



Annual Report 2014

Our Vision

We have a clear vision of what we would like to achieve for our customers.

Provide homes and neighbourhoods that our customers want to live in and are proud to live in



Welcome to our Annual Report for 2013/14

Welcome to this year's annual report which sets out our achievements over the past year and our plans for the future. It's a pleasure to report on another successful year for Dale & Valley Homes. Whilst performance across the organisation has been relatively high we are aware that there is always room to improve.

Last year was a difficult year for many customers having to cope with the Government's changes to the welfare benefits system. In response to these changes, Dale & Valley Homes has expanded its support services. Staff have worked closely with those customers most affected by the reforms, helping them balance the need to pay their rent with other commitments. The award winning energy advice service is also proving to be an invaluable service to many of our customers, receiving much positive recognition both regionally and nationally.

The changes brought about by Welfare Reform have not only impacted on our customers but also on the company. Over the past year we have seen a significant increase in empty properties compared to previous years, coupled with a drop in demand with fewer customers bidding on available properties. This has been a major challenge for us which we are currently working hard to deal with.

On a more positive note, a major achievement for the company last year was reaching the end of the Decent Homes programme, with all homes now meeting the Decent Homes Plus standard. The programme began back in 2007, and has helped deliver improvement works to over 3900 properties. This is fantastic news for customers who are now enjoying homes equipped with modern facilities. Whilst we have reached the end of this programme our challenge now is to maintain this standard. Further contracts have been procured through the Strategic Partnering Agreement to continue to deliver improvement works into the future.

The Board were also delighted to see the company's continued commitment to support

local young people into work. Our award winning apprenticeship scheme has been expanded to include office admin apprenticeships as well as vocational apprenticeships with our partner repairs contractor Gentoo.

In February 2014 Dale & Valley Homes was included in the Sunday Times 100 Best Companies to Work For list for the fourth year running, maintaining its ranking as the 3rd best company to work for. This result truly reflects the motivation and commitment of staff who share the desire to provide excellent services to customers.

I would finally like to recognise all of the effort that everyone concerned, has put into ensuring a favourable outcome for the Council's bid for Stock Transfer. It has been a long journey but it was pleasing to see that all of our collective hard work paid off with the announcement that 82% of customers who voted across County Durham, voted in favour of the transfer. This outcome would not have been possible without positive partnership working throughout the process.

Staff have worked very hard to ensure that you have been kept up to date with how the process is progressing and to personally hand deliver the Council's Offer Document which set out how services will be delivered in the future. I would like to assure you all that my fellow Board members and I are focused on ensuring the company is in the best position to deliver on this offer.

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

COLIN STOCKWELL
Chair of the Board






About this report

In April 2012, the responsibility for housing regulation in England transferred to the Homes and Communities Agency (HCA). The framework sets out seven national standards that housing providers like Dale & Valley Homes must adhere to. Similar to last year, this report updates you on how we are meeting these standards.

-  Tenant involvement and empowerment
-  Home
-  Tenancy
-  Neighbourhood and community
-  Rent
-  Value for Money
-  Governance

We have adopted a traffic light approach throughout this report to let you know how we have performed against the targets we set out to achieve.

-  **OUTSIDE 10% OF TARGET**
-  **WITHIN 10% OF TARGET**
-  **ON OR AHEAD OF TARGET**

You may recall last year we asked you for your thoughts on our annual report. It was great to hear you liked the new look!

Thank you to everyone who took the time to give us your feedback. Every person who responded to the questionnaire told us they were happy with the appearance and overall content of the report. They told us they found it informative and easy to read. We have taken on board your suggestions when producing this year's report and hope that you enjoy reading it.

Look at how we have grown

STOCK TRANSFER

Over the past year we have been supporting the Council throughout the Stock Transfer process. This has involved extensive consultation with customers through a number of workshops and three rounds of home visits. This has enabled customers to have their say and make an informed decision about how housing services will be delivered in the future.



DECENT HOMES

In September we were pleased to announce the completion of the final home in our Decent Homes programme. We have modernised 3926 homes and invested over £49.4m throughout the six year programme.

CSE - Last year we retained the Customer Service Excellence Award for a second year running



ENERGY ADVISORS – Our Energy Advisors were the proud winners of the 2013/14 Community Action National Award, which recognised the impact they have made in tackling fuel poverty in rural areas.

