the quality of your home and the quality of the repairs service that we provide are two of your highest priorities, and this means that they are our highest priorities as well. We are committed to providing you with high quality, modern homes that meet your needs, a responsive repairs service that delivers the right repair promptly, efficiently and effectively and an adaptations service that supports people living in their own homes, safely and more easily.

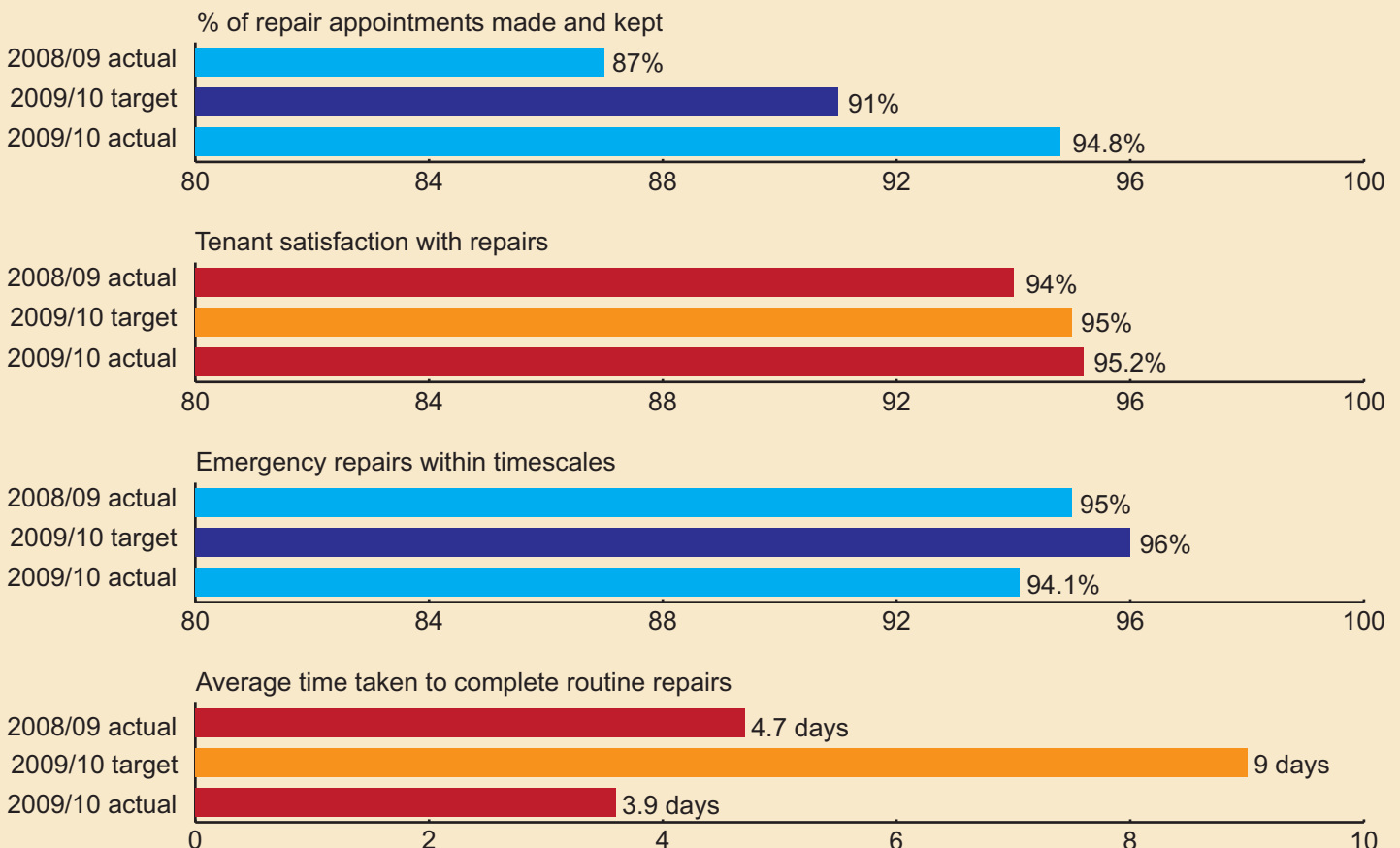
What we want:

- ✓ Modern homes that meet the different needs of the community
- ✓ To repair and improve homes to a high standard efficiently and effectively
- ✓ To reduce tenant energy costs
- ✓ To contribute to the development of new, affordable housing
- ✓ To provide support for people to live in their own homes through a high quality aids and adaptations service.

