

INSIDE
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ISSUE
OF...

YOUR
ANNUAL
REPORT
2010/11



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YOUR AREA

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your DALEMail

for the customers of **DALE & VALLEY HOMES**

can do, will do



ISSUE 17 September 2011

WWW.DALEANDVALLEYHOMES.CO.UK

Your annual report

Keeping you in touch at Dale & Valley Homes

We are the editorial panel and we are responsible for the development of all publications which are sent to customers of Dale & Valley Homes. This includes the annual report, Dale Mail newsletters, customer guarantee booklets and the tenants' handbook.



We have produced this edition of Dale Mail as your annual report. It will tell you how Dale & Valley Homes has been performing between April 2010 and April 2011 in relation to the Tenant Services Authority's standards.

It will detail how the company has delivered our services, how they have invested money and how they plan to improve services for you in the future.

The highlights within this report that we think you will find very interesting are the improvements in customer satisfaction (see page 2) and the many ways you can be involved with the work of Dale & Valley Homes (see page 6).

We have made sure this annual report is customer friendly by deciding on a new look design, agreeing the content and agreeing the layout and format of the text.

In partnership with staff we have drafted the text, removing any unnecessary jargon and agreed the graphics and pictures which we feel relate to the text.

We hope you find this new look attractive and the content interesting.

Families move in to new homes at Greenside Place

Families have moved in to the 17 eco-friendly homes at Greenside Place in Crook.

The homes are the first new build properties to be managed by Dale & Valley Homes and include solar panels to produce their own electricity.

Some of the spacious homes are also adapted for people in wheelchairs.

The Stewart family, David and Joanne with their children Lucas 7, and Patience, 4, were one of the first families to move in. They have returned to Crook from Tow Law so they can be nearer their family.





Customer satisfaction - do you like what we do?

Key to performance indicators



Green - on target.



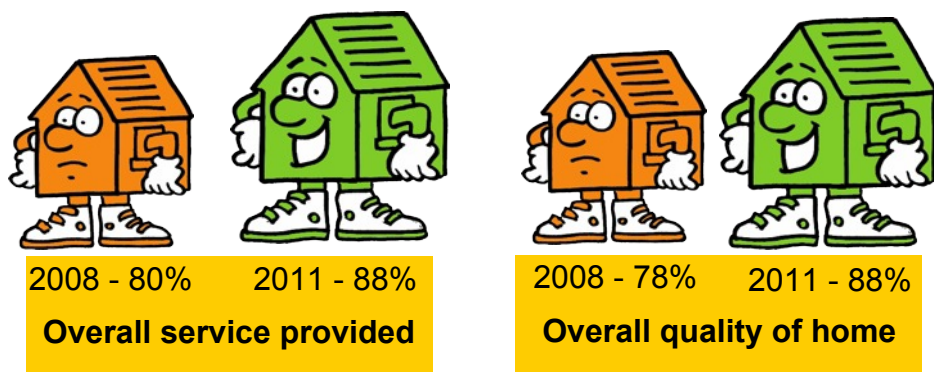
Orange - within 10% of target.



Red - more than 10% outside target.

This year we surveyed customers to find out what they think about the way Dale & Valley Homes provides services. By comparing the results with those from previous surveys we can see if you think we are improving

Below you can see the percentage of customers who said they were satisfied this year and in 2008. We are pleased with the results and hope you are too. Customers' views are very important to everyone at Dale & Valley Homes and the company will continue to do its best to improve.

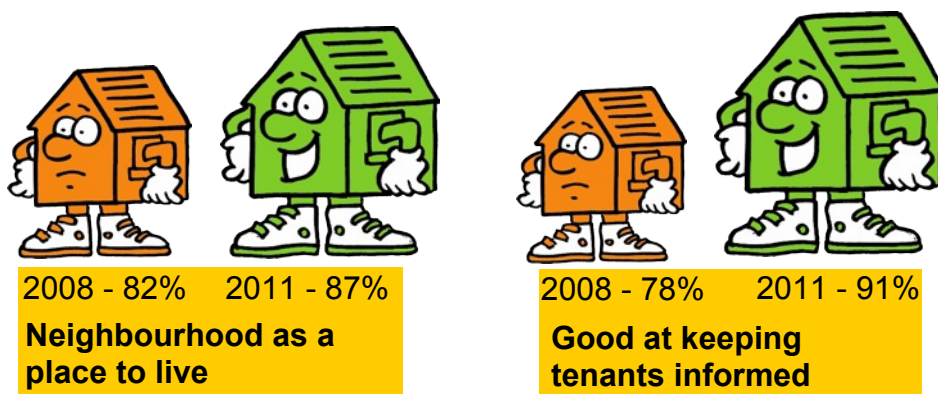
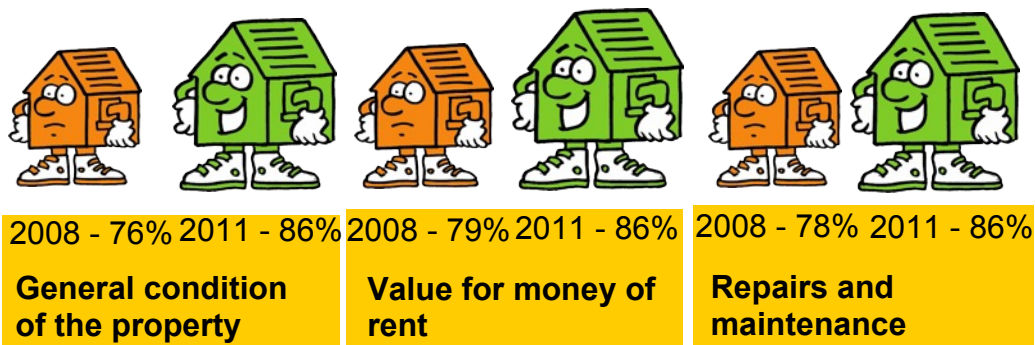