BEST COMPANIES – 4 YEARS ON TOP!

For the fourth year running we have been included in the Sunday Times 100 best companies to work for list –ranked as 3rd Best Company to work for two years in a row!



BETTER HEALTH

This year we achieved silver in the Better Health at Work award

COLOURING PADS

We have expanded our 'Colouring Pads' social enterprise which recruited five apprentices last year. Two apprentices have since secured permanent employment outside of the organisation.

TOP 100 APPRENTICES – we were named as a 'Top 100 Apprentice Employer' for a second year running





Tenant Involvement and Empowerment Standard

Tenant involvement and empowerment focuses on putting customers at the heart of everything we do, and most importantly listening to their views to improve our services. To meet this standard we must have a clear and simple complaints process in place and provide services which meet the diverse needs of our customers.

There are 3 elements to this standard:

- ✓ **Customer Involvement & Empowerment**
- ✓ **Customer Care**
- ✓ **Understanding and responding to the diverse needs of customers**



Have your say!

You may recall in March 2013 we undertook a county-wide STAR survey (Survey of Tenants and Residents) and reported the findings in last years report. These showed that levels of satisfaction with the vast majority of our services were extremely high.

In order to help ensure that these levels are being maintained we undertook a smaller scale satisfaction survey in September 2013. It was pleasing to see that satisfaction levels were being maintained and had often improved which is demonstrated throughout this report.

Please note we will be carrying out another full scale survey of 2000 tenants this month so you may well be requested to give us your thoughts. All completed surveys will be entered into a free prize draw where you could win up to £100!



Customer Involvement & Empowerment

HOW DID WE PERFORM?



81.9% of customers were satisfied with the different ways available to get involved



78% of customers were satisfied with the way we listen to their views and act upon them



76.8% of customers were satisfied with the way we inform them of the difference their involvement has made

(Source: September 2013 Satisfaction Survey)

Customer Guarantees Our promise to you

We will...

- Promote the opportunities for you to get involved with our services
- Let you know what happened as a result of your involvement

Involving You

- ✓ **790** satisfaction surveys returned
- ✓ **5** customers were involved in our scrutiny group
- ✓ **27** customers were involved in the Wear Valley Customer Panel
- ✓ **33** customers were involved in Resident Associations
- ✓ **11** customers were involved in neighbourhood inspections
- ✓ **5** customers were involved in the Stock Transfer Customer Working Group
- ✓ **85** customers were involved in consultation events

LAST YEAR

Customers were involved in our services

Wear Valley Customer Panel Update

Nigel Rowley
Chairman of the Wear Valley Customer Panel

Over the past year the Customer Panel have been heavily involved in the Stock Transfer process. This has been a huge task in itself and required much of our time. We have served as the voice for tenants, ensuring that customer views and priorities have been listened to and taken into account.

Many of our members have been involved in the Customer Working Group who were responsible for the development of the Offer Document. As such we believe it is a strong offer for customers. In addition to this we have also undertaken a gap analysis against the offer to ensure Dale & Valley Homes have everything in place to deliver their promise to customers.



“I would like to thank each member of the Wear Valley Customer Panel for all their hard work over the past year. We are always looking for new members to join our panel. If you are interested in having a say on how services are delivered we would welcome your support.”



Scrutiny Group Update

David Boal
Chairman of the Scrutiny Group

Last year we carried out two reviews which focused on the Decent Homes programme and the neighbourhood inspections process.



Decent Homes programme

The main purpose of this review was to compare customer and staff experiences throughout the process to help inform future contracts and programme of works. We undertook a series of interviews with both staff and contractors who were involved in delivering the programme. We also completed a door knocking exercise and telephone interviews, targeting customers who had received improvement works at the beginning, middle and end of the contract.

Our findings showed that customers on a whole were very satisfied and genuinely pleased to have received the improvement works. We found the contract to be delivering high levels of customer satisfaction and commend Dale & Valley Homes and its partners for their performance and conduct.

Neighbourhood inspections

When reviewing the neighbourhood inspection process we found Dale & Valley Homes' staff to be highly dedicated to improving the neighbourhoods in which we live. During this review we identified three recommendations for improvement.