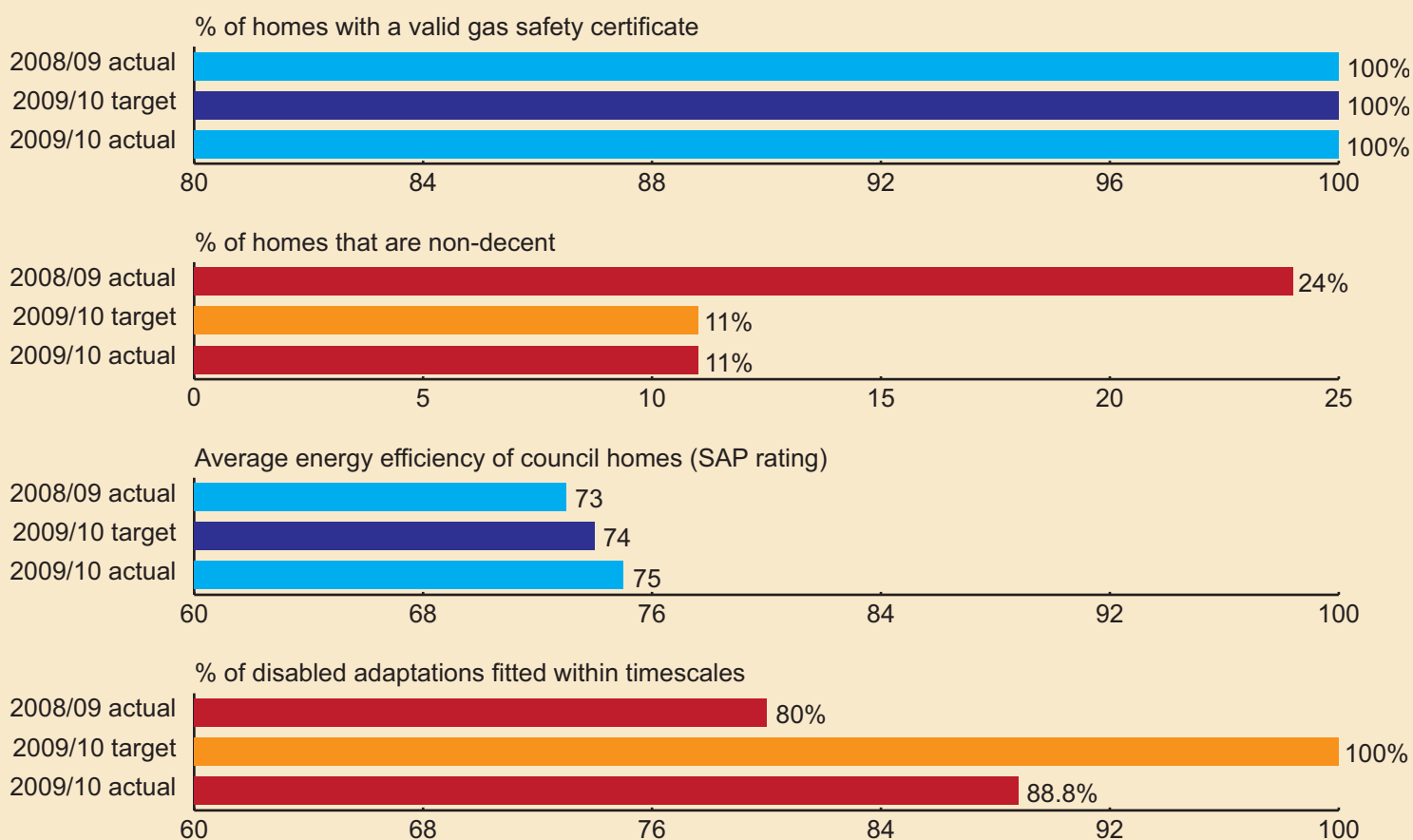
What did we improve in 2009/10?

- ✓ Introduced evening appointments during the week for repairs
- ✓ Achieved external funding for new council housing in Durham City for the first time in decades
- ✓ The quality of homes when let to new tenants
- ✓ Made 630 homes “Decent”, reducing the percentage that don’t meet the Government’s Decent Homes Standard to 11%.

How did we perform?



How did we perform? (continued)



How do we compare?