Contact us

Call us:
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Or 0300 2000194 (cheaper for mobile phone users)

Write to us:
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Improvements from survey results

Customers were asked to highlight any problems they were experiencing in their neighbourhood. The most common problem felt by tenants was the lack of children's play facilities(34%) followed by car parking (21%) and rubbish/litter (20%).

To tackle all these issues we will be working with Durham County Council and other groups such as the Area Action Partnerships, making sure they are aware of the concerns of tenants.

Actions to improve include:

Some customers would like to receive information from us in a different format but only 8% of those who had made that request said they were receiving information in the format requested.

We will contact all customers who have responded to this question to identify the format they require and ensure our records are kept up to date. This is a key action in the new customer involvement and communication strategy

When customers contacted Dale & Valley Homes by phone 98% reported that staff gave the name of the company but 13% of customers reported that staff failed to give their own name.

Managers will be reminding staff that they should give their names when customers call and will observe staff to make sure they are doing so.

How do we compare with others?

Overall customer satisfaction is 88% at Dale & Valley Homes, 84% at East Durham Homes and 83% at Durham City Homes.

Customer comments

“I know I can pick up the phone and feel the person on the other end really does care. I thank you all so very much. I am one very happy, grateful tenant. ”



How Dale & Valley Homes is managed

The company is directed and managed by a board of 15 directors - 5 tenant representatives, 5 councillors and 5 independent members from the local community who have special experience in finance, risk or law.

What has been done in the past 12 months.

The board has developed a handbook for all its members.

It has introduced measures of performance so it can see how it is doing.

It has introduced a customer scrutiny group which reports directly to the finance & audit committee.

What will be done in the next 12 months.

A new strategy will be produced to continue improving the way the company is run.

The way new board members are recruited will be formalised.

The board will look at the work of the customer scrutiny group and develop a plan of action for improving its effectiveness.



Areas for improvement

Gas safety certificates outstanding (0.07%) - To help reduce the number of homes where we cannot gain access to service the boiler before the gas safety certificate runs out, Dale & Valley Homes is moving to an 11 month cycle.

This will allow us an additional month, if needed, to gain access to a property.

The contractor is also looking at introducing additional workers to carry out rescheduled appointments. Currently they aim to complete 7 services per day. It is intended that this target will increase to 9 per day.

Percentage of tenants evicted as a result of rent arrears (0.31%) - Any customer who is at risk of losing their home will be offered the intensive housing management service, which has been introduced to help customers maximise their income and manage their home.

This is a chargeable service which Housing Benefit payments may cover. The new customer accounts services team will be working closely with neighbourhood officers and the intensive housing management team to help customers who are at risk.

Performance

Average time taken to respond to complaints (working days)

2010-11	9.7
Target	9.0
2009-10	9.0
Top performing ALMOs	6.9



Percentage of repairs completed right first time

2010-11	88.0
Target	92.0
2009-10	86.7
Top performing ALMOs	95.6



Percentage of gas safety certificates outstanding

2010-11	0.07
Target	0.00
2009-10	0.00
Top performing ALMOs	0.00



Percentage of customers satisfied with major improvements to their home.

2010-11	91.1
Target	90.0
2009-10	88.0
Top performing ALMOs	N/A



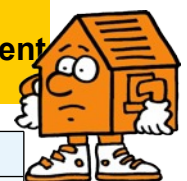
Average repair cost per property (£)

2010-11	542.14
Target	595.00
2009-10	631.22
Top performing ALMOs	222.65



Percentage of vulnerable people supported to maintain independent living

2010-11	91.4
Target	92.5
2009-10	91.4
Top performing ALMOs	99.9



Satisfaction of tenants with landlord services

2010-11	88.4
Target	82.5
2009-10	79.9
Top performing ALMOs	88.1



- how we are doing



- improvements continued

Tenant satisfaction with the repairs service



2010-11	86.1
Target	80.0
2009-10	79.9
Top performing ALMOs	88.1

Percentage of tenants satisfied that their views are taken into account



2010-11	79.1
Target	66.0
2009-10	63.7
Top performing ALMOs	80.4

Percentage of tenants evicted for anti-social behaviour



2010-11	0.00
Target	0.05
2009-10	0.02
Top performing ALMOs	N/A

Percentage satisfaction with outcomes of customer involvement



2010-11	70.7
Target	70.0
2009-10	67.2
Top performing ALMOs	N/A

Percentage of residents satisfied with estate services



2010-11	45.0
Target	55.0
2009-10	44.0
Top performing ALMOs	N/A

Percentage of new tenants satisfied with the allocations and lettings process



2010-11	73.0
Target	75.0
2009-10	73.2
Top performing ALMOs	N/A

Percentage of tenants evicted for rent arrears

2010-11	0.31
Target	0.22
2009-10	0.29
Top performing ALMOs	0.04



We are working closely with the Citizens' Advice Bureaux to help customers between the ages of 16-35 to maximise their income.

