



DALE & VALLEY
HOMES



can do, will do

ANNUAL
REPORT

2013

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 bengalski, kantoński, hindi, mandaryński, pendzabski, urdu, polski. Kopię można
 uzyskać dzwoniąc na numer 0300 2000 194.

Our Business Plan is also available on our web site at: www.daleandvalleyhomes.co.uk

If you need some help in understanding this plan, please contact one of our team in the
 Assistant Chief Executive's Directorate of Dale & Valley Homes on: **0800 083 0333**
 or e-mail: info@daleandvalleyhomes.co.uk

A member of the team will be able to answer any questions you may have. If they cannot,
 they will put you in touch with someone who can.

Welcome to our 2012/13 Annual Report to Customers

Dale & Valley Homes is an Arm's Length Management Organisation (ALMO) established in 2006 to manage, repair and improve Council owned housing in the former Wear Valley district of County Durham.

We have an extremely motivated and committed workforce who share our values and desire to provide excellent services to our customers. This is endorsed through our motto of '*can do, will do*'.

As we enter our seventh year in operation, we have celebrated many successes and have significantly grown over the years. This report looks back at what we have achieved over the past twelve months.

“ Dale & Valley Homes is an exceptional organisation that is fully committed to improving the lives of its customers. Customers are at the heart of everyone at Dale & Valley Homes and their wellbeing is paramount... Through excellent leadership, development opportunities and working closely with customers Dale & Valley Homes are ready to embrace the future and make it another great success story. ”

Investors in People Report 2013



Last year we were successful in delivering our second significant building development in County Durham funded by the Homes and Communities Agency. This has created a number of additional homes within our communities to help meet housing demand in the area.

In February 2013 we were included in the prestigious Sunday Times 100 Best Companies to Work For list for the third year running. When the company first entered in 2011 **we were ranked 26th but have since moved up 23 places to 3rd.** To have improved the ranking position by such a significant degree is a huge achievement in itself and one of which the company is justifiably proud.

We achieved further recognition when we gained the Gold Standard for Investors in People which emphasises our commitment to supporting our employees in reaching their potential. Most recently, we retained the Customer Service Excellence accreditation for the second year running which acknowledges that we truly are providing excellent levels of customer service.

We hope you enjoy reading this annual report and look forward to reporting on further successes in the future.



COLIN STOCKWELL
Chair of the Board

How Are We Regulated

In April 2012 the responsibility for housing regulation in England was transferred to the Homes and Communities Agency (HCA). The new system sets out seven revised standards that providers, like Dale & Valley Homes, must adhere to. These relate to:



Landlords and customers are encouraged to work together to improve the levels of service delivered. The HCA call this co-regulation. We believe the new framework provides huge opportunities for us to work more creatively and more effectively with our customers.

As Dale & Valley Homes is a non stock holding ALMO, we are not subject to the economic standards. However, we are working towards meeting all of the regulatory standards to demonstrate our willingness and capability to take on any additional responsibilities or opportunities that may arise from the stock options process.

This report outlines how we have performed against each of these standards.

Tenant Involvement & Empowerment Standard

This section includes:

- ▶ CUSTOMER INVOLVEMENT & EMPOWERMENT
- ▶ CUSTOMER CARE
- ▶ UNDERSTANDING AND RESPONDING TO THE DIVERSE NEEDS OF CUSTOMERS

Our strong customer focus is seen as a major strength of the organisation and has previously been recognised as best practice during external inspections. We strive to do the best we can for each of our customers. This is at the heart of everything we do. We talk to our customers regularly and most importantly we listen to their views to achieve meaningful outcomes.

Durham County Council has undertaken a stock options appraisal to determine the future management, ownership and financing of council homes within County Durham. We have actively supported the Council through this process, ensuring our customers were kept involved at each stage. The Council concluded that a transfer of the ownership of its home to the three organisations who currently manage the homes on their behalf was the best way forward. We agree with this proposal and we will continue to work with the Council and tenants to ensure they are in the position to make an informed choice when the time comes to vote on the transfer proposal.



Customer Involvement & Empowerment

The regulatory standard states that we must provide a wide range of opportunities for customers to be involved in...

- ✓ Formulating policies and strategic priorities
- ✓ Making decisions about how we should deliver our services
- ✓ The setting of our customer guarantees for service delivery
- ✓ Scrutinising our performance and making recommendations on how performance might be improved
- ✓ The management of their homes and the repairs and maintenance service

Have we complied with this standard

YES ✓

Customer Guarantees Our promise to you

We will...

- Promote the opportunities to help improve our services
- Let you know what happened as a result of your involvement

LAST YEAR



Customers were involved in our services

Involving You

- ✓ **1290** STAR surveys returned
- ✓ **8** customers are involved in our scrutiny group
- ✓ **23** customers are involved in the Wear Valley Customer Panel
- ✓ **29** customers are involved in Resident Associations
- ✓ **74%** of customers believe Dale & Valley Homes listens to customer views and acts upon them (2013 STAR survey)

STAR Survey Results

In March 2013 we worked with East Durham Homes, Durham City Homes and the council to undertake a customer satisfaction survey. This survey is known as the STAR survey (Survey of Tenants and Residents), and was sent out to all tenants and joint tenants across County Durham. We wanted to find out how satisfied our customers are with the services we provide. In addition to this we wanted to know more about what they expect from housing services and what they hope homes, neighbourhoods and services will be like in the future.

Thank You to Everyone Who Took Part

Of the 5,048 Dale & Valley Homes customers who were surveyed, 1,290 of them responded giving an overall return rate of 26%. Below are some of the headline messages along with a comparison of performance against our previous independent survey which was undertaken in 2011.



TENANT INVOLVEMENT & EMPOWERMENT STANDARD



Customers also told us that...

- Housing services in general are good, but management of anti-social behaviour and complaints could be better.
- Neighbourhoods are getting better, but they are worried about levels of dog fouling, rubbish and litter and a lack of car parking.
- Improving homes, neighbourhoods and services is more important than whether the council remains the landlord. However, their landlord must be local and based in County Durham.
- They are worried about high fuel bills and some of them are worried that recent changes to housing benefits may affect them. Customers would like to see more practical help and advice from Dale & Valley Homes in the future.
- They would like to have more of a say in how their homes and neighbourhoods are improved and housing services are delivered in the future.
- They like Dale & Valley Homes very much and think they provide excellent customer services. They find staff are friendly and easy to talk to.

Customer Involvement & Empowerment

Hello from the Wear Valley Customer Panel



Hi, I'm Nigel and the chair of the Wear Valley Customer Panel. Over the year we have been involved in many initiatives. We work very closely with staff and are committed to continuously look at ways of improving services.



Nigel Rowley chair of the Wear Valley Customer Panel

Some of the work we have been involved in during 2012/2013 includes:

- Partnership working with other organisations to promote ourselves and gain funding to deliver joint working and training sessions. Two of our members currently represent Dale & Valley Homes on the North East Procurement Customer Panel. Our involvement in this group has assisted Dale & Valley Homes in accessing funding to support projects such as the energy advice service and the 'Colouring Pads' scheme (please see page 29-30 for further information).
- Communicating with a large number of customers to keep them up to date with services and encourage them to become more involved. In March of this year we received £500 from the 'Better Homes Better Lives' fund to arrange a Welfare Reform bus tour. The bus visited the Crook and Bishop Auckland areas and was accompanied by both Wear Valley Customer Panel members and Dale & Valley Homes staff to raise awareness around the proposed changes to housing benefit. The event proved very useful, reaching over 800 customers.
- Involvement in the business planning process and strategy development; ensuring Dale & Valley Homes' business priorities reflect the needs of customers.
- Involvement in the Stock Options process, ensuring customer views and priorities are understood and recognised. Some of our members have been involved in the process from the beginning. They regularly attend the Durham County Council Stock Options Appraisal steering group which is chaired by one of our members.
- Responding to national consultation papers to ensure customer views are taken into account when final decisions are made.

