

**Durham**  
County Council



# Durham City Homes

## **Annual Report 2011/12**

Altogether better council housing in Durham City





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## Key:

Throughout this report, you will see that we often use smiley faces to show how we are performing against the targets we have set ourselves.

Our Tenants Panel like and support this approach.

The faces mean:



We are meeting or exceeding our target.



We are close to our target.



We failed to meet our target.

Where possible we have compared our performance to other housing providers. You will see here that we refer to different quartiles, these mean:

**Upper quartile** – is the performance position of the top 25% of providers in the country.

**Median** – is the average performance of providers in the country.

**Lower quartile** – is the performance of the bottom 25% of providers in the country.

Other figures provided in this report are sourced from local surveys we undertake during the year.



# Welcome & Introduction



During the last year we have made significant progress in developing and improving the services we provide for tenants and leaseholders of Durham City Homes.

I am particularly pleased by the work some tenants have undertaken in scrutinising the work we do

and making suggestions to help us improve the services we provide. You can find out more about this on page 11.

I am also very encouraged by the work undertaken across the County in taking forward the stock options project which is looking at the future management and financing options for all Council housing in the County. A final report to the Council's Cabinet is expected later in the year outlining the potential way forward.

Throughout this report you can find out about how Durham City Homes has performed during the year, along with areas where further work needs to be done. I hope you find the report useful and interesting. I am sure you will agree that the work undertaken by staff and tenants continues to improve across the services we provide.

Councillor Clive Robson  
**Council Cabinet Member for Housing**



Welcome to the third Annual Report from Durham City Homes and Durham City Homes Tenants Panel.

During the last three years I have had the privilege of chairing the Tenants Panel and during this time we have made great progress in helping shape and

influence the services that you receive as a tenant or leaseholder of Durham City Homes.

This report sets out some of the key achievements that have been made during the last year as well as some of the areas where we would like to see improvements made.

The report has been written with the support and input of tenants. I hope you find it informative and an enjoyable read.

John Kelley  
**Chair Durham City Homes Tenants Panel**



# About our Homes

**Durham City Homes** is the part of Durham County Council which manages council housing in the Durham City area. We manage approximately 6,000 homes spread across 33 discrete locations. The biggest concentration of housing is in the village of Brandon, with over 1,000 homes. We also manage a large number of council properties in Framwellgate Moor, Esh Winning, Gilesgate and Ushaw Moor.

The map below shows the approximate number of homes we manage by village:



Of the 6,000 homes we manage across the area, there are:

Type and number of homes (as at 1st April 2012)	Number of bedrooms					
	Bedsit	1	2	3	4	5
Houses (3,572)	0	1	1593	1897	80	1
Flats (514)	2	364	124	23	1	0
Bungalows (1,915)	0	1057	830	27	1	0

The average weekly rent for each of our homes in 2011/12 is shown below:

	Number of bedrooms					
	Bedsit	1	2	3	4	5
Average Rent	£42.74	£54.47	£60.35	£66.67	£71.80	£75.76
The average weekly rent in 2011/12 was:	£61.12					



# National standards and local offers

On 1st April 2012 the Tenant Services Authority (TSA) was closed and the responsibility for regulating social housing in England was transferred to the Homes and Communities Agency (HCA).

To coincide with the closure of the TSA and the transfer of its functions to the HCA a review of the TSA's former National Standards was carried out.

On 1st April 2012 the HCA refreshed and updated the National Standards. The standards are now divided into two groups; consumer and economic standards.

Within each of the groups there are a number of requirements relating to the services we deliver for tenants and leaseholders. For each of these requirements we must agree 'Local Offers' with tenants and leaseholders.

Durham City Homes' tenants and leaseholders have called their 'Local Offers' – Local Service Standards. The standards set out the minimum level of service tenants and leaseholders can expect of us.

The consumer and economic standards include:

## Consumer standards

- Tenant involvement and empowerment
- Home
- Tenancy
- Neighbourhood and community

## Economic standards

- Governance and financial viability
- Value for money
- Rents

The economic standards do not apply to local authority landlords but do apply to all other providers. However, we have in this Annual Report provided some information about how we have performed in these areas.

This report tells you how we have performed against your local service standards, which we agreed with the Tenants Panel in 2010/11. It also sets out some of the work the Panel has asked us to take forward in the year ahead.

# Consumer standards

## Tenant involvement and empowerment




This standard includes:

- Customer service, choice and complaints.
- Involvement and empowerment.
- Understanding and responding to the diverse needs of tenants.

### Customer service, choice and complaints

Providing excellent quality, accessible and responsive services is key to everything we do. We strive to ensure that the services we provide meet your needs and that you have a choice and a say in the services we provide for you.

When we get things wrong, we will say we got it wrong and we will learn from our mistakes, ensuring that the services we provide continue to improve.

Your <b>customer service, choice and complaints</b> local service standards 2011/12	How well we did
● Answer telephone calls within 60 seconds	
● All customers seen within 15 minutes	
● All complaints responded to within 10 days	

Our Tenants Panel have told us they want these standards to stay the same for 2012/13.

### A closer look at our performance:

- We answered 69% of telephone calls within 60 seconds.
- We scored 5 out of 10 on satisfaction with how we handled your complaint. Our target was 6.
- We scored 7.1 out of 10 for satisfaction with the quality of customer service we provide for you. Our target was 7.
- We dealt with 93 complaints about the services we provided.
- We received 17 compliments about the services we provided.
- We know that 78% of you are satisfied with the overall service we provide. This was a fall from the previous years satisfaction and lower than our target of 84%.
- We know that 71% of you are satisfied with how we deal with your enquiries, which is the same level of satisfaction achieved in the previous year.

### Our achievements in 2011/12:

- We reviewed our 'out of hours' customer contact arrangements. You can now contact us 24 hours a day, 7 days a week.
- We changed our free-phone telephone number (0800 068 0013) so that you get straight through to a Customer Service Advisor.
- We introduced text reporting for repairs.
- We reviewed our internal procedures to speed up how we manage your complaints.

### How we plan to improve in 2012/13:

- We will continue to work with County Council colleagues to improve response times when answering telephones, which we think is an important factor in the fall in customer satisfaction.
- We will review our complaints process and the types of complaint we receive to improve customer satisfaction, maximise tenant involvement and improve communication between tenants and our repairs staff.
- We will increase the capacity of our Estates and Tenancy Team so that we have more staff to respond to the needs of our customers.