Percentage of residents satisfied with estate services (45%) - We are working in partnership with Durham County Council and the police to reduce the number of stray horses and the number of incidents of fly tipping.

We are also working closely with the street wardens to tackle issues around dog fouling.

Street wardens are visiting schools to raise children's awareness of this problem and additional waste bins have been installed.

Staff at Dale & Valley Homes have led a campaign encouraging responsible pet ownership which resulted in a number of articles in local newspapers.





Getting involved and communicating with you

Involving customers matters a lot to Dale & Valley Homes. Giving customers the best opportunity to have their say in the services they receive, how they are planned and paid for helps us to improve services and ensures you are getting value for money.

Achievements from the last 12 months include

- ★ Developing and implementing customer guarantees following in depth customer consultation.
- ★ Setting up a new customer scrutiny group.
- ★ Stopping customer involvement opportunities which were not providing value for money.
- ★ Introducing new involvement opportunities with help from customers.
- ★ A new customer involvement strategy including communications.
- ★ Reviewing strategies, policies and plans in light of the Equality Act 2010.
- ★ We have made sure that we offer the same level of service to all our customers.
- ★ Customers told us they would like us to have longer opening hours.

Keeping customers well informed about issues which affect them is also very important. The company aims to do this in a way which reflects customers' needs.

Different ways of being involved take up different amounts of time. The following list shows how you can be involved and the number of customers who are involved in each method.

Tenant Board Member (5)
Wear Valley Customer Panel (23)
Scrutiny Group (8)
Customer Inspectors (4)
Residents Association (40+)
Mystery Customer Scheme (19)
Working Groups (45+)
Neighbourhood Inspections (16)
Focus Groups (49)
Surveys (157)
Social Activities (n/a)

To find out more about becoming involved contact us on the numbers on page 2

Customer comments

“ The girls on the involvement team work hard to help people. ”



Getting better in 2011/12

Working with our customers we have come up with the following improvements which we will be working on this year.

- ★ Review the diversity and vulnerability information we currently hold on customers and contact customers whose information is missing.
- ★ Review all surveys being sent to customers to remove any duplications of content, to minimise the amount of questions customers are asked.
- ★ Provide staff training on how to use customer profile information when directing service improvements through policies, procedures and strategies.
- ★ Review the tenants' handbook to include all service improvements in the last two years.
- ★ Improve services in order for Dale & Valley Homes to achieve the Customer Service Excellence standard.
- ★ Implement and evaluate new consultation methods which support customer involvement in regulating Dale & Valley Homes.
- ★ Implement and evaluate the impact of the new customer involvement & communication strategy.
- ★ Implement and evaluate the impact of the scrutiny group on the services delivered to customers.
- ★ Monitor and review the customer guarantees, ensuring they continue to reflect customer needs and priorities.
- ★ Implement and evaluate the impact of the new equality and diversity strategy, making sure it is effective in all areas of our work.
- ★ Introduce extended weekday opening hours for our telephone service from September 2011.



How we are doing with our new customer guarantees

We said we would deal with complaints in 10 working days.

90.9% of complaints were dealt with in 10 days.

Target 65%.



66.7% of customers were satisfied with the complaints service.

Target 60%.



We said we would answer the telephone within five rings and resolve general enquiries within five working days.

81.8% of telephone calls were answered within 5 rings.

Target 84%.





In the future

We have developed a 12 month work plan which will see us continuing our work for the benefit of all tenants and progressing with:

- ★ the continuation of the stock options appraisal steering group;
- ★ a recruitment drive to encourage more residents to get involved with us;
- ★ development of a garden competition across the Wear Valley area in which all residents can participate;
- ★ promoting the work we do and the benefits we bring;
- ★ developing of Dale & Valley Homes' strategies.

Any resident of the Wear Valley area can be involved with us. If you are interested please contact the customer involvement team or come along to our monthly meeting, which is always held on the first Tuesday of every month at Dale & Valley House, 5 – 7pm.

Contact details on page 2.

Tenant involvement and empowerment

We are the Wear Valley Customer Panel and we are made up of customer representatives from across the Wear Valley area within Durham County. Our purpose is to gain and share knowledge around social housing issues to all residents.



In the last 12 months we have been involved in:

- ★ organising our best customer conference yet, with representatives attending from across the North East;
- ★ organising and attending the Wolsingham Show exhibition in Weardale, where we promoted our work and that of Dale & Valley Homes;
- ★ reviewing the new tenancy agreement, which has now been created for all tenants of Durham County Council;
- ★ staging a housing revenue account briefing for customers across County Durham so they could have a say in how a review of the account progressed;
- ★ agreeing targets for the new customer guarantees, including when the customer guarantees should be reviewed;
- ★ representing Wear Valley tenants on the stock options steering group, ensuring customers priorities are fully taken into account in the process.