Our main actions for this coming year are to:

- Further enhance co-regulation with Dale & Valley Homes.
- Build on our knowledge of researching, planning and training for the development and delivery of forward work plans.
- Develop a framework to measure our performance and assess the impact our involvement has made on both customers and the organisation.
- Further engage with external residential groups such as Area Action Partnerships (AAP's) and Resident Associations to influence decision making, ensuring they reflect the needs of customers.



Scrutiny Group – Our Second Year Running



David Boal chair of the Scrutiny Group

Hello, my name is David Boal and I am the newly appointed chair of the Scrutiny Group. We are a customer led group who have been set up to challenge Dale & Valley Homes' performance and business priorities. During the two years of scrutiny involvement, I am proud of the work we as a group have delivered. It's been a pleasure to work alongside Dale & Valley Homes in this worthwhile enterprise. Since being in operation we have made twenty three recommendations over five service areas and have represented the organisation at several external events.

We are dedicated to making sure Dale & Valley Homes offer customers the best service at the right cost. Our former chair, Lesley Mellis, was recently awarded the 'Chairman's Medal' which recognised the huge contribution she has made to the community.

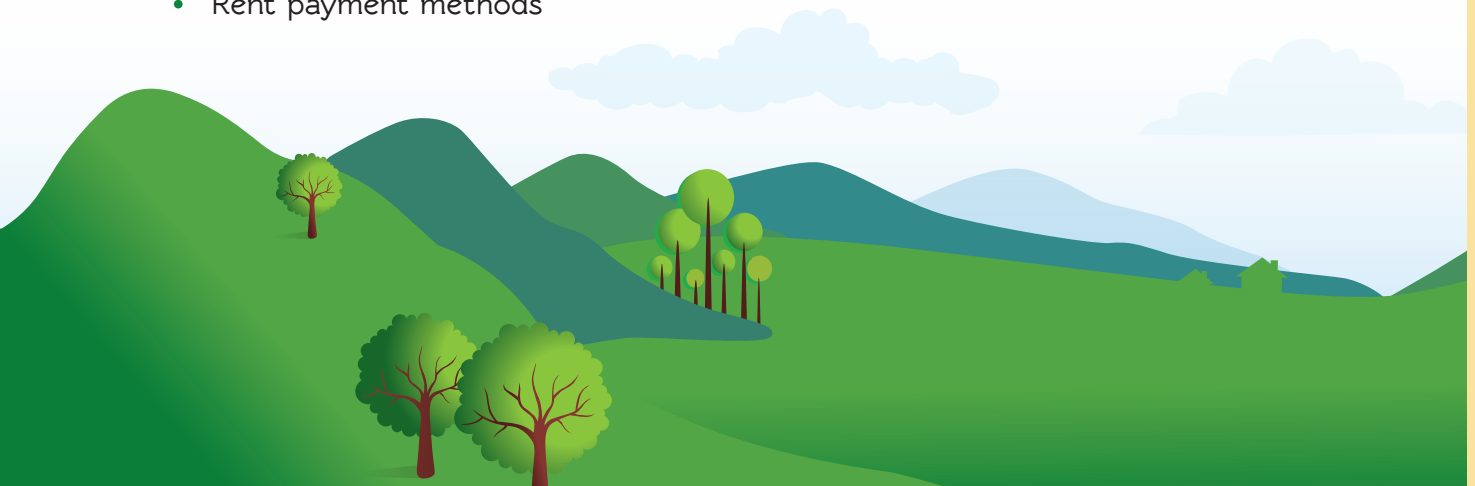
During last year we investigated three areas of work. These were the letting of empty homes, dealing with anti-social behaviour (ASB), and measuring social return on investment (SROI). We have undergone extensive training and worked directly with the managers responsible for the delivery of each service to provide recommendations which in some cases have helped improve performance and customer satisfaction levels.

For example:

- Our investigation into the process for letting empty homes led to a full review of the lettable standard and a review of all related policies and procedures.
- Following our investigation into SROI we recommended that Dale & Valley Homes adopt this tool as a means of measuring value for money. This has since been incorporated into their revised Value for Money Strategy.
- Whilst looking into the way Dale & Valley Homes deal with ASB cases we felt the way the company communicates with customers could be improved. It is hoped by doing so, customers will understand the difference between true ASB and low level environmental issues, and feel more encouraged to report any problems they are experiencing.

We have just finished reviewing the decent homes programme and have found this very interesting and worthwhile. *Following this we plan to look at:*

- Neighbourhood inspections
- Benchmarking of complaints and repairs
- Rent payment methods



Customer Care

The regulatory standard states that we must...

- ✓ Provide choices, information and communication that is appropriate to the diverse needs of our customers
- ✓ Have an approach to complaints that is clear, simple and accessible, ensuring complaints are resolved promptly, politely and fairly

Have we complied with this standard

YES ✓

Customer Guarantees Our promise to you

We will...

- Ensure all documents we send you are easy to read and understand
- Answer the telephone promptly and politely
- Ensure all complaints are resolved within the following timeframes
 - ▶ Frontline resolution complaints – 7 calendar days
 - ▶ Formal complaints – 14 calendar days

Complaints

Dale & Valley Homes want to provide good quality services for all our customers but understand that things can sometimes go wrong. We encourage customers to get in touch so that we can do something about it, learn from our mistakes and make any necessary improvements.

We have recently reviewed our complaints process to ensure we comply with the new regulatory standards. The new process, implemented in March 2013, has a much stronger focus on staff being empowered to resolve customer complaints at the initial point of contact (frontline resolution) within 7 calendar days. If we are unable to resolve the complaint at this stage or the complaint is too complex and requires a full investigation, we will log it as a formal complaint to be investigated within 14 calendar days.

If the customer is unhappy with our response the next step would be to approach a designated person; your M.P, Local Councillor or County Durham Tenant Complaint Panel (CDTCP).

Alternatively complainants can wait 8 weeks following the completion of Dale & Valley Homes' internal complaints procedure, and present their case to the Housing Ombudsman.

What does a designated person do?

A designated person will help resolve the complaint in one of two ways; they can try to resolve the complaint or refer the complaint straight to the Housing Ombudsman. If they refuse to do either the customer can contact the ombudsman directly.

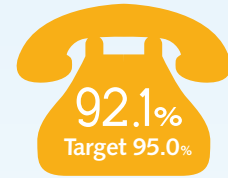
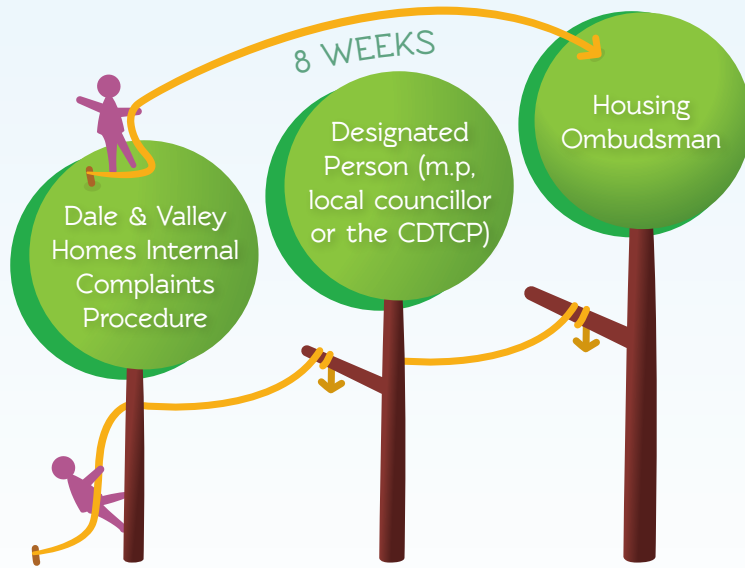
Who would be my designated person?