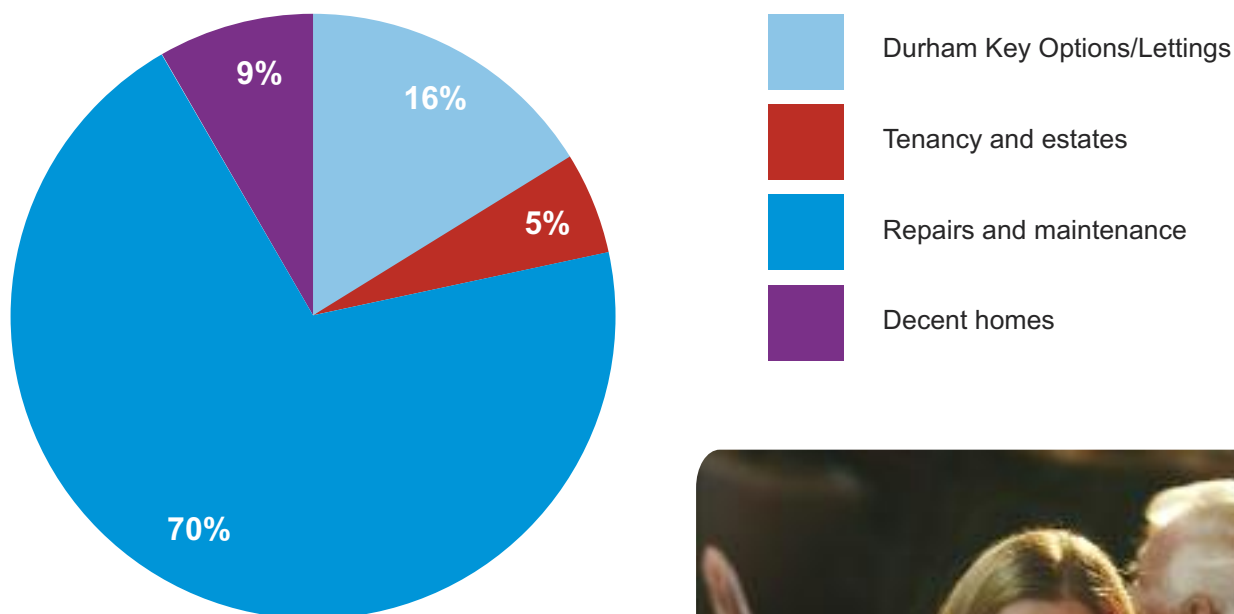


**A closer look at complaints:**

There are a number of stages in the Council's complaints process. Your initial complaint is known as a stage 1 complaint, this type of complaint is responded to by individual managers with responsibility for the service you complained about. If you are not satisfied with their response you can proceed to a stage 2 complaint. These complaints are investigated by the Council's Corporate Complaints Team.

In 2011/12 we received 93 'stage 1' complaints from customers about the services we provide.

The chart below provides a breakdown of these complaints by service area:



We recognise that on some occasions the services we delivered fell short of our usual high service standards. As a result we paid £10 compensation to 16 complainants where we failed to deliver what we said we would in our local service standards.

We responded to all stage 1 complaint's within 10 days. 6 of the 93 complaints progressed to stage 2 of the complaints process.

The majority of complaints were in relation to repairs (65 complaints). Although this number appears high, it is important to highlight that we completed over 25,000 repairs in 2011/12. The complaints have told us that we need to improve communication between tenants and our operatives who carry out repairs. We have included this as an area for improvement in 2012/13.





## Involvement and empowerment

You are at the heart of everything we do. We want you to continue to have a say in and help shape the services we deliver for you. During 2010/11 we made significant progress working with tenants and other customers to improve and strengthen our involvement opportunities, enabling tenants to make a real contribution to the decision making processes we have in place.

### Involving you:

Getting involved does not mean that you have to give up lots of your free time if you don't want to. You can become involved by simply filling in one of our customer surveys or providing feedback. Alternatively, if you have a little more time to spare you may like to get involved in one of our more formal involvement groups like the Tenants Panel, Home Service Improvement Group or Tenant Scrutiny Panel. The ways you can get involved are listed below.

- Attending an event or drop-in.
- Being part of a focus group.
- Being on a Service Improvement Group.
- Becoming a member of our Non-Executive Board.
- Filling in a survey.
- Going on an Estate Walkabout.
- Joining the Tenants Panel.
- Joining the Readers Panel.
- Joining the Tenant Scrutiny Group. (Formerly known as the Reality Checkers)
- Joining a Residents Group.
- Joining a Working Group.
- Making a complaint or compliment.
- Making a suggestion.
- Reading Tenant Matters.
- Registering on our involvement database.
- Attending a neighbourhood meeting.

### Your involvement local service standards 2011/12

### How well we did

- Hold at least 10 meetings of the Tenants Panel per year
- Give you at least 20 working days notice of meetings of the Tenants Panel and Service Improvement Groups
- Give attendees the agenda and other papers for meetings of the Tenants Panel and Service Improvement Groups at least 5 working days prior to the meeting
- Publish 3 copies of Tenant Matters every year



Our Tenants Panel have told us they want these standards to be strengthened in 2012/13 to include Tenant Scrutiny.

### New standards for 2012/13:

In addition to the above service standards we have also committed to:

- Supporting our Tenant Scrutiny Group in undertaking 4 tenant scrutiny exercises per year.

### A closer look at our performance:

- We held 12 meetings of the Tenants Panel.
- We held our annual Tenants Matter conference, which about 200 customers attended.
- We recruited 15 tenants to our 'Reality Checkers' (Tenants Scrutiny) Group.
- We supported our 'Reality Checkers' to complete 5 scrutiny exercises.
- We know that 57% of you are satisfied with the opportunities for you to get involved. This is higher than the previous year's satisfaction of 52%.
- We know that 49% of you were satisfied that we took your views into account. This was a fall from the previous years satisfaction and lower than our target of 65%.
- We scored 7 out of 10 for satisfaction with our involvement work. Our target was 7.

### Our achievements in 2011/12:

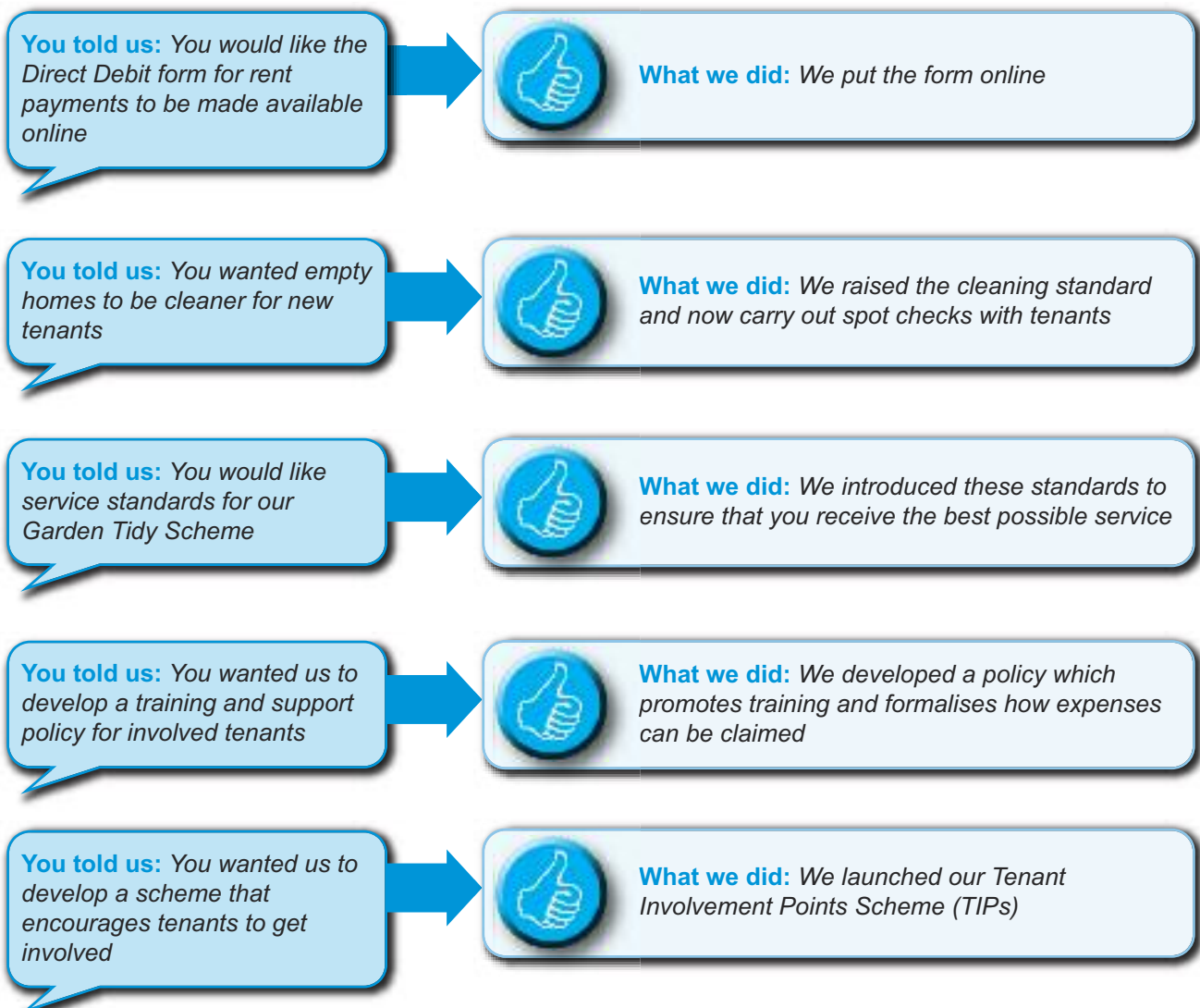
- We launched our Tenant Incentive Points Scheme (TIPs) in September 2011 which rewards you for getting involved in the work we do.
- We established our first Tenant Scrutiny Panel.
- More tenants joined our Tenants Panel.
- We streamlined our Service Improvement Groups.
- We reviewed our area involvement mechanisms and agreed to launch Neighbourhood Meetings in 2012/13.