Achieving value for money

Dale & Valley Homes defines value for money as doing the same for less, achieving more for the same or, at best, doing more in terms of delivering better outcomes for customers for less money. Overall, Dale & Valley Homes aims to improve outcomes and reduce costs.

Our efforts in the past 12 months are listed below.

- ★ We have delivered the decent homes programme on budget and met the efficiency targets set out in the contracts.
- ★ Customers helped us identify three services which some of them would like to receive. These are garden maintenance, intensive housing support and furnished tenancies. As these services will not be delivered to all of our customers and are not mandatory, we have decided to fund them by charging those customers who will use them.
- ★ We have negotiated a new and more efficient agreement for computing services from Durham County Council.
- ★ Staff have gone through a restructure to ensure we continue to deliver excellent services to customers but in a smarter and more cost-effective way.
- ★ We have developed a priority-based budget system where customer and stakeholder consultation highlights priorities and money is allocated to them.

What the future holds.

In the coming year we will produce a new value for money strategy for the whole organisation to make sure we make the best use of the resources we have. Part of this will include developing a procurement policy and guidance to staff on its use. We will also improve the existing financial system to enhance the monitoring arrangement, empowering budget holders to achieve value for money.



What our customers have said about us

- “ Would like to thank the workmen and Dale & Valley for the plastering in my property. ”
- “ I have nothing but praise for the tenants’ handbook, it’s full of information. ”
- “ I found Craig Sams very helpful when I was offered the property and when he came to see if we had settled in. Any problems have been sorted immediately by very pleasant and helpful workmen. ”
- “ All aspects of the work were very good, especially the workmen. The speed in requesting the work and having it carried out was very good. Overall a first rate response. ”
- “ I am so happy with the work that has been done. Over the moon. Thank you very much. ”



Achievements for the past year

- ★ 892 homes had decent homes work completed, six more than planned. The decent homes programme is coming in on target and within budget.
- ★ Go-warm carried on providing energy efficient measures for customers homes and benefit advice to help maximise customers' income at the same time.
- ★ Dale & Valley Homes started providing aids and adaptations as part of the decent homes programme, fitting a home to meet customers' needs.
- ★ Customers helped decide what improvements they wanted to see in their area, such as fencing, guttering and fascia boards.
- ★ The company developed a 7 year painting and guttering cleaning programme as one of its customer guarantees.
- ★ Wherever possible, officially recognised Considerate Contractors are used for all contracts, encouraging all contractors to achieve this accreditation. Dale & Valley Homes has pioneered this for reactive repairs. See www.ccscheme.org.uk.

Decent homes and repairs

Dale & Valley Homes is committed to providing the very best housing for all customers. The company wants to ensure all customers have a home that they are proud to live in and strives to provide an excellent decent homes and repairs & maintenance service to achieve this.



We are the service delivery group for Dale & Valley Homes. Our aim is to keep improving the standards of the repairs & maintenance and decent homes services.

We have been keeping an eye on all the information about these services, especially customer satisfaction levels, ensuring they continue to get better.

This year we have been involved in the review of the aids and adaptations service, choosing cupboard doors and work tops, which resulted in better quality and money savings, giving us increased value for money.

Monitoring performance helps us ensure that repairs are done right and that they are done right first time.

To help the environment we have been involved in increasing the amount of waste that is recycled rather than going to landfill.

We have also been involved in inspecting 3 empty properties, giving a customer perspective on the stages of the repair work in order to make improvements.

In future we will continue to monitor the services and make improvements where necessary, trying to make more savings. We will also be working to reduce the times that properties are left empty.

Any Dale & Valley Homes customer can get involved with the service improvement group. If you are interested please contact the customer involvement team for more information.

Our guarantees to you

In April 2011 we introduced our new customer guarantees and said we would report regularly on whether we are achieving our goals. These are the figures for the first three months.

We said we would give customers whose homes are receiving major works a diary and fill it in every day so they can see how work is progressing.

77.7% of customers received a diary.

Target 98.0%



86.7% of customers felt well informed about work.

Target 93.0%



We said we would complete decent homes work within 20 working days.

99.5% of homes were completed within 20 days.

Target 99.8%



88.9% of customers were satisfied with the work's progress.

Target 93.0%



For the future

Dale & Valley Homes will continue to deliver decent homes work in accordance with the published programme.

The company will continue with its efforts to make homes more fuel efficient and reduce fuel poverty.

New IT software will be introduced so the company has easier access to information on the condition of its homes.

Longer working hours will be introduced for a trial period for bricklayers, plasterers, carpenters, electricians and plumbers working on decent homes work. They will apply between Monday and Thursday only.

Customer comments

“ Good job on the path by the two workmen. ”



Customer guarantees on repairs

In April this year we introduced our customer guarantees, which are the standard of service you said you want us to reach. This is how we have done in the first three months

Guarantees when we visit your home

We said we would let you know who we are and why we have come.

94.3% of customers were shown identification when staff or contractors visited.

Target 94.0%



We said we would use dust sheets, keep your home as clean as possible and tidy up at the end of each day.