To find out who your MP or local councillor is please contact Durham County Council by visiting their website on www.durham.gov.uk or by telephone on **03000 260 000**.

The CDTCP is made up of tenants from Dale & Valley Homes, East Durham Homes and Durham City Homes. If you wish to refer your complaint to this panel please contact our Customer Insight Advisor on **01388 770910**.



Dale & Valley Homes Complaints Process



...of customers felt their call was answered promptly



...of customers felt their call was answered politely



...of customers find our publications easy to understand

How have we performed?

During 2012/13 we received...

- ▶ **134** frontline resolution complaints - taking on average 10.2 days to resolve each case
- ▶ **31** formal complaints - taking on average 14.8 days to resolve each case

Our 2012 Annual Customer Satisfaction Survey Found That	
88.3%	...of customers find it easy to make a complaint
56.8%	...of customers were satisfied with the time taken to resolve their complaint
59.9%	...of customers were satisfied with the way we handled their complaint
50.8%	...of customers were satisfied with the overall outcome of their complaint

“The quality of customer care to the tenants is exceptional both on the telephone and person to person. Thank you.”

Customer comment



What's next?

The new complaints procedure has only been in place since March 2013. We will continue to monitor this and provide further guidance to staff on how to handle complaints. We will also ensure that staff follow up any agreed actions with customers so they are kept informed throughout their complaint and are happy with the outcome.

Performance Key:

- On or ahead of target
- Within 10% of target
- Outside 10% of target

Understanding and Responding to the Diverse Needs of Customers

We are committed to actively promoting equality and diversity, believing that all our customers should have access to our services. No customer should experience the barriers of discrimination or harassment due to their personal characteristics.

The regulatory standard states that we must...

- ✓ Treat all customers with fairness and respect
- ✓ Demonstrate that we understand the different needs of our customers, including in relation to the equality strands and customers with additional support needs

Have we complied with this standard

YES ✓

“Put simply, we believe **no-one** should suffer disadvantage because of **WHO THEY ARE**”



88%

...of customers feel we treat them fairly

2013 STAR survey

Throughout 2012/13 we have responded to customers' needs by...

- Completing 491 adaptations to our customers' homes. These have included flat floor showers, ramps, stair lifts, grab rails and lever taps. By doing so, our elderly and more vulnerable customers can continue to live safely and independently in their own home. At the same time customer satisfaction with this service is exceptionally high at **98.6%**.

“Excellent service. It has made a big difference to my everyday living. Thank you.”

Customer comment regarding the Aids & Adaptations service



- Providing an intensive housing management service which offers our vulnerable customers help and support in managing and sustaining their home as independently as possible. The team work with our customers on a one to one basis, assisting them with a number of issues such as setting up gas and electricity suppliers, claiming benefits, arranging repairs or providing money and debt advice. During 2012/13 **194** customers benefited from this service, which has also delivered high levels of customer satisfaction **85.2%**.



- Providing a garden maintenance service to offer assistance to all customers, especially those unable to maintain their gardens. The service in particular has benefited our most vulnerable customers who experience difficulties in managing their garden due to physical or mental health issues. During last year **207** customers were in receipt of this service.



- Completing a new build scheme at Park Avenue Close consisting of 46 apartments and 4 bungalows. Each two bed roomed apartment is designed to be easily used by the elderly and people with disabilities. They have their own kitchen, ensuite shower room and a link to a care service. In addition to this, each floor is designed with specific colours to assist residents suffering from dementia related illnesses. It also features a communal living room and kitchen, and an assisted bathroom with an accessible bath for the disabled.



Home Standard

This section includes:

- ▶ DECENT HOMES
- ▶ REPAIRS & MAINTENANCE

Decent Homes

In 2007 we were successful in receiving Decent Homes funding for us to invest in improving our customers' homes. Through partnership working with Esh Property Services, the programme is now in its final stages with only 0.6% of homes failing to meet this standard.

The regulatory standard states that we must...

- ✓ Ensure all homes meet the Decent Homes Standard as set out by the government, and continue to maintain this standard
- ✓ Meet the standards of design and quality that applied when the home was built, and were required as a condition of publicly funded financial assistance, if these standards are higher than the Decent Homes Standard
- ✓ Ensure a customer guarantee is set at a level not less than these standards and have regard to section 6 of the Governments Decent Homes Guidance

Have we complied with this standard

YES ✓

ESH PROPERTY SERVICES
HOUSING & REGENERATION



3000th Decent Homes Property

Customer Guarantees Our promise to you

We will...

- Provide you with details of the works to be undertaken in your home and keep you regularly informed of progress
- Complete works to your property in 28 calendar days
- Correct any faults within 14 calendar days of them being reported
- Agree a plan of action with vulnerable customers to best manage any improvement works to their home



How have we performed?

Since the programme began in 2007 to the end of March 2013, we have...



SPENDING ON AVERAGE £11,971.83 **PER PROPERTY**

92.1
%

...of customers were satisfied with their decent homes works

“ I’m really happy with my lovely new home and cannot fault the workmen at all...they treated me and my home with respect. Nothing was too much trouble for them. Thank you so much. ”

Customer comment



90.9%

Target 90.0%

...of customers felt they had been kept informed throughout the process

98.2%

Target 90.0%

...of properties had their decent homes works completed within 28 calendar days

70.4%

Target 95.0%

...of faults were corrected within 14 calendar days



We agreed an action plan with 10 vulnerable customers to help them best manage the improvement works to their home

89.8%

Target 90.0%

...of customers were satisfied with the contractors response to faults

Performance Key:

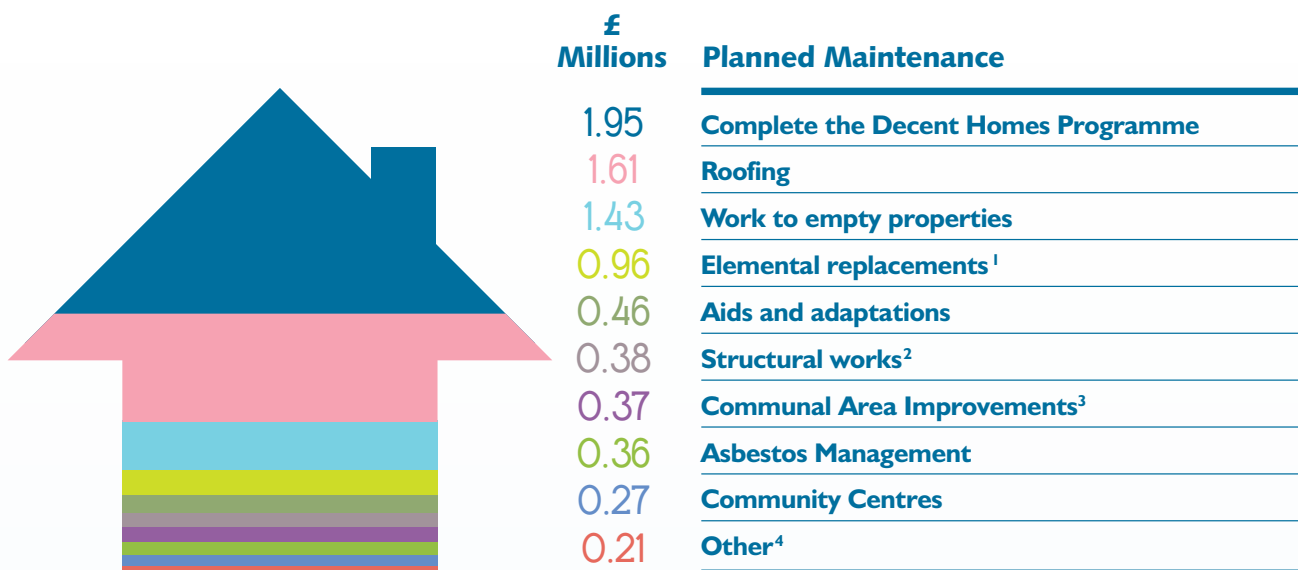
- On or ahead of target
- Within 10% of target
- Outside 10% of target

Decent Homes

What's next?