### How we plan to improve in 2012/13:

- We will develop Tenant Scrutiny further to ensure that your views are taken into account.
- We will launch a new Tenant Training Programme ensuring all involved tenants have access to appropriate training and support.
- We will hold another Tenants Conference building on our previous success.

### Some of the changes we made as a result of your suggestions and involvement:

We consider all the suggestions you make very carefully and where possible we implement these. A few changes we have made as a result of your feedback are listed below:



## Tenants making a difference...



Audrey, Mary and Colin are three members of the Tenant Scrutiny Panel who have made a massive contribution towards the work of Durham City Homes during the last year.

All three have been actively involved in the Tenant Scrutiny Panel and have worked with other tenants to look at a range of services and make suggestions about how services could be improved.

**Audrey** remembers coming along to her first session and not knowing what to expect. Audrey said; *"I decided if I didn't like it I wouldn't come back but I loved it and have been involved in every exercise"*.

**Mary** who represents tenants on the North East Procurement (NEP) Customer Panel, came along to see how she could get more involved. Mary said; *"I'm really enjoying the work we do and find it very interesting and rewarding. I've learnt a lot about Durham City Homes and how it operates"*.

**Colin** highlighted that; *"If it wasn't for the scrutiny group who would hold Durham City Homes to account? This is a valuable activity and has helped me to understand more about Durham City Homes and how I can contribute to improving services"*.

In 2011/12 the Panel have looked at the following services:

- Empty property management.
- Estate management.
- Repairs and maintenance.
- Decent Homes.
- Aids and adaptations.

Getting involved in Durham City Homes can also have other benefits as Audrey said; *"As a result of being involved I have gained a place on a locally run NVQ training course. I would not have achieved this without getting some experience with Durham City Homes first"*.

If you would like to get involved and make a difference please contact us using our details provided on page 31.

## Some of the changes we made as a result of suggestions from our Tenant Scrutiny Panel:





## Understanding and responding to the diverse needs of tenants

During the last year we have made significant progress in improving our knowledge about who our tenants are and if they have any specific needs or requirements.

### A closer look at our performance:

At the end on 2011/12 we had collected demographic details for over 90% of our tenants.

This information told us that:

- More than 50% of tenants are female.
- 4% of tenants are under 25 years of age.
- Almost 99% of tenants identify themselves as “White”, with nearly all these identifying as “White British”.
- Of the remaining 1% who do not identify as “White”, the largest minority ethnic communities are Asian and Roma Gypsy Travellers.
- 2% of tenants identified themselves as lesbian, gay or bisexual.
- Over 70% of tenants identified themselves as Christians.
- 15% of tenants said they had no religion.

We do not have specific Local Service Standards for diversity as we are committed to ensuring we treat all customers fairly, with respect and that we respond to their individual needs across all the services and service standards that we deliver.

### Our achievements in 2011/12:

- We published our Equality and Diversity staff guide.
- We completed our Local Government Equality Action Plan.
- We published our Young People’s Action Plan.
- We complied with the Equality Framework for Local Government.






### How we plan to improve in 2012/13:

- We will develop a ‘hard to reach’ Involvement Statement and Action Plan.
- We will publish our Equality and Diversity Statement and Action Plan to underpin everything we do.

## Tenant involvement and empowerment standard

### Service improvements our Tenants Panel asked us to make in 2011/12:

In 2010/11 we asked our Tenants Panel what they would like us to do to improve tenant involvement and empowerment in 2011/12. The table below shows the main improvements members of the Panel asked us to do and how well they think we have performed in delivering these improvements.

The Tenants Panel asked us to:	Tenants Panel Assessment
● Continue to improve, expand and increase the variety of ways to get involved	
● Involve more tenants in the groups we have in place	
● Increase the diversity of involved tenants	
● Look at changing meeting times to meet tenant needs	
● Let more people know about what we are doing	

### Tenants Panel priorities for 2012/13:

The Tenants Panel have told us that their priorities and areas for improvement for 2012/13 under this standard are for us to:

- Increase the diversity of involved tenants.
- Improve advertising of estate walkabouts and feedback to tenants on actions identified during walkabouts.
- Further explore area and locally based involvement mechanisms.
- Explore options for customer involvement in complaints management in line with national guidelines.

# Your home

This standard includes:

- Quality of accommodation.
- Repairs and maintenance.


## Quality of accommodation

As at the 31st March 2011 all the homes we manage met the governments' 'Decent Homes' standard. We are committed to maintaining this standard to ensure that current and new tenants live in good quality accommodation which is safe, modern and meets current standards.

**Your Decent Homes local service standards 2011/12**

- Publish the programme of Decent Homes work every year
- Write to you three months before any works are due to start
- Visit every home to undertake a full survey of work required and talk to you about the choices available
- Give you at least 21 days verbal notice before work starts on your home, followed by a copy of the works programme
- Give you the contact details of your site supervisor 2 weeks before the works starts
- After the works have been completed we will check 100% of all completed improvements to make sure they have been completed to a good standard

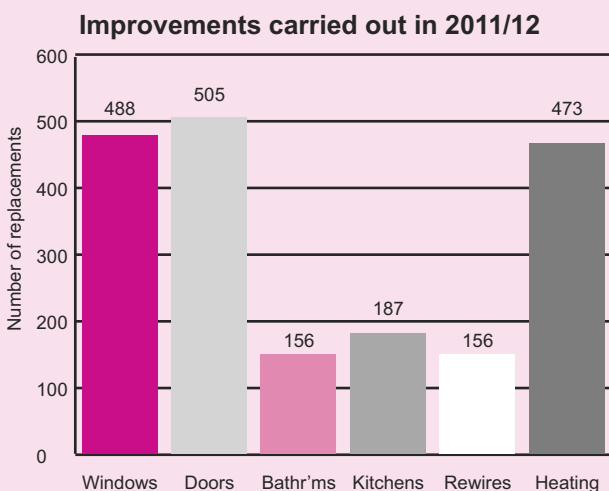
**How well we did**



Our Tenants Panel have told us they want these standards to stay the same for 2012/13.