1. Scrutiny Group will work more closely with Dale & Valley Homes' staff, the Wear Valley Customer Panel and Resident Associations members to further develop community involvement within your neighbourhood.
2. Dale & Valley Homes investigates the options for delivering a comprehensive estate caretaking service.
3. During the proposed stock transfer discussions, consideration was given to identifying available land suitable for the provision of additional car parking.

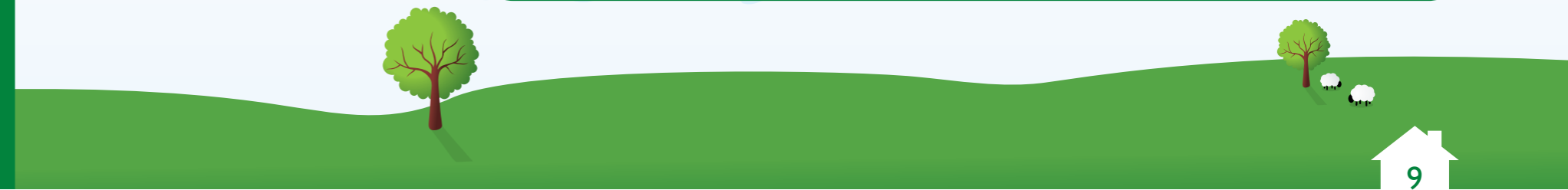
Are you interested in becoming a Scrutiny Group member?

If so, please contact the Customer Experience team on **0800 083 033** or **0300 2000 194**

Here is what we will be working on over the next year, and we would welcome your support.

- Undertake a review of the lettings process, focusing on the journey customers experience when applying for a home.
- Investigate the company's readiness for delivering a right first time repairs service as set out in Durham County Councils offer document.
- Following the successful outcome of the Stock Transfer tenant ballot we will continue to represent customers in our area to ensure the offer is delivered.

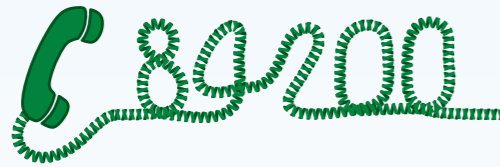
“We have been extremely busy over the past year and I would like to thank all Scrutiny Group members for their hard work. I would also like to thank staff at Dale & Valley Homes and members of the Wear Valley Customer Panel, Finance and Audit Committee and the Board for all their support.”



Customer Care

HOW DID WE PERFORM?

During 2013/14 we received a total of 84,200 calls



Staff took on average 14 seconds to answer each call



90% of customers who contacted us by telephone found it easy to get hold of the right person



93% of customers felt their call was answered promptly



99% of customers felt their call was answered politely

(Source: September 2013 Satisfaction Survey)

Customer Guarantees Our promise to you

We will...

- 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

“The Complaints Procedure has been simplified, improved and complaints are now investigated and managed at Director level which has led to speedier responses and greater insight into issues in relation to service delivery. This simple, speedy and effective complaints process merits Compliance Plus.”

Customer Service Excellence Assessment July 2014

Complaints Handling

One of our four key strategic objectives is to deliver excellent services to our customers. However, we realise that things can sometimes go wrong and when this happens we encourage customers to let us know so that we can put things right and learn from our mistakes.

In March 2013 we introduced a new process with a much stronger focus on staff being empowered to resolve customer complaints at the initial point of contact. We refer to these complaints as a frontline resolution and aim to resolve them 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.

The new process has now been in place for over a year and has led to an improvement in both customer satisfaction and timescales for resolving complaints.

HOW DID WE PERFORM?