- When examining the reasons why our response to faults fell outside of 14 calendar days, we found that 98% of these are plumbing faults caused by either defective components or small leaks. These issues have since been resolved with the subcontractor. Customers can be reassured that future plumbing rectifications will be completed in accordance with the customer guarantee.
- We have been working closely with the council and Elliot Dent to identify future development opportunities. Their report identified the possibility of developing 760 new homes across the county of which 160 would be in the former Wear Valley district.
- As we approach the last phase of our decent homes programme, with only a handful of properties left to complete, our challenge now is to maintain this standard. In March 2013 Dale & Valley Homes were allocated £8 million investment from the council to spend on improving our customers' homes and neighbourhoods over the next twelve months. The graph below shows how we intend to spend this money.

Planned Maintenance During 2013/14



¹ Kitchens, bathrooms, heating, re-wires, boundary fencing doors and windows

² Rendering and structural repairs

³ Decoration, floor coverings and fire protection

⁴ Garage demolitions, thermal insulation, environmental improvements and option appraisal for low demand/unsuitable homes

Securing funding plays a key part in ensuring we are able to maintain homes at a good standard into the future. The transfer proposal would deliver much more certainty about funding that would be possible with the council.



Repairs and Maintenance

Our customers have told us that repairs and maintenance is the most important service Dale & Valley Homes provides. In partnership with Gentoo we have implemented major changes over the past twelve months to improve the service to customers and deliver better value for money.

The regulatory standard states that we must...

- ✓ Provide a cost-effective repairs and maintenance service to homes and communal areas that respond to the needs of, and offers choices to customers, with an objective of completing repairs and improvements right first time
- ✓ Meet all applicable statutory requirements that provide for the health and safety of the occupants in their homes

Have we complied with this standard

YES ✓



Customer Guarantees Our promise to you

We will...

- Carry out your repairs as soon as we possibly can (weather permitting) however; we will ensure they are done within:
 - ▶ Emergencies - 24 hours
 - ▶ Urgent - 7 calendar days
 - ▶ Routine - 28 calendar days
- Carry out urgent and routine repairs right first time - works done to the customer's satisfaction first time
- Make an appointment for all repairs inside your home

When visiting to work on your home, we will...

- Let you know who we are and why we have come
- Leave your home clean and tidy when we finish the work
- Be polite, friendly and knowledgeable at all times

WE HAVE REDUCED THE AVERAGE REPAIR COST PER PROPERTY FROM

IN 2011/12

£540

IN 2012/13

£425

83%

...of customers are satisfied with the repairs and maintenance service

2013 STAR survey

Repairs and Maintenance

How have we performed?

During 2012/13 we completed...



...of emergency repairs within 24 hours



...of urgent repairs within 7 calendar days



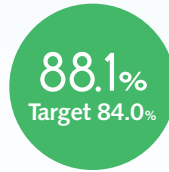
...of routine repairs within 28 calendar days



...of urgent and routine repairs were completed 'right first time'



...of customers were satisfied with being told when workers would call



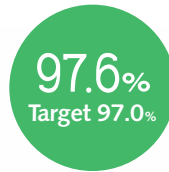
...of customers were satisfied with the time taken before work started



...of customers stated that staff and workmen showed them identification when visiting their home



...of customers were satisfied that workmen kept dirt and mess to a minimum



...of customers were satisfied with the attitude of the workmen

“ Excellent service from both the lady who took my call and the gentleman who carried out the repair. ”

Customer comment regarding the repairs service



Performance Key:

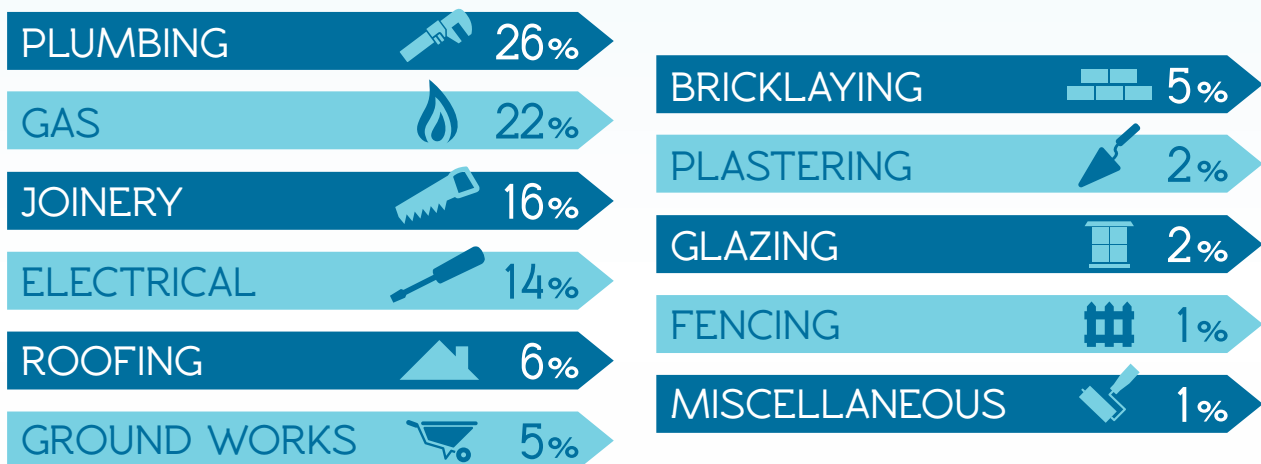
- On or ahead of target
- Within 10% of target
- Outside 10% of target



LAST YEAR WE COMPLETED 16,696 REPAIRS



The following works were undertaken...



Including drain and footpath repairs

Gas Servicing

Dale & Valley Homes is responsible for carrying out a yearly safety check for all gas boilers and fires. We will contact you at least 2 weeks in advance to arrange an appointment. Faulty appliances can give off poisonous carbon monoxide. This cannot be seen or smelt but can kill. **It is extremely important that you are available or make alternative arrangement to allow us access to your home to complete these essential safety checks.**

- ✓ During 2012/13 we spent **£454k** on gas servicing
- ✓ At the end of March 2013, **99.9%** of properties had a valid gas safety certificate. We were unable to gain access to **6** properties; however all of these have since been completed
- ✓ Customer satisfaction with gas servicing was exceptionally high at **97.8%** as opposed to 94.9% in 2011/12
- ✓ **99.2%** of customers were satisfied with the attitude of the workmen – 2012 Annual Survey (2012 Annual Survey)



DID YOU KNOW?



The new build sites at Greenside Place and Park Avenue Close are now complete providing 67 new homes

Park Avenue Close was named one of the top 50 UK Affordable Housing Developments by Inside Housing 2013

Not only are we building new properties but also looking at remodelling existing ones. Last year we completed the conversion of 8 flats in Leeholme into 4 three bedroomed family homes. More recently we have converted 3 maisonettes in Waterloo Close from three bed to two bedroomed properties. This has not only assisted in bringing what were once long term empty properties back into use, but has also increased the supply of smaller accommodation to help customers potentially affected by the bedroom tax

We have extended the Gentoo repairs and maintenance contract for a further 5 years. When reviewing this contract we identified £200k of savings

We have completed the installation of six air-source heat pumps in Witton-le-Wear and Weardale

We have further updated the information held on our Property Asset Management system, PIMSS. This will enable us to better understand the sustainability of our stock and plan any necessary improvements. This work has also been fundamental in progressing with the development of a new county wide asset management strategy

We have invested in new technology and handheld devices for workmen, enabling them to spend more time on site and increase the number of repairs completed

We have introduced a new appointment system for repairs which came into effect in April 2013. The new system is much simpler and involves two categories, emergency and appointed repairs. This means we can now offer customers a convenient repairs appointment at first contact

A zoned working system is now in place in the Weardale area. These changes mean that repairs to outlying areas in the Dales are now undertaken on Wednesdays (unless it is an emergency repair). The new system minimises travelling time, and is more efficient delivering both environmental and cost savings



This section includes:

▶ ALLOCATIONS & MUTUAL EXCHANGE

Allocations and Mutual Exchange

The regulatory standard states that we must...