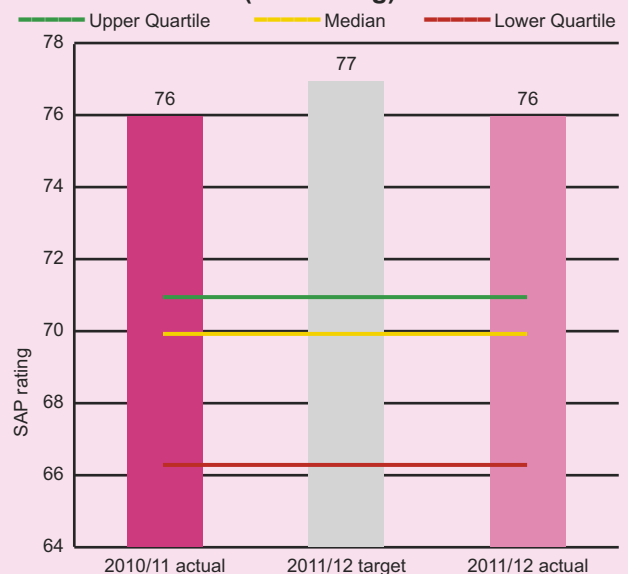
### A closer look at our performance:

- 664 homes were made decent in 2011/12. The type of improvements carried out is shown below:



- 68% of you are satisfied with the quality of your home.
- We completed 100% of all Decent Homes work within 15 days.
- We scored 7.7 out of 10 for satisfaction with our Decent Homes work. Our target was 8.

### Average energy efficiency of our homes (SAP rating)



- We scored 6.2 out of 10 for satisfaction with our external painting programme. Our target was 8.25.
- We scored 6.7 out of 10 for satisfaction with our decoration voucher scheme. Our target was 8.

### Our achievements in 2011/12:

- We published our first Asset Management Strategy which sets out how we will manage the investment needs of our homes.
- We published our Decent Homes Information Pack which is given to all tenants whose homes are having refurbishment works completed.
- We introduced a new 'welcome pack' for all new tenants. The pack includes basic household items to give new tenants a little extra help setting up their home.

### How we plan to improve in 2012/13:

- We will review our Decoration Voucher Scheme with tenants to improve customer satisfaction.
- We will publish our first Affordable Warmth Strategy.
- We will deliver our first Renewable Energy scheme at Woodland Road Bungalows, Esh Winning. This will inform our future approach to renewable energy sources.

## Repairs and maintenance

In 2011/12 we completed over 25,000 repairs to the homes we manage and we serviced over 6,100 gas and solid fuel fires. You have told us that the repairs and maintenance service is one of the most important services we provide. Our responsive repairs service aims to undertake repairs promptly and efficiently, making sure that we get the repair right first time.

In addition, our Adaptations Service completed 549 alterations and improvements for tenants requiring additional support to live in their homes.

There are three service standards for this theme:

- Repairs.
- Gas and solid fuel.
- Adaptations.

#### Your repairs local service standards 2011/12

- Complete emergency repairs within 24 hours, if a repair is reported before 12 noon (Monday-Friday) it will be completed the same day
- Arrange an inspection appointment within 7 working days if we can't identify the repair over the phone
- Respond to a report of a gas leak or carbon monoxide alarm activation within 2 hours
- Complete urgent repairs within 7 working days
- Complete routine repairs within 20 working days
- Complete planned repairs within 60 working days
- Check 10% of all repairs to make sure they have been completed to a satisfactory standard
- Offer an appointment within 5 working days to discuss a repair that you are responsible for but would like us to do
- Decide within 10 working days whether to approve or reject your application to carry out your own improvements

#### How well we did

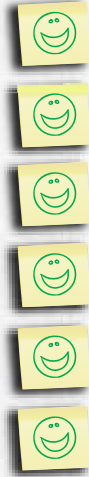




Your **gas and solid fuel** local service standards 2011/12

How well we did

- Complete a safety check when you move into your new home
- Service your heating appliance every 12 months
- Send you a letter with an appointment for our engineers to call when it is time for your gas service
- Give you a copy of the safety certificate when the service is completed
- Check any smoke and carbon monoxide alarms we have fitted, at the same time as your gas or solid fuel appliance service
- Check 10% of all gas servicing to make sure it has been completed to a good standard



Your **adaptations** local service standards 2011/12

How well we did

- Assess all request for support within 30 working days of the request being received by us
- Give you 7 calendar days verbal notice followed by written notification before starting any minor works at your home
- Complete all minor adaptations within 30 working days of the initial assessment
- Give you 7 calendar days written notice before starting major adaptations work on your home
- Complete all major adaptations within 60 working days of the initial assessment

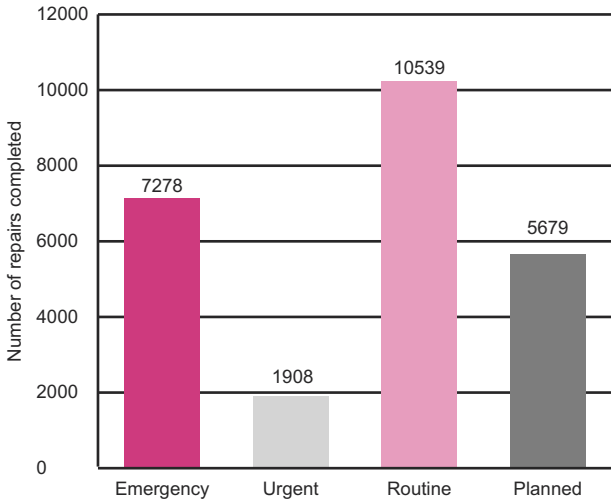


Our Tenants Panel have told us they want each of these standards to stay the same for 2012/13.



**A closer look at our performance:**

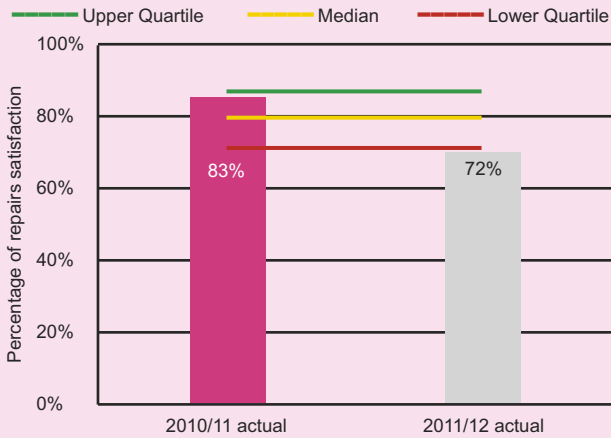
**Types and numbers of repairs completed**



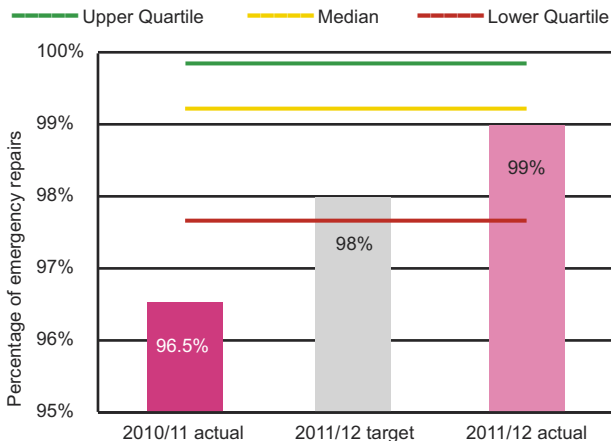
Of the 25,404 repairs completed in 2011/12:

- 29% were classed as an emergency and were repaired within 24 hours.
- 8% were classed as urgent and were repaired within 7 working days.
- 41% were classed as routine and were repaired within 20 working days.
- 22% were large scale 'planned works' and were repaired within 60 working days.