Where possible, we have tried to compare our performance last year to other housing providers. Compared to all other housing providers in the country, for:

Repair appointments:	we are lower middle – below average, but not in the bottom 25%
Repairs satisfaction:	we are in the top 25%
Gas safety:	we are in the top 25%
% of homes non-Decent:	we are in the bottom 25%
Average energy efficiency:	we are in the top 25%
Emergency repairs within timescales:	we are in the bottom 25% (this is compared to other North East housing providers)

What are our priorities for 2010/11?

- ✓ Making improvements to over 675 homes and reducing the number of homes that don't meet the Government's Decent Homes Standard to 0
- ✓ Introducing Saturday morning repair appointments
- ✓ Improving the adaptations service
- ✓ Introducing decoration vouchers for new tenants and Decent Homes customers, delivering better value for money
- ✓ Introducing text message reminders for repair appointments
- ✓ Providing better information for new tenants on asbestos risks
- ✓ Completing the 28 new council homes that are being built in Durham City.

Local service standards

In April 2010 we agreed these service standards which apply in this area:

- ✓ Repairs
- ✓ Decent Homes
- ✓ Adaptations
- ✓ Gas and solid fuel servicing.

We will monitor how we perform against these standards and report on this every three months and in next year's annual report to tenants.



Did you know?

We carried out 26,327 repairs last year
We installed over 400 new kitchens last year
We put in 68 flat floor showers, to help people with mobility problems



Your tenancy

Our lettings service is designed to provide people with as much choice as possible about where they live in a way that responds to people's needs and is fair and open. We made big changes to the way we let homes last year when we joined the County-wide Durham Key Options lettings process. This has been one of the biggest changes to the way the housing service is run for many years. It has taken some time for all of us, staff and applicants, to get used to but we hope that you agree with us that it is already providing wider choice and a better service.

Rent payment is another important part of the housing service. Now, more than ever, people are facing financial challenges and we want to do our bit to help and support people manage their money and avoid getting into debt. Paying your rent on time and in full is important; to you and to us. We will do everything we can to support you meet your rent obligations.

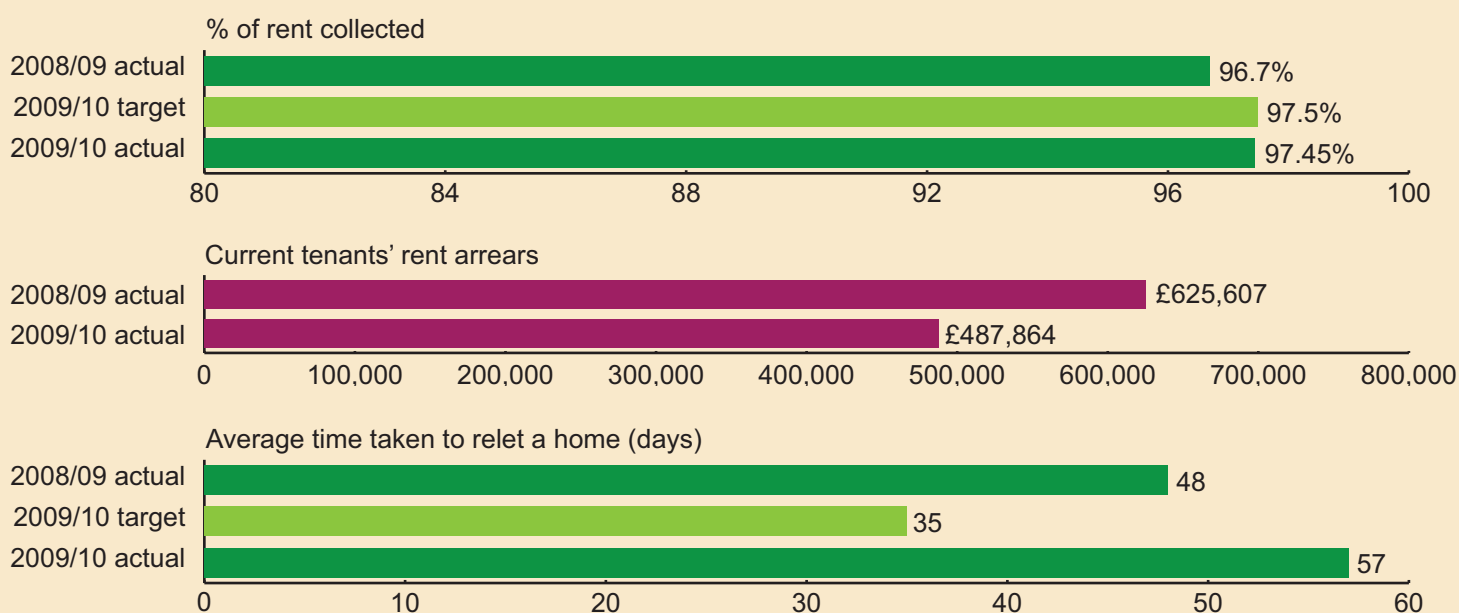
What we want:

- ✓ To provide an excellent lettings service that provides you with real choice about where you live
- ✓ To let homes to new tenants as quickly as possible
- ✓ To provide affordable housing that meets people's needs
- ✓ To make it as easy and convenient as possible for you to pay your rent
- ✓ To provide advice and support to help you avoid getting into financial difficulties.

What did we improve in 2009/10?

- ✓ Introduced Durham Key Options, which included:
 - Dedicated website showing all the properties that were available across the county
 - A free, weekly property guide
 - Help with bidding for people who need it
 - Accompanied viewings of new homes, like estate agents
 - A visit to all new tenants after you move in, to see how you are settling in.

How did we perform?



How do we compare?

Where possible, we have tried to compare our performance last year to other housing providers. Compared to all other housing providers in the country for:

Rent collection: we are upper middle, above average but not in the top 25%
Relet times: we are in the bottom 25%

What are our priorities for 2010/11?

- ✓ Reduce the time it takes to let new homes
- ✓ Agree a new, modernised Tenancy Agreement for all council housing in the County
- ✓ Review the Durham Key Options policy, with our partners, to make sure it is fair and operating well
- ✓ Produce area information to let people know more about the area they are interested in moving into
- ✓ “Unpooling” service charges from rent, so that people who benefit from a service pay the cost and those that don’t benefit, don’t pay.

Local service standards

In April 2010 we agreed these service standards which apply in this area:

- ✓ Rent payment
- ✓ Lettings
- ✓ Furnished Tenancies.

We will monitor how we perform against these standards and report on this every three months and in next year’s annual report to tenants.



Did you know?

There are 2,685 people in Durham City registered on Durham Key Options
29% of tenants pay their rent by direct debit, the cheapest way to pay rent
24 people were evicted last year for not paying their rent
388 people have a furnished tenancy



Your neighbourhood and community

We understand that our responsibilities don't start and finish with the bricks and mortar of your home and the collection of your rent. As your landlord, we know that we have wider responsibilities, for neighbourhoods and estates and the people who live there. We will work with our partners to support you, help you maintain your tenancy and to make sure that neighbourhoods are safe, clean and pleasant places to live.

What we want:

- ✓ To create neighbourhoods and communities that people are proud of
- ✓ Homes and neighbourhoods that people feel safe in
- ✓ Clean and attractive estates
- ✓ Help and support for people to live peacefully in their homes and to maintain their tenancies.

What did we improve in 2009/10?

- ✓ Introduced regular estate walkabouts, with partners and tenants, to identify local priorities for action
- ✓ Were successful in getting funding to extend the work of the Family Intervention Project to Durham City, offering intensive support to families whose behaviour is putting their tenancies at risk
- ✓ Agreed with the County Durham and Darlington Fire and Rescue Service that they would carry out free fire safety assessments and fit smoke alarms when people move into a new home that hasn't got one.

How did we perform?



How do we compare?

Where possible, we have tried to compare our performance last year to other housing providers. Compared to all other housing providers in the country for:

ASB complaint satisfaction: we are in the top 25%

What are our priorities for 2010/11?

- ✓ Work with partners to improve the range of support we offer tenants
- ✓ Create a new team and employ extra staff to focus on estate management and providing support to tenants
- ✓ Work with Centrepont and other partners to provide “Lifeskills” training for young people
- ✓ Work with the NHS to provide opportunities for health improvement
- ✓ Support the council’s plans for the regeneration of Esh Winning
- ✓ Improve the information and support available on money issues
- ✓ Improve the ways that tenants can report anti-social behaviour.

Local service standards

In April 2010 we agreed these service standards which apply in this area:

- ✓ Tenancy and estate management
- ✓ Anti social behaviour
- ✓ Racial harassment and hate crime
- ✓ Domestic abuse.

We will monitor how we perform against these standards and report on this every three months and in next year’s annual report to tenants.



Did you know?