90.6% of customers were satisfied with the care and cleanliness during work.

Target 93.0%



We said we would be polite, friendly, knowledgeable and courteous at all times.

93.9% of customers were satisfied with the conduct of workers,

Target 96.0%



We said we will carry out your repairs as soon as possible with a maximum time of 24 hours for emergencies, five working days for urgent cases and 20 working days for routine repairs.

99.5% of emergency repairs were completed within 24 hours.

Target 99.8%



99% of urgent repairs were completed within five working days.

Target 99.0%



94.4% of routine repairs were completed within 20 days.

Target 97.0%



We said we would carry out urgent and routine repairs right first time.

79.6% of repairs were completed right first time.

Target 88.5%



We said we would make an appointment for all repairs except gas repairs and confirm those appointments in writing or by text.

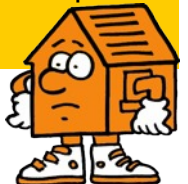
96.8% of appointments we made were kept.

Target 98.0%



84.1% of customers were satisfied with the arrangements made to carry out their repair.

Target 88.0%



Customer Comments

“ The work was carried out in an efficient manner and the workmen were well mannered and friendly. Everything was left clean and tidy. ”

News from our new scrutiny group



We are the customer scrutiny group and we work with the finance and audit committee, management, tenants and staff to ensure the scrutiny group is effective. We choose different topics to review and ensure Dale & Valley Homes is fulfilling its strategic and governance roles, and that managers are meeting their operational targets.

Our aim is to support Dale & Valley Homes in the achievement of its vision and build its reputation through effective scrutiny and enquiry. We listen to professional advice and have extra support in order for us to make decisions and recommendations for improvement.



We are working on behalf of tenants to ensure they receive services of the highest standard. One member of the scrutiny group said:

“As a member I have learnt a lot and had good training from the Board Development Agency. There is a good support network.”



What the scrutiny group has done so far

The scrutiny group has worked as a team and job shadowed staff dealing with complaints and repairs; interviewed a director about complaints and looked at performance information in relation to complaints and repairs.

We have done this to see how things are working and if there is room for improvement.

We will be reporting our findings on complaints and repairs to the finance & audit committee soon.

We intend to review aspects of the following services in the next 12 months:

- Contracts
- Empty homes
- Anti-social behaviour
- Environmental works
- Customer involvement

If you would like to be involved with the scrutiny group please contact Amy Glendinning in one of the ways listed on page 2.



Managing your tenancy

Lettings working group

We are the lettings working group and we meet every two months to monitor and review lettings performance, provide feedback and input into improving services and policies.

Over the past twelve months we have:

helped develop local lettings policies for the new developments at Greenside Place and Park Avenue Close;

consulted on the development and the introduction of the moving home scheme;

helped with the development of customer guarantees;

monitored re-let performance.

monitored customer satisfaction with new tenancies;

suggested ways to help let difficult properties.

In the next twelve months we will be continuing to closely monitor lettings performance. We are hoping that the membership of our group will expand to include more customers and staff, as well as representatives from the repairs and maintenance contractors. By doing this we hope to look at issues from all sides.

Dale & Valley Homes understands that moving home can be a stressful time and we want to help reduce the stress where we can. The company is committed to helping customers find a home that is right for them, in a neighbourhood in which they can be proud to live. We also understand that customers can sometimes need support with living in their homes, so we will do our best to help you where we can.

In 2011/12 we plan to improve by introducing improved tenancy management for vulnerable customers to ensure they can sustain their tenancy, including:

- ★ working with other agencies to bring in the relevant support depending on individual needs;
- ★ installing aids and adaptations to homes;
- ★ introducing the new intensive housing management scheme, enhancing the role of the neighbourhood officer;
- ★ introducing a furniture pack service;
- ★ working with customers and other partners to develop a more pro-active and preventative approach to tenancy management;
- ★ working with the credit union and insurance scheme to increase customers take-up of these services;
- ★ launching an awareness campaign about Housing Benefit;
- ★ further improving re-let times for empty properties, reducing rent loss and improving customer satisfaction with their new home.

We said we would give all new tenants a handbook to explain our services

90% received a handbook

Target 98%



95% were satisfied with information provided when signing up.

Target 90%



We said if you are viewing a new home we will agree on any repairs it needs and give you a timetable for when they will be done.

Figures for how many people received a timetable will be published next quarter.

80% of customers said Dale & Valley Homes was responsive to any problems when they moved into their new home

Target 78%



Are we living up to our guarantees?

In April this year we published our new customer guarantees. The performance statistics below show if we met our goals in the first three months since then.

We said we would give a brief description of properties in newspaper adverts and more detailed information on the website.

95% of customers felt the property matched what was advertised.

Target 90%



We said we would confirm your housing registration within 5 working days and give you more information on how Durham Key Options works.

100% of customers were registered in 5 days

Target 99%



We said we would publish the outcomes of allocations every month on our website, in the office and through our customer contact point.

84.2% of customers were satisfied with the literature during their application and time on the housing register.

Target 65%



We said we would give you a Durham Key Options application pack including all the relevant information.