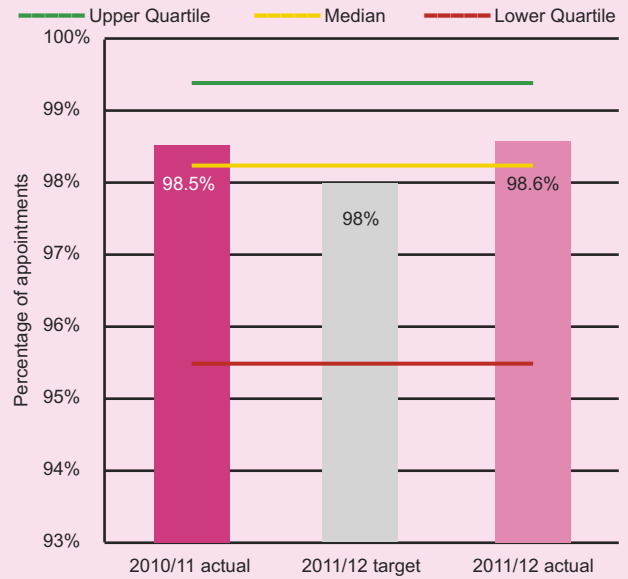
**Percentage of tenants satisfied with repairs and maintenance**



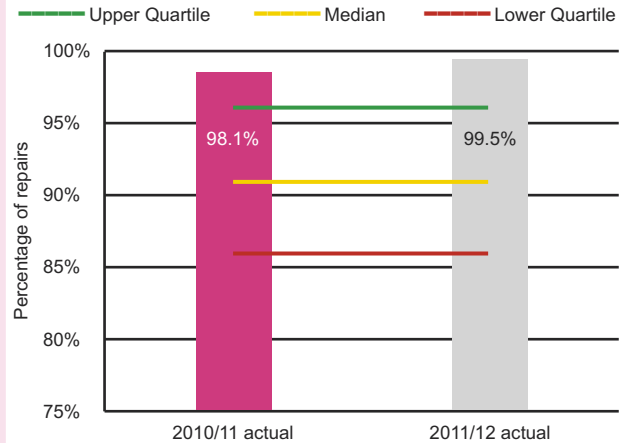
**Emergency repairs completed within timescale**



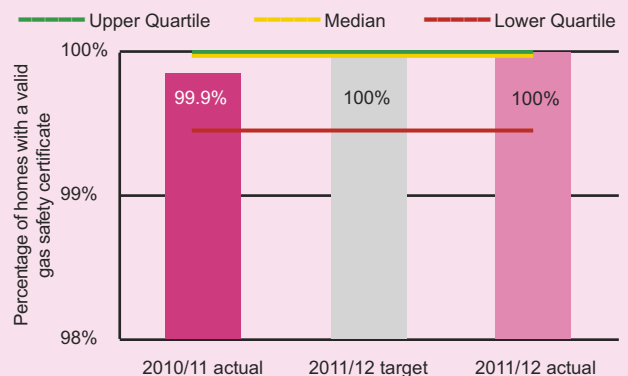
**Percentage of repair appointments made and kept**



**Percentage of repairs right first time**



**Percentage of homes with a valid gas safety certificate**



- We scored 9 out of 10 for satisfaction with our Adaptations Service. Our target was 9.
- We scored 8.9 out of 10 for satisfaction with our Gas Servicing Programme. Our target was 9.

### Our achievements in 2011/12:

- We expanded the ways in which repairs can be reported with the introduction of text reporting.
- We published our first Repairs and Maintenance Policy which formalises how we deliver the repairs service.
- We started a major programme to improve fire safety in the communal areas of flats, including fitting fire doors to tenants' flats, installing new emergency lighting, new flooring and decoration.

### How we plan to improve in 2012/13:





- We will take a robust approach to recovering the cost of deliberate damage to our homes through our Rechargeable Repairs Policy.
- We will explore the potential of introducing a 'handy person scheme' for everyday minor repairs.
- We will improve communication with tenants to reduce the number of complaints we receive about the repairs service.



## Home standard

### Service improvements our Tenants Panel asked us to make in 2011/12:

In 2010/11 we asked our Tenants Panel what they would like us to do to improve the quality of their home and repairs service in 2011/12. The table below shows the main improvements members of the Panel asked us to do and how well they think we have performed in delivering these improvements.

The Tenants Panel asked us to:	Tenants Panel Assessment
● Ensure our homes are modernised to a consistently high standard	
● Work with others to explore the opportunities for building new homes	
● Explore the potential use of greener energy sources	
● Introduce more streamlining of services and standards	
● Aim higher and improve what we already do	
● Carry out more environmental improvements	

### Tenants Panel priorities for 2012/13:

The Tenants Panel have told us that their priorities and areas for improvement for 2012/13 under this standard are for us to:

- Work with others to explore opportunities for building new homes.
- Improve communication with tenants regarding repair works.
- Continue to improve the energy efficiency of our homes and reduce tenants energy bills.



# Your tenancy

This standard includes:

- Allocations and mutual exchange.
- Tenure.

## Allocations, mutual exchange and tenure

When we talk about allocations we mean the way in which we let homes and mutual exchange refers to tenants swapping homes with each other. Tenure refers to the type of tenancy you have.

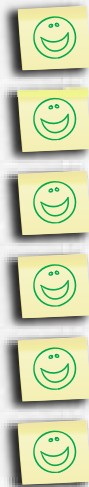
There are two service standards for this theme:

- Lettings.
- Furnished tenancies.

### Your **lettings** local service standards 2011/12

- Assess your housing application within 10 working days from the date that you gave us all the information we need
- Let you know the result of your appeal against our banding decision within 10 working days from the day you give us all your evidence to support the appeal
- Advertise our available homes every week (except Xmas and New Year)
- Make an offer over the phone within one working day of the close of bidding
- Allow you one working day after offering you a home to decide whether to accept it or not
- Contact everyone registered on Durham Key Options at least once a year to check they still need a home

### How well we did



Our Tenants Panel have told us they want these standards to be strengthened in 2012/13 to include our 'Lettable Standard' and scrutiny work.

### New standards for 2012/13:

In addition to the above service standards we have also committed to:

- Ensuring your new home meets our 'Lettable Standard' at the time of offer.
- Ensuring tenant scrutinisers attend our monthly empty property inspection meetings.



## Your furnished tenancy local service standards 2011/12

How well we did

- Have furniture delivered on a convenient day within 5 working days of you asking for it
- Repair or replace a faulty cooker we have supplied to you within 2 working days
- Collect furniture within 5 working days of you asking us to
- Replace any furniture that needs changing due to wear and tear within 5 working days of you telling us about it (to be deleted for 2012/13)
- Make an inventory of the furniture in your package every 6 months. This means we list the furniture and its condition (to be deleted for 2012/13)

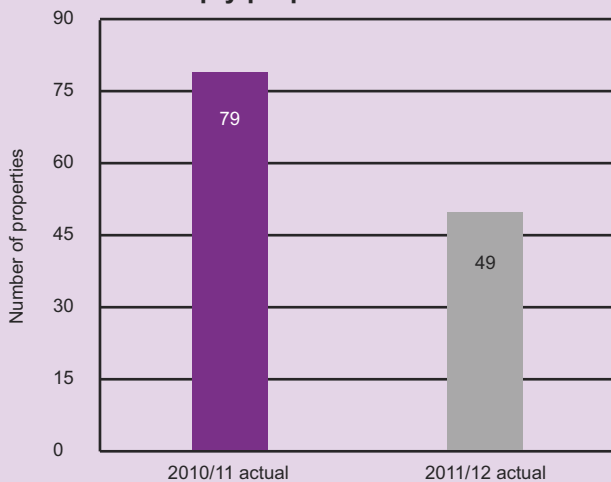


### Changes to the standards for 2012/13:

Our Tenants Panel asked us to delete the last two standards, we agreed to this.