- ✓ Rent our homes in a fair, transparent and efficient way
- ✓ Take into account the housing needs and aspirations of both existing and potential customers
- ✓ Have a clear application, decision-making and appeals process in place
- ✓ Enable customers to gain access to opportunities to exchange their tenancy with that of another customer, by way of mutual exchange
- ✓ Demonstrate how we:
 - ▶ Make the best use of available housing
 - ▶ Are compatible with the purpose of the housing
 - ▶ Contribute to local authorities' strategic housing function and sustainable communities

Have we complied with this standard

YES ✓

“ Everyone within Dale & Valley Homes has been extremely helpful, approachable and friendly. My new home is in a lovely location and the neighbours are very friendly and helpful. I feel physically and emotionally safe here. Thank You. ”

Customer comment

Customer Guarantees Our promise to you

We will...

- Provide you with details on how the Durham Key Options Scheme works when applying for a new home
- Confirm your housing registration within 7 calendar days of receiving your fully completed application form, and provide more information on how Durham Key Options works
- Publish a newsletter every 6 months and send it to all applicants registered by Dale & Valley Homes
- 'Fast track' any minor repairs reported to us within the first 2 weeks of the start of your tenancy, and complete them within 7 calendar days of reporting, or by appointment to best suit the customer
- Give all new tenants information at the start of their tenancy, which will tell them all about our services

Allocations and Mutual Exchange

How have we performed?

During 2012/13 we...

LET 406 PROPERTIES

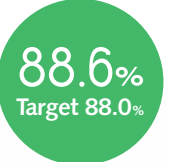


TOOK ON AVERAGE 42 DAYS TO RELET EMPTY HOMES

HELPED 20 CUSTOMERS MOVE HOME BY WAY OF MUTUAL EXCHANGE



...of housing application forms were registered within 7 calendar days



...of customers were satisfied with the literature given to them when applying for a new home



...of customers were satisfied with the information provided by staff when signing up to their new home



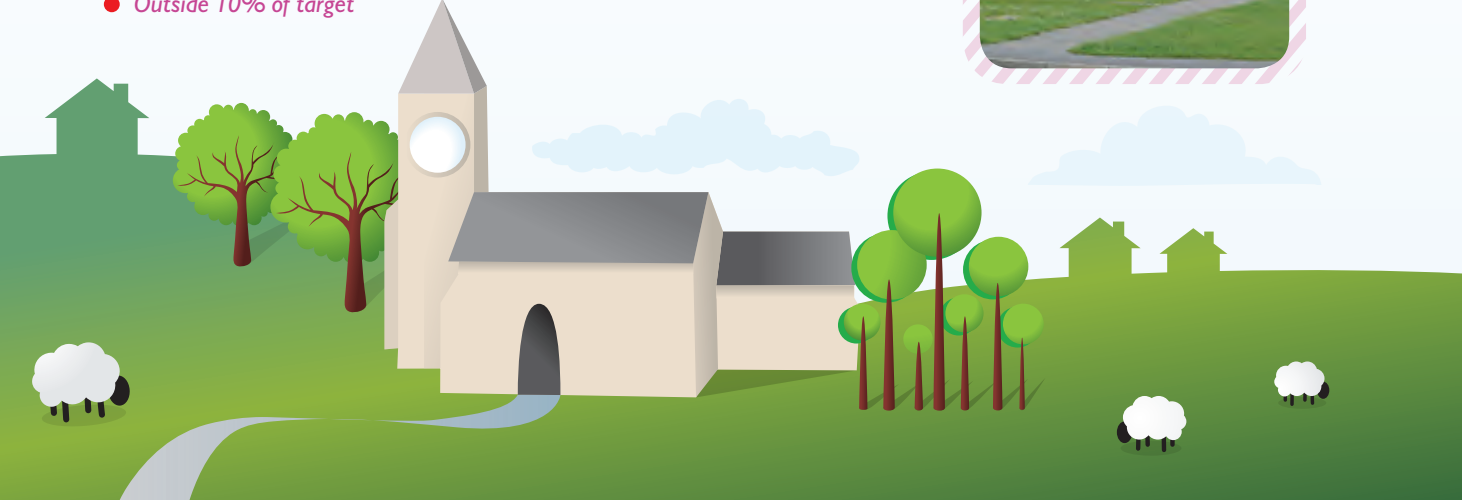
...of fast tracked repairs were completed within 7 calendar days



...of customers felt we were responsive when addressing any problems which occurred soon after moving into their new home



Performance Key:
● On or ahead of target
● Within 10% of target
● Outside 10% of target



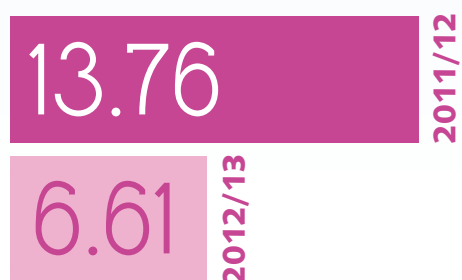
TENANCY STANDARD

Major challenge

The recent changes to the benefit system represents one of the biggest challenges we face this year. The introduction of the 'spare bedroom tax' means that many customers are receiving less housing benefit if they are seen to have more bedrooms than they need. Many of our customers have found themselves in the position where they are having to downsize their home to afford their rent, whilst some are having to move back home with parents.

Recent figures suggest that this is already having a major impact on the allocations and lettings service with an increase in terminations when compared to previous years. At the same time we are experiencing a significant drop in demand with fewer customers bidding on available properties.

AVERAGE NUMBER OF BIDS PER PROPERTY



NUMBER OF TERMINATED TENANCIES



What's next?

We are talking a two-sided approach to help tackle these issues by:

- 1 Developing a customer retention function which will support customers in sustaining their tenancy and help reduce the number of terminations we receive
- 2 Introducing an incentive scheme to increase demand and widen the scope of our advertising to reach those groups who in the past have not considered social housing as an option

DID YOU KNOW?



THERE ARE CURRENTLY



CUSTOMERS ON OUR HOUSING REGISTER





HELPING YOU SAVE

We are successful in our bid for funding of £44k from North East Procurement to recruit two Energy Efficiency Advisors



AWARD WINNING HOMES

Park Avenue Close wins a place in the top 50 UK affordable housing developments list published by Inside Housing



HEALTHIER & HAPPIER

We achieved the Better Health at Work bronze award



MAKING A DIFFERENCE

We establish our first joint social enterprise 'Colouring Pads' with Gentoo, funded through North East Procurement. The scheme not only helps to combat youth employment in the communities we support, but is also improving the quality of homes before they are relet



BUILDING FOR THE FUTURE

County Durham's most modern new council homes are officially opened at Park Avenue Close. This consists of 46 apartments and 4 bungalows that are energy efficient and adaptable, for older people



Through 2012/13



GOLD

We are successful in achieving the Investors in People 'gold' accreditation. The inspection report praised the company's enormous commitment to continuous improvement and development throughout the organisation



CREATING AMBITION

We are recognised for our commitment to apprenticeships, and named the North East Medium Sized Employer of the Year, whilst also achieving runner up in the national award



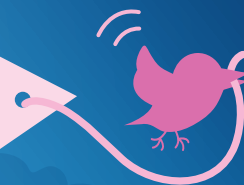
SIMPLY THE BEST

We are awarded a 3* accreditation for the second year running in the Sunday Times Best Companies Award 2013. Our ranking improves to the 3rd best not-for-profit organisation to work for, and placed us as the highest North East company across all sectors to appear on the list and the best ALMO in the country



WE ARE EXCELLENT!