100% of customers received the information

Target 98%



84.2% of customers were satisfied with the information given

Target 65%



Achievements from the past 12 months

In the past 12 months Dale & Valley Homes has:

- ★ undergone an external review of our Durham Key Options choice-based lettings scheme and established a plan of action to meet the recommendations;
- ★ joined the national HomeSwapper exchange programme giving customers more choice when choosing a home;
- ★ developed its own 6 monthly newsletter to provide those customers who are waiting to be re-housed feedback on properties which have been re-let;
- ★ reviewed and extended its contract with the Citizens' Advice Bureau, which gives advice to Dale & Valley Homes customers on managing their debt and maximising their income;
- ★ reviewed, consulted and implemented the new revised tenancy agreement for tenants of Durham County Council;
- ★ developed a local lettings policy for the new build schemes in Crook.



Neighbourhoods and communities

What our customers have said about us

- “ Graeme Wade has been very helpful when dealing with application. ”
- “ With regards to the Allocations Focus Group Mrs Coglan Thanked Clair Ord, Sam Elms & Amy Glendinning for a good day and felt they were very good at their job and it was a pleasure to spend the morning with them. ”
- “ I have always found your staff polite and helpful when I have needed to contact you. ”
- “ I am quite happy with your services, when I have had any problems. At my age it means a lot to see some respect if needed. ”

Dale & Valley Homes is committed to helping customers feel safe and secure in their homes and neighbourhoods. We want customers to be proud of the area where they live and ensure that they understand that neighbourhood cleanliness and tidiness plays a big part in that.

The company wants customers to enjoy a high quality of life free from nuisance, harassment or anti-social behaviour. We promote respect and expect customers to be considerate towards their neighbourhoods and other residents in the community. We want customers who are victims of anti-social behaviour to report it to their local neighbourhood officer because we cannot deal with a situation unless we know about it.

As one of the new customer guarantees we said we would produce an action plan with you when you reported anti-social behaviour to us and keep you informed of progress resolving the situation.

100% of cases have had an action plan agreed.
Target 100%



66.8% of customers felt Dale & Valley Homes had kept them informed of the progress of their case.
Target 90%



100% of customers felt Dale & Valley Homes had clearly explained what they would do in their case.
Target 95%



Highlights from 2011/12

In the past 12 months we have been working hard to make your neighbourhoods better places to live. Here are some of the things we have achieved.

- ★ We have worked in partnership with other organisations to help customers manage their personal finances.
- ★ We have used our knowledge of hate crime, harassment and anti-social behaviour to work in partnership with the police and other agencies to contribute to the establishment of the Safer Neighbourhood Unit.
- ★ We set up our intensive support service to help customers who are at risk of losing their home through anti-social behaviour.
- ★ A new computer system was introduced which will ensure correct procedures are followed and help staff to monitor the progress of a case.
- ★ We carried out neighbourhood inspections in areas where we have properties. Together staff and customers identified improvements that were needed and the work was carried out. Below are some examples.

Simpson Avenue, St Helen
Auckland

Before



After



Douthwaite Road, Bishop
Auckland

Before



After



Improvements for 2011/12

In the coming year we plan to:

- ★ introduce a garden maintenance service paid for through a service charge.
- ★ bring in new IT software to keep track of the environmental issues in individual neighbourhoods.
- ★ work with customers and other partners to develop a more pro-active and preventative approach to anti-social behaviour.
- ★ work with Durham County Council, Durham City Homes and East Durham Homes to develop a strategy for managing garage sites, improving neighbourhoods.
- ★ review the procedures for neighbourhood inspections to ensure we work with other organisations and achieve the best for customers.



Watergate garden competition winners

Gardeners of all ages were busy this summer flexing their green fingers for the Watergate estate gardening competition.

Ken Blakey (above), from Grasmere Grove was the winner, Mr & Mrs Welsh from Ullswater Crescent came second and Mr and Mrs Fowler from Grasmere Grove were third.

The winners of the new tenant category were John and Ann Spoor from Scafell Gardens. Seven-year-old Dan Fallon (below), from Coniston Crescent, was the young gardener of the year.



Neighbourhood inspections-

Neighbourhood officer

Kevin Dawson (01388 770949)

Howden-le-Wear
Watergate estate, Crook
Escomb/Witton Park/
Witton-le-Wear
Crook town centre

October	November	December
4th		
18th	15th	20th
20th		
6th		1st

Neighbourhood officer

Liz Graham (01388 770950)

Stanley Way
Low Mown Meadows
Wolsingham
Frosterley & Stanhope
St John's Chapel & Wearhead
Rookhope
Bankfoot Grove

11th	8th	13th
5th	2nd	
	28th	
	24th	
10th		
28th		
6th		1st

Neighbourhood Officer

Jill Forbes (01388 770955)

St Helen Auckland
West Auckland (upper)
West Auckland (lower)
Henknowle

13th	10th	9th
20th		
6th	3rd	1st
	10th	

Neighbourhood Officer

Craig Sams (01388 770956)

Woodhouse Close (lower)
Woodhouse Close (upper)

26th	23rd	21st
19th	16th	14th

Neighbourhood Team Leader

Liz Bradley (01388 770951)

Bishop Auckland Town Centre

6th

These are the dates when we will be looking at your area in the next three months.