### A closer look at our performance:

#### Number of empty properties available to re-let



- We let 547 homes in 2011/12.
- 2112 applicants were registered with Durham Key Options as at 31st March 2012.
- We scored 7.4 out of 10 for satisfaction with the quality of services provided to new tenants. Our target was 7.5.
- 86% of applications to Durham Key Options were made active within 28 days of us receiving all the necessary information.
- 8% of new tenancies lasted less than 12 months.

#### Our achievements in 2011/12:

- We introduced a new County-wide Tenancy Agreement.
- We distributed a new 'Tenants Handbook' to all tenants.
- We reviewed and made some changes to our Furnished Tenancy Scheme including supporting 'Smaterbuys' which enables tenants to access low cost household items.

#### Average time taken to re-let a home (days)



- We introduced our new Tenancy Sustainment Service to offer additional support to tenants.





#### How we plan to improve in 2012/13:

- We will appoint a Welfare Benefits Advisor dedicated to Durham City Homes to give advice to prospective and existing tenants.
- We will publish an easy to read 'Tenancy Agreement'.
- We will continue to work with colleagues to reduce the time it takes to relet empty homes, including reviewing our 'Lettable Standard'.
- We will continue to develop our Tenancy Sustainment Service to reduce the number of new tenancies that end within 12 months.

## Tenancy standard

### Service improvements our Tenants Panel asked us to make in 2011/12:

In 2010/11 we asked our Tenants Panel what they would like us to do to improve in 2011/12. The table below shows the main improvements members of the Panel asked us to do and how well they think we have performed in delivering these improvements.

The Tenants Panel asked us to:	Tenants Panel Assessment
● Ensure tenancies are sustained with good quality support being given to tenants	
● Make sure tenancy-related problems are resolved quickly	
● Look at ways of supporting new and existing tenants	
● Ensure that homes are well managed by both us and tenants, using tenancy enforcement action when necessary	

### Tenants Panel priorities for 2012/13:

The Tenants Panel have told us that their priorities and areas for improvement for 2012/13 under this standard are for us to:

- Resolve tenancy-related problems quickly.
- Put mechanisms in place to support tenants to manage the impact of Welfare Reform and Universal Credit.



## Your neighbourhood and community

This standard includes:

- Neighbourhood management.
- Local area co-operation (working in partnership with other agencies).
- Anti-social behaviour.

### Neighbourhood management, local area co-operation and anti-social behaviour

We are committed to working with you, other tenants, residents and partners to make sure the area where you live is safe, clean and enjoyable. When problems do occur we want to make sure you have easy access to the services that can provide advice and support to try and help you resolve issues quickly.

There are four service standards for this theme:

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

Your **tenancy and estate management** local service standards 2011/12

How well we did

- Visit you within 4 weeks of you moving into one of our properties to discuss any concerns you may have with your property, your neighbours and the local environment
- Visit all new introductory tenants again before the first anniversary of moving into their new home
- Publish the outcomes of estate walkabouts in Tenant Matters
- Remove offensive or racist graffiti from our buildings within 24 hours of it being reported to us
- Refer any complaint (for example graffiti, litter, abandoned cars, fly-tipping) to the agency responsible for dealing with it within 2 working days
- Secure abandoned or insecure properties within 24 hours of being told about them
- Remove syringes from our estates within 24 hours of being told about them



Your **anti-social behaviour** local service standards 2011/12

How well we did

- Contact you and begin investigating your complaint within 24 hours for high priority cases or within 3 working days for routine cases
- Where we cannot resolve your concerns at the first point of contact we will provide you with a written action plan within 3 working days



Your **racial harassment and hate crime** local service standards 2011/12

How well we did

- Speak to you within 24 hours of you telling us so we can gather more information to help us investigate it properly
- Remove offensive or racist graffiti from our buildings within 24 hours of it being reported to us
- Agree an action plan with you within 24 hours and keep you informed of progress until the case is closed



Your **domestic abuse** local service standards 2011/12

How well we did

- Speak to you about your complaint within 24 hours of you telling us, so we can gather more information to help us investigate it properly
- Agree an action plan with you within 24 hours and keep you informed of progress until your case is closed



Our Tenants Panel have told us they want each of these standards to stay the same for 2012/13, but that they would like to see new standards introduced for communal areas, the environment and our garden tidy scheme.



### New standards for 2012/13:

We have agreed the following new standards with our Tenants Panel for 2012/13:

### Communal areas

For this standard we have committed to:

- Providing, checking and updating, on a quarterly basis, notice boards in all communal blocks, including publishing details of cleaning schedules, Housing Officer inspection's and planned estate walkabouts.
- Inspecting the communal areas of blocks of flats with tenants at least 4 times a year.
- Repairing communal lighting within 7 working days.
- Repairing communal doors within 7 working days.
- Removing offensive or racist graffiti from communal areas within 24 hours of it being reported to us.

### Environment

For this standard we have committed to:

- Holding at least 35 estate walkabouts a year.
- Publishing the outcomes of the estate walkabouts in Tenant Matters, (formerly part of the tenancy and estate management standard).
- Responding to reports about environmental issues within 24 hours of being told about them.
- Referring any complaint (for example, about graffiti, litter, abandoned cars, and fly-tipping) to the agency responsible for dealing with it within 2 working days, (formerly part of the tenancy and estate management standard).
- Cutting the grass every two weeks between April and October (weather permitting) on communal grassed areas on our estates.
- Undertaking a litter pick on grassed areas on our estates every two weeks.

### Garden tidy scheme

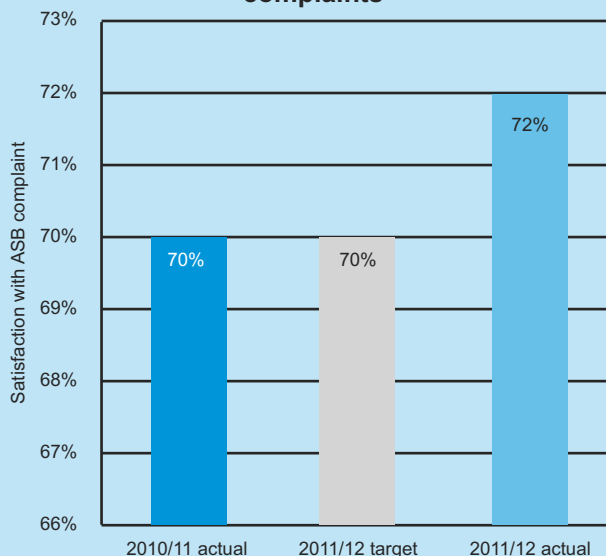
For those tenants who pay for the garden tidy service we have committed to:

- Cutting your grass (including grass collection) every two weeks between April and October (weather permitting).
- Strimming grass edges twice per season (usually June and September).
- Cutting hedges once per year (usually August/September).

### A closer look at our performance:

- 83% of tenants told us they were satisfied with their neighbourhood, this is less than our target of 88% and less than 2010/11 performance of 87%.
- We scored 6.7 out of 10 for satisfaction with the estate management services we provide. Our target was 7.
- We evicted one tenant as a result of their behaviour.
- We agreed 5 Anti-Social Behaviour Contracts.

### Satisfaction with the way we handled ASB complaints



### Our achievements in 2011/12:

- We published and implemented our first Neighbourhood Policy.
- We started to talk to tenants about improving communal areas and how they are managed, including starting improvement works at Churchill Square flats.
- We developed a common approach to managing council owned garages with East Durham Homes and Dale and Valley Homes, including demolishing a garage site at Brandon improving the local area for residents.