We agreed 6 Acceptable Behaviour Contracts and obtained 3 Anti-Social Behaviour Injunctions
1,058 people receive the garden tidy service



Value for Money

Value for money has always been important to council tenants. In Durham, you've told us that getting good value for money for your rent is your fourth highest priority (after the repairs service, quality of your home and quality of your neighbourhood). Now, more than ever, getting the most for your rent is one of the biggest challenges facing us in Durham City Homes. Every little bit saved means more that can be spent on doing things that matter to you.

What we want:

- ✓ To deliver high quality, high performing services efficiently and effectively
- ✓ To understand our costs, how we perform and how this compares to others
- ✓ To achieve the right balance of cost and quality in what we deliver.



What did we improve in 2009/10?

- ✓ We achieved significant savings in Durham City as a result of Local Government Review (LGR), the merger of all the district councils with the County Council
- ✓ We reviewed our arrangements for delivering our Decent Homes programme and joined the NEP, a consortium of social housing providers that use their combined purchasing power to get better prices from construction companies
- ✓ We improved our rent collection performance, reducing rent arrears by over £137,000.

What are our priorities for 2010/11?

- ✓ Make more efficiencies arising from Local Government Review
- ✓ Carry out a Value for Money Review of our repairs service and take action to improve its effectiveness and efficiency
- ✓ Reduce the time it takes to let new homes and increase our rental income
- ✓ Unpool service charges from rent, making it more transparent what things cost
- ✓ Formally compare our service performance and costs with other housing providers and take action where we appear to be high cost, poor performers or both
- ✓ Look at all of our communal rooms and see if any of them that are not being used by the community can be converted to homes
- ✓ Improve our collection of money owed to us by former tenants
- ✓ Reduce the number of repairs that are classified as “emergencies”, which will improve our performance and lower our costs, but without a reduction in service



Did you know?

As a result of Local Government Review, we saved £905,000 last year



Where your rent is spent

Council housing is funded from a “ring-fenced” account within the County Council; the Housing Revenue Account. This means that it is separate from the rest of the Council’s finances. By law, the Housing Revenue Account can only be used to deliver council housing services. The money to fund the service mostly comes from tenants’ rent, with a contribution from other charges like heating charges and garage rents.

Durham is also part of the National Housing Subsidy System. This is a complicated national approach to funding council housing that sees rents in some areas contributing to the costs of council house services in other areas. The national system is managed by the Government and each year they decide how much each council will receive, or how much they will need to pay into the national system.

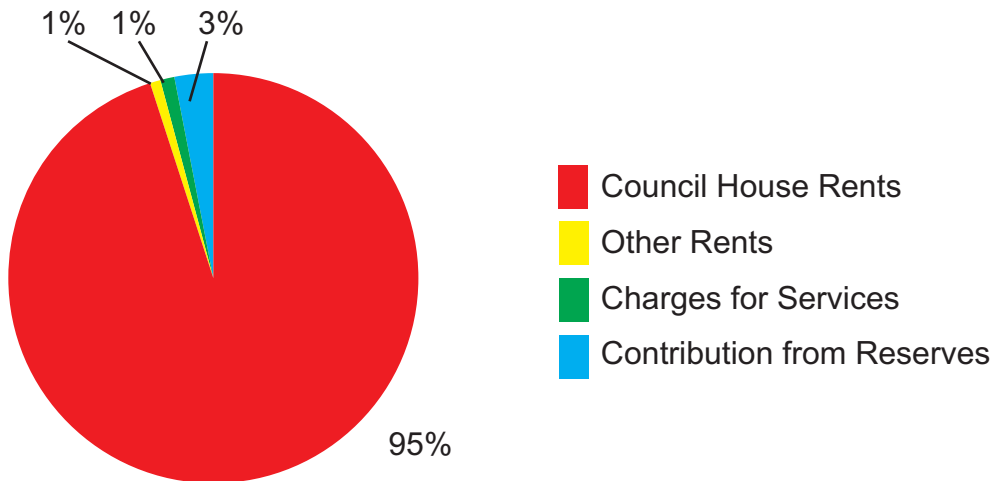
Durham City has historically been a contributor into the national subsidy system. This means that each year a proportion of tenants’ rent has gone back to the government. Last year we estimate that Durham City tenants paid £3.27m into the national system. This national approach is being reviewed and we are waiting to hear from the new Government what its plans are for the future.