Neighbourhood officer

Terry Longthorne

(01388 770954)

Wear Valley View

Hall Lane

Dovedale Ave, Sunnybrow

Huntsgarth, Sunnybrow

Willington & Oakenshaw

Hunwick

October	November	December
	29th	
20th	24th	20th
31st	28th	19th
25th	29th	20th
29th		
27th		
6th	4th	5th
	11th	
	10th	
		19th
11th		6th
24th	28th	16th
14th		15th

Neighbourhood officer

Sarah Dowson (01388 770956)

Tees Walk

Grey Gardens

York Close

Buckingham Tce/Cambridge St

South Church

St Andrew's Rd/North End Gdns

McCullagh Gdns

Coundon Grange/Eldon Lane



Dog fouling

Staff from Dale & Valley Homes have called on their furry friends to lead a campaign for responsible pet ownership.

Dog mess is one of the main concerns of the company's customers so staff are hoping to encourage more people to clean up after their dogs, keep them on a lead and care for them properly.

Kath Wright, neighbourhood manager, said: "Some of the diseases spread by dog dirt are really nasty.

"No-one would want someone they love to catch anything in this way. Please help keep your neighbours and families safe by cleaning up after your dogs.

"Whenever we ask our customers what concerns them responsible pet ownership is high on the list.

"Dog owners who do not clean up after their pets are committing an offence which is subject to a fixed penalty notice.

"Regular worming is another aspect of responsible pet ownership we want to encourage. Cats and dogs should both be wormed regularly to avoid spreading toxocariasis, a condition which can cause blindness and asthma."

Anyone troubled by badly behaved dogs should contact our **anti-social behaviour hotline on 01388 770940.**





Clair Ord named Young Leader of the Year

Young mother Clair Ord is celebrating being named as Young Leader of the Year.

Clair, 28, from Darlington, has won a national competition organised by 24 Housing magazine to find the professional leaders of the future.

Clair, customer insight manager for Dale & Valley Homes, beat competitors from all over the country to the title.

She said: "I think the judges were impressed because I started at Dale & Valley Homes as an apprentice with no real idea what I wanted to do.

"Now, nearly eight years later, I am studying for a Masters degree. I don't think I could have done it anywhere else.

"Everything I have done has been to inspire my daughter Chloe-Marie and be a good role model for her. I really believe that girls need to see that women can achieve and take control of their own lives."

Chief executive Peter Chaffer added: "We are so proud of Clair for achieving this. She is just one of the many talented people who are committed to doing their very best at Dale & Valley Homes."

Do you need a helping hand?

Did you know we can help some customers with those little jobs around the home? Vulnerable customers qualify for our Helping Hands scheme, which is free of charge.

To qualify for the service you must fall into one of the following categories: be over 60, have a visual or severe mobility impairment, be aged 16 to 24 or be classed as vulnerable.

The service is also available if you have moved into your home in the past four weeks or are a victim of domestic abuse who has recently moved. The service is only for people who do not have an alternative way of having the work done.

As a general rule we will do up to two hours work and it will include jobs such as changing light bulbs, putting up shelves, installing curtain rails or assembling one piece of flat pack furniture.

We will not do jobs that include gas or electrical work or require our estate caretakers to spend long periods on ladders.

To find out if the helping hand scheme could help you contact your neighbourhood officer or use the contact methods on page 2.



Finance - how the money stacks up

Our biggest source of income is the management fee paid to us every year by Durham County Council. In 2010-11 this was £5,911,000. This, in turn, is paid for from the rents paid by tenants and collected into a central account, the housing revenue account.

One simple way of measuring whether we are becoming more cost effective is to look at how much the fee we are paid has changed over the years. It is important that we keep this as low as possible whilst still delivering high quality services to customers: the less we and the other providers need to spend on management and day to day repairs, the more is available for improving peoples' homes.

Based on this measure, in the five years since Dale & Valley Homes was established our costs have been reduced by 12% after allowing for inflation.

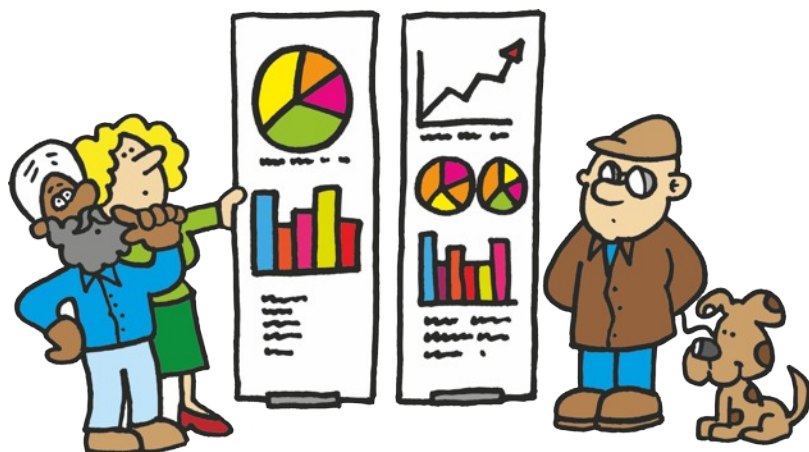
Our major staffing restructure started in 2010-11 and other measures that we have already taken will mean that by 2012-13 our costs will be 25% lower than when we started. Our new value for money and procurement strategy aims to make even bigger savings over the next two years.