### How we plan to improve in 2012/13:



- We will improve satisfaction with your neighbourhood by appointing more Housing Officers to deal with those neighbourhood issues which matter the most to you.
- We will do work to understand more about victims and perpetrators of anti-social behaviour, this will help us shape services to meet local needs.
- We will develop a customer support referral map; ensuring customers get the help they need as quickly as possible.
- We will roll out neighbourhood meetings to engage with tenants and other residents.



## Neighbourhood and community standard

### Service improvements our Tenants Panel asked us to make in 2011/12:

In 2010/11 we asked our Tenants Panel what they would like us to do to improve in 2011/12. The table below shows the main improvements members of the Panel asked us to do and how well they think we have performed in delivering these improvements.

The Tenants Panel asked us to:	Tenants Panel Assessment
● Continue to reduce anti-social behaviour	
● Create a nice environment to live in	
● Make sure we deal with any issues you have quickly	
● Establish local groups to promote community pride and tackle local issues	

### Tenants Panel priorities for 2012/13:

The Tenants Panel have told us that their priorities and areas for improvement for 2012/13 under this standard are for us to:

- Improve the maintenance of and appearance of empty properties and their gardens.
- Improve partnership working across the Council to address neighbourhood and community issues.
- Create a nicer environment for people to live in by carrying out environmental improvements.

# Economic standards

These standards do not apply to Durham County Council as your landlord. They are for other social housing providers, like Housing Associations. However, we have provided some information about the work we have undertaken in these areas.

## Value for money

We are committed to ensuring that we achieve excellent value for money in the services we provide and through the way in which we spend your rent. We have in place robust procedures to make sure that we commission services and buy goods which are of good quality but are a reasonable cost.

Through our business planning process we aim to achieve excellence in service delivery whilst maximising the opportunities to save money to reinvest in the services that matter the most to you.

In 2011/12 we made significant progress in delivering better value for money for tenants.

### A closer look at our performance:

- We know that 74% of you are satisfied with the value for money you get for your rent.

### Our achievements in 2011/12:

- As a member of the North East Procurement Group (NEP) we continued to procure contractors for our capital programme through the group. This resulted in significant savings to be reinvested into the capital programme throughout the year.
- We secured over £70K external funding to invest in a renewable energy scheme at Esh Winning.
- We introduced changes to our home security packs including the introduction of service charges for security alarms fitted to tenants home.
- We introduced service charges for the Garden Tidy Scheme meaning only those tenants who receive the service pay for it.
- We reduced the number of weeks homes were empty from an average 6 weeks in 2010/11 to 4 weeks in 2011/12 saving us £63K in potentially lost rent.
- We converted 3 former communal rooms into homes. This has reduced our running costs and increased our rental income.
- We closed Brandon House and Oversteads House, former sheltered housing schemes. This significantly reduced our overheads and lost rental income.

- We developed a new strategy for the management of empty garages which will bring about long term savings in terms of rent loss as the most unpopular garages are demolished.
- We reviewed our Service Level Agreements to make sure we maximised value for money.
- We set up a Value for Money Working Group.
- We reviewed our furnished tenancy scheme and made some changes to the packages available to tenants.

### How we plan to improve in 2012/13:




- Our approach to achieving excellence in service delivery whilst maximising value for money is embedded across all the services and functions we provide.
- We will review our value for money strategy and complete a self assessment of how well we are doing.



## Value for money standard

### Service improvements our Tenants Panel asked us to make in 2011/12:

In 2010/11 we asked our Tenants Panel what they would like us to do to improve value for money. The table below shows the main improvements members of the Panel asked us to do and how well they think we have performed in delivering these improvements.

The Tenants Panel asked us to:	Tenants Panel Assessment
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>● Make it a priority to involve you more in contract decisions</li></ul>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>● Involve you more in the financial decisions we make</li></ul>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>● Involve you more in the management of contracts we award</li></ul>	

### Tenants Panel priorities for 2012/13:







The Tenants Panel have told us that their priorities and areas for improvement for 2012/13 under this standard are for us to continue to involve tenants in:

- Contract decisions.
- Financial decisions.
- Contract management.

## Your rent

The rent standards focus upon how your rent is set and what you are charged. The County Council follows the national formula set by government for the rent it charges tenants.

In this section you can find out about your rent local service standards and our performance in this area.

Your rent local service standards 2011/12	How well we did
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>● Send you a rent statement every 3 months</li></ul>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>● Give you at least 28 calendar days' notice of any rent or service charge changes</li></ul>	
If you owe money, for example, if your rent account is in arrears, we will:	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>● Respond to any enquiry from you within 5 working days</li></ul>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>● Send you a reminder, if appropriate, within 14 calendar days if you miss a payment</li></ul>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>● Tell you the amount due, how you can pay it and what will happen if you don't repay the debt</li></ul>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>● Confirm any payment arrangement we make with you to clear any arrears, in writing within 3 working days</li></ul>	

Our Tenants Panel have told us they want this standard to stay the same for 2012/13.



### A closer look at our performance:

- We collected 97.1% of rent owed to us in 2011/12 compared to 97.6% in 2010/11.
- We collected £52,945 former tenant arrears in 2011/12.
- 31% of tenants paid their rent by Direct Debit.
- We evicted 15 tenants for rent arrears.
- We scored 7.8 out of 10 for satisfaction with our rent service. Our target was 8.
- 5% of tenants owed us more than 7 weeks rent.
- In 2011/12 the amount of current tenant rent arrears owed to us was £623,000 this was significantly higher than the previous year at £472,000. The increase was caused through the introduction of a new computer system for Housing Benefits, which resulted in claims not being processed as quickly as we would have liked. The new system is now up and running and the backlogs are being cleared. We expect the current rent owed to us to reduce in the coming months.

### Our achievements in 2011/12:

- We un-pooled service charges from housing rents. This means that the cost of the additional services we provide for some tenants is separate from the rent they pay for their home. As a result of doing this only the tenants who receive these services pay for them. Examples include our Garden Tidy Scheme and our Window and Communal Cleaning Programmes for some flats.

### How we plan to improve in 2012/13:

- We will strengthen our Income Recovery Team with the addition of an officer dedicated to increasing the amount of former tenant rent arrears and sundry debts we recover.
- We will explore the potential of providing on-line access to your rent account and statements.
- We will introduce text messaging for our rents service.

The Tenants Panel have not set any priorities for improving performance in this area.



# Governance and financial viability

When we talk about governance, we mean the arrangements we have in place to make sure that our services are well managed and that the decisions we make are clear, well informed and open to external scrutiny and challenge. Financial viability is about making sure we manage our money efficiently.

Durham County Council has overall responsibility for the delivery of landlord housing services in Durham City. The Council's Cabinet make all major decisions regarding housing in Durham City. The Economy and Enterprise Scrutiny Committee support the Cabinet's role through scrutinising the decisions they make and suggesting recommendations.

**To support the Council's political decision making framework, we have in place:**

**Durham City Homes Non-Executive Board** – the Board is made up of an equal numbers of tenants, independent members and Durham County Council Councillors. The Board supports the delivery of Durham City Homes' Delivery Plan and makes recommendations to the Council's Cabinet.

**Tenants Panel** – all tenants are welcome at this monthly meeting. The meeting provides tenants with the opportunity to hold us to account, scrutinise the work we do and help shape the services we deliver.

**Service Improvement Groups** – our 'Home' Group works towards improving services relating to repairs, decent homes and other issues impacting upon tenants. All tenants and leaseholders are welcome to attend.

**Neighbourhood meetings** – we are currently in the process of setting up these meetings to provide a forum for tenants, leaseholders and other residents to have a say about the services and activities we deliver in their local area.

**Other involvement options** – we have in place a menu of involvement which supports the work of the above groups ranging from attending focus groups to simply giving us your feedback. Contact our Involvement Team to find out more.