Running the council housing service in Durham City in 2009/10

Where the money came from:

Council House Rents	£17,252,904
Other Rents	£202,813
Charges for Services	£121,165
Contribution from Reserves	£566,128
Total Income	£18,143,010

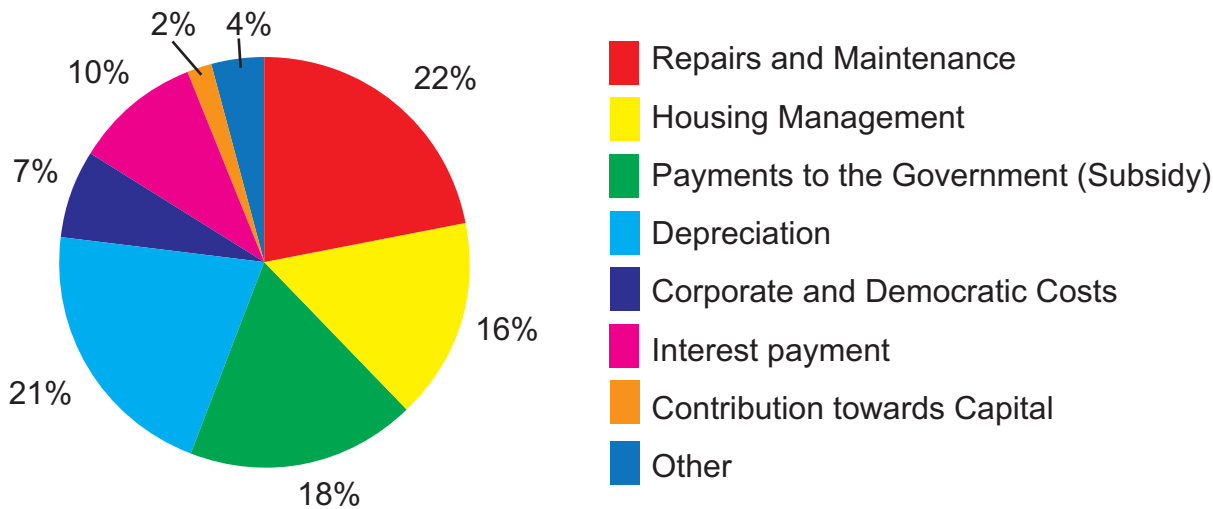
Where the money came from



What the money was spent on :

Repairs and Maintenance	£4,001,732
Housing Management	£2,864,912
Payments to the Government (Subsidy)	£3,272,589
Depreciation	£3,805,433
Corporate and Democratic Costs	£1,182,475
Interest payable	£1,870,024
Contribution towards Capital	£450,512
Other	£695,333
Total expenditure	£18,143,010

What the money was spent on



Capital expenditure

In addition to the income we receive from rents and other sources, every year we have a programme of capital spending on council housing. This is major expenditure on carrying out lasting improvements to council homes, rather than carrying out day to day repairs. The majority of the funding comes from the Government in the form of the Major Repairs Allowance, but there is also a contribution from the Council's revenue reserves.

Capital budgets

	2009/10 (£m) (actual)	2010/11 (£m) (forecast)
Decent Homes Programme	3.721	5.085
Disabled Adaptations	0.329	0.420
One-off replacements	0.092	0.200
Homeloss and Disturbance Payments	0.116	0.100
Major work to empty homes	0.232	0.300
Delivering the programme	0.559	0.580
Total Expenditure	£5.049m	£6.685m

Our Spending Priorities for 2010/11

In 2010/11 we plan to spend more on the following priority areas:

- ✓ Decent Homes improvements to achieve the Government's Decent Homes Standard by the end of 2010
- ✓ Aids and adaptations, to respond to increased demand and reduce the backlog of people waiting for adaptations work
- ✓ Better standards when we let homes to new tenants
- ✓ Increased staffing levels in Durham City Homes, to deliver an improved service
- ✓ Improvements to the telephone service
- ✓ Better communication with tenants, including a new Tenants Handbook, newsletters and leaflets
- ✓ Increased opportunities for tenants to get involved in the housing service.



**Stop
Press!**



TENANTS MATTER

Come and join Durham City Homes

- Meet the team – find out about us, our services and our partners
- Get involved – find out how you can get involved
- Have your say – find out about our commitment to providing more and more opportunities so you can have your say
- Tell us what is important to you – let us know what your priorities are

Saturday 30th October 2010 10am – 3pm

**Meadowfield Leisure Centre,
John Street North, Meadowfield, Durham DH7 8RS**



Artwork by
Elizabeth Griffiths - Kelloe Primary School
one of the Durham City Homes competition winners

**If you need help with transport
please contact**

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