Our excellent customer service is officially recognised through the achievement of the Customer Service Excellence accreditation



Neighbourhood and Community Standard

This section includes:

► NEIGHBOURHOOD MANAGEMENT ► LOCAL AREA CO-OPERATION ► ANTI-SOCIAL BEHAVIOUR

Neighbourhood Management

The regulatory standard states that we must...

- ✓ Keep neighbourhoods and communal areas associated with our homes clean and safe
- ✓ Work in partnership with customers, other providers and public bodies where it is effective to do so

Have we complied with this standard

YES ✓

Customer Guarantees Our promise to you

We will...

- Undertake an estate inspection in your neighbourhood as per our programme (weather permitting)
- Publish the outcomes of issues which have been raised within your neighbourhood

How have we performed?

Last year we undertook **197** estate inspections...

96.3%
Target 95.0%

...of inspections were completed when planned

87.8%
Target 89.0%

...of customers were satisfied with their neighbourhood as a place to live

93.2%
Target 92.0%

...of customers were satisfied with being kept informed about things that might affect them

(2012 Annual Survey)

Performance Key:

● On or ahead of target ● Within 10% of target ● Outside 10% of target



DID YOU KNOW?



Last year, 26 groups were successful in receiving over £10,000 from the Better Homes Better Lives fund which provides small grants of up to £500 to groups in the local area. Below are just a few examples of these grants and how they have helped worthwhile causes:

Durham Rural Community Council - **£400** - to fund an Energy Advice Fayre

Spectrum Leisure & Community - **£500** - to update a purpose built website for young people with disabilities

Auckland Youth & Community Centre - **£500** - to upgrade the CCTV system in the centre

Willington Disabled Club - **£500** - to fund their Christmas lunch and transport costs

To help improve the appearance of our neighbourhoods we have carried out various external works to our properties including roofing repairs, rendering, painting and fencing

We have completed works to install new door entry systems to our blocks of flats in Stanhope. The communal areas have also been refurbished to comply with the Public Sector Equality Duty 2010

We have decorated and re-carpeted the communal areas in our blocks of flats at Devon Place, Dorset Place, Waterloo Close and Chester Drive

We have representatives on the boards of the three Area Action Partnerships based in our area. We work in partnership with these groups to address community issues which are important to our customers

We have been involved with the Safer Durham Partnership in the review of the Local Multi Agency Problem Solving Groups (LMAPs). The LMAPs consist of relevant agencies brought together to address community safety issues. The problem solving groups concentrate on repeat issues with regards to crime, fear of crime, anti-social behaviour or substance misuse

40.7%

...of customers feel their neighbourhood has improved in the last 3 years

2013 STAR survey

Your Money, Your Area, Your Views

This autumn, you can have a say on how money is spent in your local area

All 14 Area Action Partnerships (AAP's) across County Durham have set aside between £20,000 and £60,000 to give to local projects and organisations chosen by you.

Come along to your local voting event (listed below) and vote on the projects close to home that you would like to see supported, whether it's a local project for kids, opportunities for apprentices, improving a community garden, or activities for older people.

Attendees will also be given the opportunity to vote on their AAP Priorities for 2014/15 at this event. Votes go forward to AAP boards which steer their decision making in line with forum feedback. This helps us direct our local spend to the priorities you tell us are the most important for your area.

At the same events, we'll be asking you to help us decide where further savings should be made from the overall council budget.

All the information we gather at these events will be used to help us decide how to make savings from 2014 onwards.

Saturday 2 November

Three Towns AAP - Crook Primary School, Croft Avenue, Crook, DL15 8QG - 10am-2pm. For further details contact us on: 03000 267539 or threetownsaap@durham.gov.uk

Weardale AAP - Wolsingham School, Leazes Lane, Wolsingham, DL13 3DN - 10am-2pm. For further details contact us on: 03000 268666 or weardaleaap@durham.gov.uk

Saturday 16 November

Bishop Auckland and Shildon AAP - Bishop Auckland College (Main Campus), Woodhouse Lane, Bishop Auckland, DL14 6JZ - 10am-2pm. For further details contact us on: 03000 268663 or bishopshildonaap@durham.gov.uk



Local Area Co-operation

We are proud to work in partnership with other organisations to ensure our customers receive high quality information, advice and support to enable them to live independently and happily in their home. *Our partners include:*

- Construction contractors (including Gentoo, Esh Property Services and Coast & Country)
- Durham County Council
- Police
- Citizens Advice Bureau
- Local colleges
- Energy specialists

The regulatory standard states that we must...

- ✓ Co-operate with relevant partners to help promote social, environmental and economic wellbeing in our neighbourhoods

Have we complied with this standard



Saving you money on your fuel bills

Last year we introduced an energy advice service to improve the thermal efficiency of our customers' homes which was funded by North East Procurement. During 2012/13 the energy advisers visited over **830** customers to advise them on how to use their heating efficiently and save money on their bills. During their visits they identified an **average saving of £135 per customer** by switching suppliers and a total of **£40,300** in potential Warm Home Discounts. Customer satisfaction with this service is extremely high at **96%**.

Would you like £135 credit towards your electricity bill?

Warm Home Discount is back, providing an **extra £135** towards eligible customers electricity bills. Customers on key meters may also be able to benefit from this credit.

If you are not automatically eligible then you still may be able to qualify for this credit if you apply to your electricity supplier.

For more information about Warm Home Discount, including questions about eligibility or help with applications, please contact: **Dale & Valley Homes Energy Advisors** by calling **0800 083 0333/0300 2000 194**

Local Area Co-operation

Introducing our first social enterprise - Colouring Pads

By listening to what our customers tell us is important to them we are able to focus our efforts on delivering services that make a difference in our local communities. Recent feedback highlighted the need to improve the cleanliness and appearance of homes before they are relet. To address this problem we worked with North East Procurement and our partner contractor Gentoo to appoint apprentice decorators. The scheme, known as 'Colouring Pads', is our first joint social enterprise and has so far not only delivered higher levels of customer satisfaction, but has also created employment opportunities for local people.

Since Colouring Pads was set up, customer satisfaction with the internal condition of their property has increased from 71% at the end of September 2012 to **81%** by the end of March 2013 (+14%).



Gentoo Apprentice Decorators



Award winning apprenticeship programme

Lack of youth employment and training opportunities are a major problem in our area. We believe in giving young people opportunities to develop, and work closely with Bishop Auckland College to recruit and support apprentices.

Many of our apprentices have gone on to full time employment within the company and help to mentor the next generation. Our positive approach was recently recognised when we were named the North East medium sized apprentice employer of the year, and a 'top 100' apprentice employer nationally.

“Over **25%** of our **staff** are current or **FORMER APPRENTICES**”



“ County Durham should be justifiably proud of Dale & Valley Homes' achievements and the employment opportunities they are providing to young people in the local area. We are now calling on other employers across the region to pick up the gauntlet and recognise the benefits to their organisation of employing an apprentice. ”

David Way, Chief Executive of the National Apprenticeship Service



Anti-social Behaviour

The regulatory standard states that we must...

- ✓ Work in partnership with other agencies to prevent and tackle anti-social behaviour in our neighbourhoods

Have we complied with this standard



Customer Guarantee Our promise to you

When investigating your case of anti-social behaviour we will ...

- Produce a plan of action with you which will agree how and when we will keep you informed of progress

How have we performed?