**A closer look at our performance:**

- We held 12 meetings of the Tenants Panel.
- We held 4 meetings of our Non-Executive Board.
- We were released from monitoring by the former TSA/HCA following sustained action to improve the services we provide.

**Our achievements in 2011/12:**

- We established our Tenant Scrutiny Group (Reality Checkers).
- We ran 5 tenant scrutiny exercises and implemented tenant suggestions (see page 11 for further details).
- We completed Training Needs Assessments for our involved tenants.
- We delivered training for tenants including; presentation skills, reporting writing and meeting skills.

**How we plan to improve in 2012/13:**

- We will review the 'Terms of Reference' for all the groups we have in place to make sure their roles and responsibilities are clear.
- We will publish a new 'Tenant Training Programme', ensuring that the training needs of individual tenants are met in order for them to be able to perform their role effectively in the work they do with us.








## Governance and financial viability

### Service improvements our Tenants Panel asked us to make in 2011/12:

In 2010/11 we asked our Tenants Panel what they would like us to do to improve governance and financial viability. The table below shows the main improvements members of the Panel asked us to do and how well they think we have performed in delivering these improvements.

The Tenants Panel asked us to:	Tenants Panel Assessment
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>● Develop their scrutiny role further</li></ul>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>● Make sure we give you the right support and training to maximise your role in scrutinising the services we deliver</li></ul>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>● Ensure that you are aware of the roles and responsibilities of the different groups we have in place</li></ul>	

### Tenants Panel priorities for 2012/13:

The Tenants Panel have told us that their priorities and areas for improvement for 2012/13 under this standard are for us to continue to:

- Develop Tenant Scrutiny.
- Ensure that tenants are given support and training to maximise their role in scrutinising the services delivered.
- Ensure tenants are aware of the roles and responsibilities of the different groups we have in place.



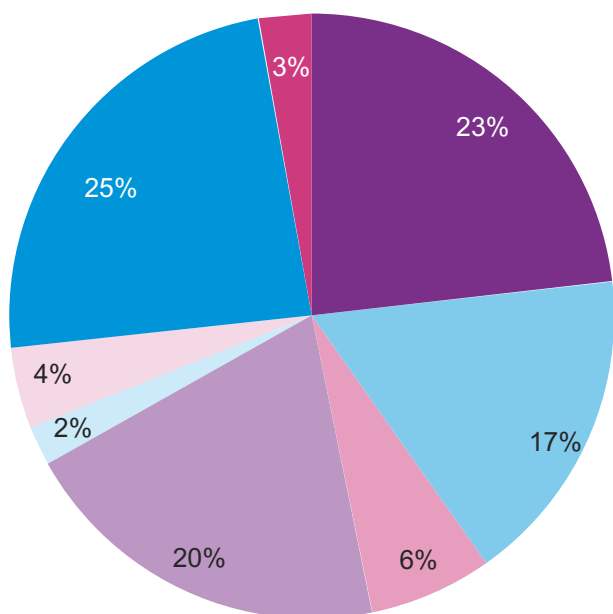
# How we spent your money

## Where the money came from in 2011/12:

	£
Council house rents	£18,927,511
Other rents	£225,165
Service charges	£164,246
<b>Total income</b>	<b>£19,316,922</b>

## What the money was spent on in 2011/12:

	£
Repairs and maintenance	£4,504,369
Housing management	£3,355,668
Payments to the Government (Subsidy)	£1,229,061
Depreciation	£3,793,330
Corporate and Democratic costs	£350,537
Interest	£853,807
Contribution towards capital works	£4,624,975
Other	£605,175
<b>Total expenditure</b>	<b>£19,316,922</b>



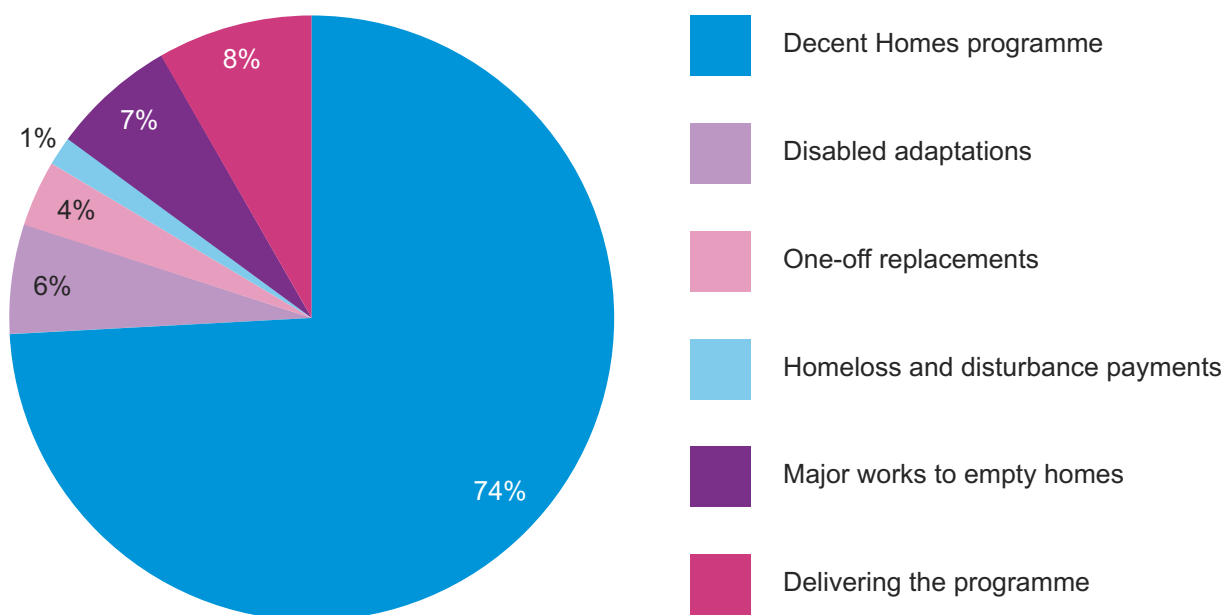


### Capital expenditure in 2011/12:

Every year we carry out improvements to our homes. These works are funded through the Government's Major Repairs Allowance and the Housing Revenue Account.

#### What the money was spent on in 2011/12:

	£
Decent Homes Programme (including heating)	£4,617
Disabled Adaptations	£0,368
One-off replacements	£0,231
Decent Homes Decants	£0,082
Empty Homes	£0,423
Supporting the programme	£0,513
<b>Total expenditure</b>	<b>£6,234,000</b>



#### Some of our spending priorities for 2012/13:

- We will continue to make sure our homes meet the Decent Homes standard with over £6m being invested in this area.
- We will continue to provide disabled adaptations for qualifying tenants; we have allocated £420,000 for this work.
- We have allocated over £170,000 to contribute towards environmental improvements.
- We have allocated £100,000 to undertake fire safety improvements.

# How to contact us

**In writing:** Durham City Homes  
Lumley House  
Whitfield Court  
St John's Road  
Meadowfield Industrial Estate  
Durham  
DH7 8XL

**In person:** The above office is open to the public from 8.30am - 5.00pm Monday to Thursday and 8.30am until 4.30pm on Fridays. Please note this office is for Durham City Homes enquiries only and not for other Durham County Council services.

**By email:** [durhamcityhomesadmin@durham.gov.uk](mailto:durhamcityhomesadmin@durham.gov.uk)

**By telephone:** 24 hours a day, 7 days a week.  
0191 301 8470  
0800 068 0013

(Calls to an 0800 number are free from a BT landline, charges from other suppliers and mobiles may vary).





**Information produced by**

Durham City Homes, Lumley House, Whitfield Court,  
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Durham, DH7 8XL

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