TENANT INVOLVEMENT

We regard tenant involvement as crucially important to the running of our business and have invested more in this work than many other housing companies.

We spent £219,000 on tenant involvement in 2010-11. This includes the cost of work done by staff from across the organisation to develop our first customer guarantees. Costs in the previous year were £208,000.

In the current year we have planned additional work to involve our customers, including setting up our tenant scrutiny group, but we expect to do this at reduced cost.



Some financial highlights



Repairs and maintenance

Repairing and maintaining homes cost us £3,518,000 in 2010-11, more than half the total money we spent.

Big value for money savings meant we spent almost £300,000 less than in 2009-10.

We have planned a further reduction of at least £150,000 in the current year.

Tenancies

Tenancy services cost us £660,000 in the year 2010-11. This was slightly more than in the previous year (£652,000).

As part of our staffing restructure we expect to make significant savings in the current year.

Neighbourhood and community

Supporting your neighbourhoods and communities cost £596,000 in 2010-11, compared with £592,000 in 2009-10.

The restructure is expected to reduce costs in this area in the future.

Decent homes

Expenditure on Decent Homes and other capital works to properties is funded directly by the council. In 2010-11 this was £8,928,000 reduced from £10,415,000 in the previous year as we moved closer towards completion of the Decent Homes programme.

SIGN UP TODAY
JOIN IN!



Take part in our survey for your chance to win £25

We would like to hear what you think of the new look Dale Mail. Fill in the form below and send it to us at the address on the form to be entered in a prize draw. First entry out of the hat will receive a voucher for £25.



Please return this form to

Annual report survey
Dale & Valley Homes
27 Longfield Road
South Church Enterprise Park
Bishop Auckland
DL14 6XB

Closing date October 28, 2011



Housing benefit payments - update

Changes to the computer system which pays Housing Benefit to people in County Durham have led to delays in payments being made.

As a result some people's rent accounts are in arrears when they should not be.

The problems have been caused because Durham County Council is moving all payments onto one computer system instead of the separate systems used by the former district councils.

The council expects to have worked through all the backlog in payments by the end of March 2012, when all outstanding benefits should be credited to tenants' accounts.

If you are worried about the arrears showing on your rent account please contact the Citizens' Advice Bureau on 01388 606 661, Monday, Wednesday and Friday between 10am and 1pm. The CAB will calculate how much benefit you should receive.

Tell us what you think to win £25

Answer the questions below to tell us what you think of the annual report to be entered in a prize draw where you could win a voucher worth £25.

How useful was the information in this annual report?

Very useful Useful Okay Not useful

How much did you like the way the report was presented?

Liked it a lot Liked it It was okay Didn't like It

How do you think the report could be improved?

(Continue on a separate sheet if needed)

Your name

Your address

Good Neighbour awards 2011

Is your neighbour special? Has someone you know made a difference to the community? Would your life be harder without the commitment and care of someone in your area?

Following the huge success of last year's first ever good neighbour awards, Dale & Valley Homes is again giving you the chance to reward your neighbours.

Fill in the form below to let us know about your nominee, the category you think they qualify for and why they deserve to be recognised.

The results will be announced in the new year.

The categories are:

- Good Neighbour of the Year
- Young Neighbour of the Year (under 25 years)
- Getting Involved in the Community
- Outstanding Contribution to the Fight Against Anti-social Behaviour.



Last year's winners received their awards from Paralympic swimming hopeful Lyndon Longhorne.

If your neighbour deserves special recognition then don't forget to nominate them for an award.

Closing date December 2.

In partnership with



Weardale
gazette



Good Neighbour Awards 2011 Entry Form

Your name

Your address

Your phone number

Nominee's name

Nominee's address

Nominee's phone number

Category you are nominating for

Reasons your neighbour should win an award (continue on a separate sheet if needed).



Please return this form to:

2011 Good Neighbour Awards
Dale & Valley Homes
27 Longfield Road
South Church Enterprise Park
Bishop Auckland
DL14 6XB

Closing date December 2, 2011





Woodhouse Close youngsters go Wiiiiiiiiiiii

Auckland After School Club has taken delivery of a new Wii to keep youngsters busy.

The console is a gift from the neighbourhood police team as part of their Operation Summer Nights campaign.



PCSO Mike Atkinson said: "A big part of it is education, how anti-social behaviour affects other people, but it is also about showing youngsters there is something else to do and about keeping them safe."

Playworker Michelle Hunt added: "It helps to encourage children to come here, and they come every week, which is a good thing."

Children attend the club, which meets each Tuesday and Thursday at Auckland Youth and Community Centre, from as far away as St Helen Auckland.

Accessibility

Customers who have told us they would like Dale Mail in large print have been provided with a magnifying device. If you need one of these please contact our customer involvement team (see page 2).

Customers who have asked for an audio tape version have been provided with that. If you would prefer the publication on audio tape, CD ROM or in another language we can help. Just call 0300 2000 194 or 0800 083 0333 free from landlines.