- ▶ **120** customers complained about anti-social behaviour during 2012/13. This is a reduction of almost **40%** when compared to 2011/12
- ▶ **93%** of customers have told us they feel safe in their neighbourhood.
– (2013 STAR Survey)



...of customers felt we had clearly explained what we would do with their case



...of customers felt we had kept them informed of the progress of their case



Performance Key:

- On or ahead of target
- Within 10% of target
- Outside 10% of target



Anti-social Behaviour

CASE STUDY

We work very closely with partner agencies to ensure our neighbourhoods are safe and free from anti-social behaviour. Here is an example of how partnership working really does make a difference.

In November of last year we received numerous complaints from customers, private residents and businesses regarding a gang of teenagers causing disruption in the community by starting fires, damaging properties and creating an atmosphere of hostility and intimidation. To help address these issues we held a multi agency meeting which involved the Family Intervention Programme, Education Department, Youth Service, Police and Fire Service. When investigating this case it came to light that the teenagers concerned were not just causing disruption in the community but also at school. Through partnership working, the levels of anti-social behaviour within the estate are under much closer control. The families whose children were involved in the incidents are now engaging with the Family Intervention Programme. The police are also working with parents and young people in the community to set up additional clubs, activities and drop in centres. Extra funding has also been secured to help a number of youth projects in the area.

DID YOU KNOW?



During 2012/13 we served 6 notices to customers as a result of anti-social behaviour

We regularly attend Partners and Communities Together (PACT) meetings, and work with the Police, the Council and other partner agencies to solve issues causing concern within our neighbourhoods

We have trained staff to work with the Police to deliver a 'Restorative Justice' project to help tackle low level crime and disorder. Our staff have been trained to facilitate mediation sessions between both the offender and the victim, and have used this approach to help resolve issues locally before they escalate further



What's next?

Last year the Scrutiny Group undertook a review of this service and made the following recommendations which we are in the process of implementing...

- Raise customer awareness of the difference between anti-social behaviour, nuisance and environmental issues, and explain what each organisation is responsible for
- Publicise more outcomes and provide customers with more information about the process
- Provide a diary to customers going through the process to enable them to record anti-social behaviour events

Further to this we also plan to...

- Deliver mediation training to neighbourhood officers so they can work with customers to help them resolve problems or disputes between neighbours
- Work with an independent organisation known as Bliss who specialise in community mediation.



Sunnybrow Police Community Support Officers (PCSO's) receiving their 2012 Good Neighbour award for their outstanding contribution to the fight against anti-social behaviour.

Customer Guarantees Our promise to you

We will...

- Send all customers a statement of their rent account 4 times a year, with a letter giving contact details for their neighbourhood officer
- Inform you of the different ways to pay your rent
- Any Dale & Valley Homes' customer who tells us they want or need money/debt advice will be contacted by the Citizens Advice Bureau within 7 calendar days of their referral

How have we performed?

We have made some changes to our rent statements to make them more customer friendly. This has resulted in improved customer satisfaction

86.8%
Target 80.0%

...of customers found their rent statement easy to understand

95.0%
Target 90.0%

...of customers were satisfied with the different ways to pay their rent

Money and Debt Advice through the Citizens Advice Bureau

Our money advice service is provided by Wear Valley Citizens Advice Bureau (CAB) and is free to all Dale and Valley Homes' customers. Their advice is professional, confidential and can be provided at a place convenient to you, including your home.

During 2012/13 the CAB contract helped achieve the following outcomes for customers...

- **252** customers were referred to the service (52 cases over target for the year)
- **89%** of the customers who were referred have engaged with the service
- Nearly **£60k** of unclaimed benefits have been accessed by customers
- Over **£280k** of debt has been successfully managed over the year

Due to the success of this service we have decided to renew our contract with CAB for a further year.


If you are worried about debts such as rent arrears, council tax, gas/electricity, loans or credit cards this service can help you.

**For further information please contact us on:
freephone 0800 083 0333 or 0300 2000 194 if calling from a mobile.**

Performance Key:

- On or ahead of target
- Within 10% of target
- Outside 10% of target

DID YOU KNOW?



During 2012/13 we collected over **£15.7 million** in rent and kept rent arrears within our target of 2%

As a result of our proactive work with customers we have reduced the number of evictions due to rent arrears by **38%**

Welfare Reform

Changes to the welfare, health and benefits systems came into effect in April 2013 and present one of the most significant challenges faced by Council tenants in the last 60 years. As almost 76% of our tenants are currently in receipt of housing benefit, these changes are having a major impact on many of our customers.

What have we been doing to help?

We have been responding to the impact of Welfare Reform by...

- ✓ Visiting 875 customers who we have identified as being affected by the bedroom tax and who are in receipt of housing benefit. We have discussed their options with them and given appropriate advice and assistance. Following this, some customers have chosen to move into a smaller property whilst others have found work. The main response from customers however has been that they don't wish to move and will make up their shortfall in the benefit payment
- ✓ Working with other organisations to publicise the changes and raise awareness so that customers fully understand the impact it will have on their lives
- ✓ Delivering presentations to Area Action Partnership meetings, Resident Association meetings and staff briefings so that all key stakeholders are kept informed
- ✓ Working with other providers to develop a Discretionary Housing Payment policy which will allow some customers to apply for additional housing benefit due to exceptional circumstances
- ✓ Developing and implementing a new Durham Key Options lettings policy which recognises under occupation as a priority within the banding



Rent Standard

What's next?

- We are now in the process of visiting a further 825 customers who are of working age and in receipt of housing benefit
- We are working with the Credit Union to help our customers' access accounts in preparation for the introduction of Universal Credit
- We are revising our current rent recovery procedure to enable neighbourhood officers to be more supportive to customers who are struggling to pay their rent

“ Overall, Dale and Valley Homes continues to impress as an organisation. They perform well in many areas against their key targets. There is a positive attitude and customer focus about how staff deliver their services. In particular staff have been positive in addressing issues around the welfare benefit reform and working to make customers aware of the potential impact and to minimise the impact on individual customers. ”

Customer Service Excellence
Assessment May 2013



Monkey is a Big Lottery Funded project setup to offer free money support to young and first-time social housing tenants across County Durham. This includes help with the following:

- Paying bills
- Managing budgets
- Claiming benefits
- Getting the best rate on borrowing money
- Managing debt
- Finding quality affordable furniture
- Finding affordable gas and electric
- Setting up bank accounts
- Savings

To find out if you qualify for this support please contact Dale & Valley Homes on freephone: **0800 083 0333** or from a mobile on: **0300 2000 194**.



Our Finances and Value for Money

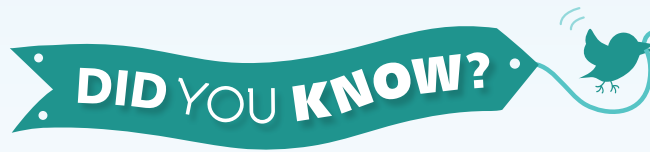
As a housing provider, we are always seeking ways to improve our services and make the most of our money for the benefit of our customers. At Dale & Valley Homes, we encourage our staff to be mindful of value for money in all that they do.

Our staff are motivated by a culture that puts our customers at the heart of everything we do. Because our employees believe in going the 'extra mile', this results in increased productivity (lower costs) and improved customer satisfaction. These are the foundations of our approach to achieving value for money.

Our approach to value for money



Our Finances and Value for Money



We have reduced the management fee we charge Durham County Council by **£400k** which has helped release funding to support the final stages of our decent homes programme

During last year we completed our major staff restructuring programme which will contribute to reductions in the management fee of over **30%** since the company was established

We have been working with East Durham Homes and Durham City Homes in the procurement exercise of a joint partnership framework for capital works across all of County Durham. We have also jointly procured a further framework for the management of asbestos. By doing so this will gain greater efficiencies for all three housing providers

Savings of approximately **£60k** have been achieved in the cyclical painting programme. We have targeted properties which were due for external painting and decided to instead replace soffits and fascias with UPVC. This removes the need for costly repairs and future painting, saving us money in the long term

In May 2012 we identified savings of **£200k** when reviewing the repairs and maintenance contract. More importantly these savings have been made without compromising performance and customer satisfaction. We are completing more repairs within timescale (96.5%), with 86.4% of those being completed 'right first time', whilst at the same time continuing to deliver high levels of customer satisfaction (83%)



Where we spend your rent

Rents and other income are paid into a pot of money called the Housing Revenue Account (HRA). This covers all council properties within County Durham (properties managed by Dale & Valley Homes, East Durham Homes and Durham City Homes).

Making Sense of the Money

For every £1 paid into the HRA account this is how the money is spent



How We Spend Our Management Fee



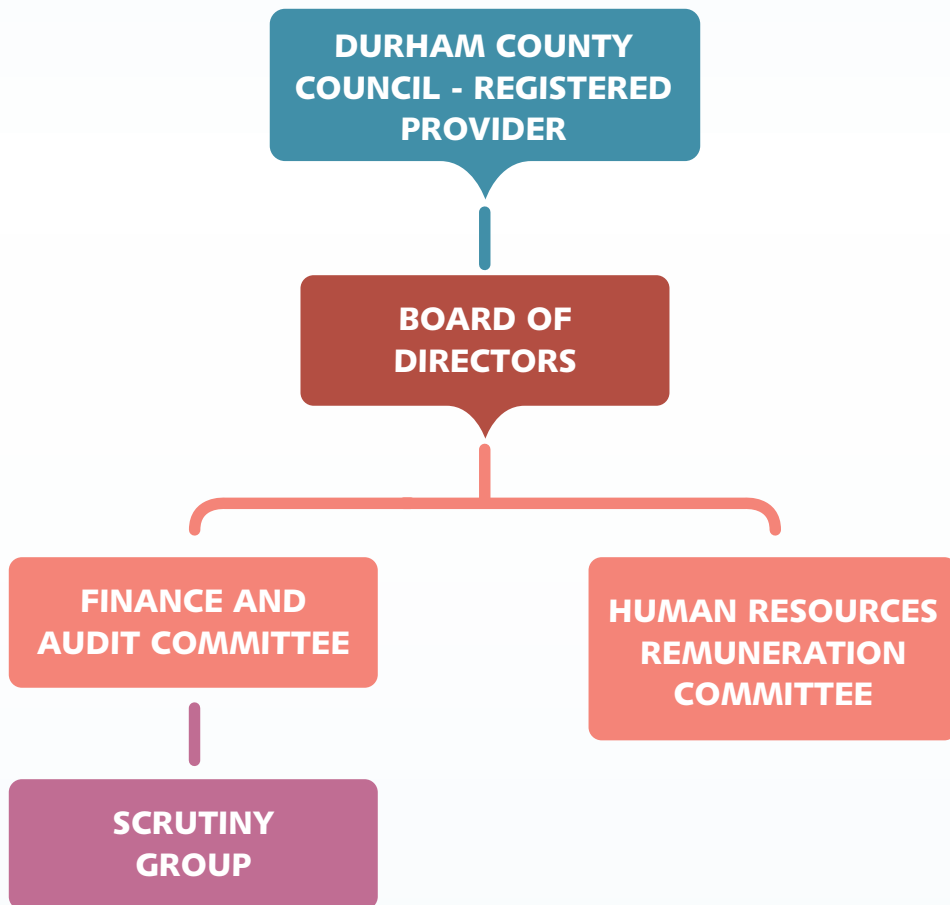
£✓ Governance Standard

Good governance enhances organisational reputation, and ensures better results are achieved for our customers.

Dale & Valley Homes is accountable to Durham County Council for the management of the housing services we provide on their behalf.

Our work is directed and managed by a Board of 15 Directors, which is made up of 5 customer representatives, 5 Council representatives and 5 independent members of the community who have special experience in finance, risk management or law.

How are we managed?



The role of the Board

The Board are responsible for setting the strategic direction, key objectives and performance of the company. They meet on a regular basis to consider the company's performance and decide how we will invest our resources in achieving our stakeholder's priorities.

The Role of the Committees

We also operate a committee structure, which enables our Board of directors to concentrate on specific areas of the business that are of interest to them. The committees are chaired by Board members and are also attended by customer representatives. We currently have two committees:

- ▶ **Finance and Audit Committee -**
Responsible for overseeing the company's financial performance, internal control and risk management arrangements. The committee reviews and advises the Board on the financial position of the organisation, through its monitoring of the annual budget. They also ensure that suitable arrangements are in place to secure value for money in the use of our resources
- ▶ **Human Resource Remuneration Committee -**
Responsible for advising the Board on strategic human resource issues. The committee oversees the development of the corporate organisational development strategy; health and safety; strategic issues relating to staff remuneration; and staff diversity

The role of the Scrutiny Group

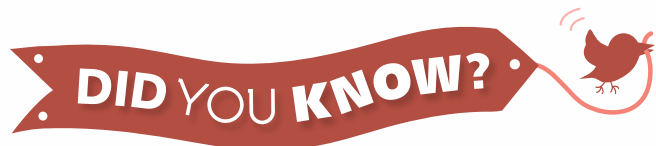
The introduction of co-regulation has seen the Council, Dale & Valley Homes and customers work together to improve services. We have established a customer led Scrutiny Group who are responsible for undertaking service reviews and working with service managers to propose recommendations for improvement. All scrutiny findings and resulting action plans are reported into the Finance and Audit Committee.



Is this something that would appeal to you?

We are currently looking to recruit additional Scrutiny Group members. If you would like to receive further information or wish to talk to a member of staff

**please contact Joanne Cartledge
on tel: 01388 770987**



We regularly assess ourselves against the principles and guidance set out in the National Housing Federation's Code of Governance. The code is widely recognised and enables us to demonstrate the highest standards of corporate governance.

Tell us what you think and be in with a chance to win **£50 of high street shopping vouchers!**

We value your opinion and would be grateful if you could spare a few minutes to take part in our quiz along with answering a few questions to help us improve our annual report. By doing so you could win shopping vouchers to spend on a treat for yourself or your family.

You will find a copy of the quiz enclosed within your pack. All the answers to the quiz can be found within the Annual Report. Once you have completed the questions, fold your answers and pop it in the post. **Please return it to us no later than 31st October 2013.**

In the June issue of Dale Mail Lesley Ann Bell from Wolsingham won first prize in the adult competition winning a shopping voucher and Anita Preston from Bishop Auckland came second.

Alicia Connor (8) won the colouring competition for 7-11 age group and Hallie McNeil (22 months) for 6 and under. Both won a selection of summer toys, craft sets and books for their very creative entries!



Alicia Connor very excited at winning first prize



Hallie McNeil discovers her craft set



Lesley Ann Bell receives her prize from Joanne Cartledge



WHAT CAN I DO IF I AM BORROWING FROM A LOAN SHARK?

- Consider contacting the Illegal money lending team for specialist advice in confidence
- If you are in immediate danger you must call 999
- Recognise that this is happening to you and that it needs to stop
- Accept that you are not to blame
- Keep a diary of incidents, noting down times, dates and witnesses, if any
- Keep a photographic record of any injuries
- Your personal safety is the most important thing
- Report each incident to the illegal money lending team
- Tell trusted friends and family
- Seek help and support from agencies
- Keep text messages, voicemails and any written notes

For confidential help and advice contact the Illegal Money Lending Team

0300 555 2222 (local call rate, including inc minutes from mobiles)

Email: reportaloanshark@stoploansharks.gov.uk

Text: loan (space) shark (space) + your message to 60003.

Web: www.direct.gov.uk/stoploansharks





Tel: 0800 083 0333

E-mail: info@daleandvalleyhomes.co.uk

www.daleandvalleyhomes.co.uk