During 2013/14 we received:



161 frontline resolution complaints - taking on average 3 days to resolve each case



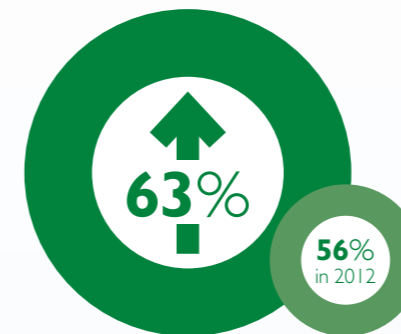
83% of customers who made a formal complaint were satisfied with the outcome



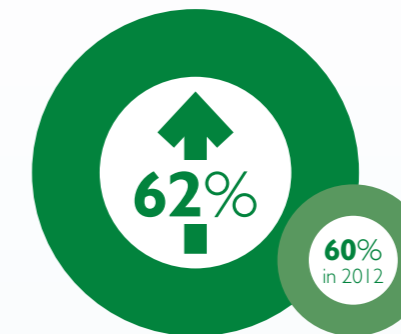
18 formal complaints - taking on average 8.6 days to resolve each case



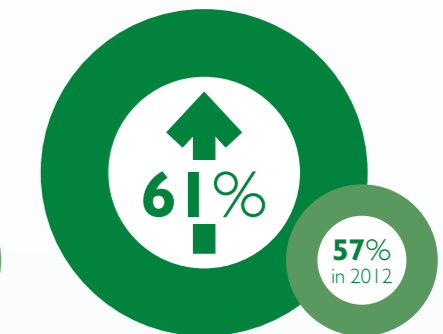
136 compliments were also received from Dale & Valley Homes customers



63% of customers were satisfied with the way we kept them informed of the progress of their complaint



62% of customers were satisfied with the way we handled their complaint



61% of customers were satisfied with the time taken to resolve their complaint

(Source: September 2013 Satisfaction Survey)



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.


We continuously update and review the information we hold on our customers. This information is used to give us a greater understanding of their different needs so that we are able to provide an accessible and responsive service to all who need it.

The following section demonstrates how we have responded to the diverse needs of our customers.

“Put simply, we believe **no-one** should suffer **disadvantage** because of **who they are.**”



HOW DID WE PERFORM?

 **93% of customers find our publications easy to understand**

88% of customers feel we treat them fairly

2013 STAR survey

Aids & Adaptations



During 2013/14 we completed **300** adaptations to our customers homes with an **astounding 100%** of **customers** telling us they were satisfied with the service. This type of work makes a significant difference to our customers with a disability and the satisfaction levels confirm how important and welcome the service is.

Customer Guarantees Our promise to you

We will...

- Ensure all documents we send you are easy to read and understand

Saving you money on your fuel bills

We recognise that our most vulnerable customers are the ones who would benefit most from reducing their energy consumption and their fuel bills. Last year we targeted customers to inform them about their opportunities to access Warm Home Discount and to advise them about the best fuel tariffs.

DID YOU KNOW? DID YOU KNOW?

Our Energy Advisors now have 'tablets' which enables them to provide more up to date and immediate information to customers in their own homes. This is particularly helpful for customers who would otherwise find it difficult to communicate with energy companies.

The advisors have received positive recognition both regionally and nationally. In November 2013 they were shortlisted for the NEProcurement Northern Stars Award and presented with a 'Highly Commended' award. More recently they were also the proud winners of the 2013/14 Community Action National Award which recognised the impact they have made in tackling fuel poverty in rural areas.



During 2013/14 our Advisors visited almost 569 customers and have undertaken 72 cost comparisons identifying a potential saving of £153 per household.

During 2013/14 34 properties received loft and cavity wall insulation. We have received further grant funding which will allow us to undertake this work in an additional 52 properties over the next financial year.



Dale & Valley Homes staff receiving their Community Action Award



Introducing our new Community Hubs

Last year Durham County Council transferred the responsibility of 16 common rooms over to Dale & Valley Homes. Five centres were identified to be refurbished and developed into community hubs. These are:

- Mickle Grove in Coundon
- Dovedale in Sunnybrow
- Stanley Way in Billy Row
- Selby Close in St Helens
- Wheatbottom in Crook

The hubs will provide a focus for local community activity and bring residents together. They are fully kitted out with a brand new kitchen and Wi-Fi facilities, and are a great venue to host meetings or events.

The first completed centre at Mickle Grove opened its doors to the public in July. There was a fantastic turn out of local residents and other providers in the area who were very impressed with the new hub and the services it will offer. Mickle Grove is also being used as a community Post Office venue twice a week (Tuesday and Friday 10am - 2pm), providing the same service as the main Post Office in Bishop Auckland. For those that lack mobility, they have already found it an invaluable service.

The opening of Stanley Way and Wheatbottom took place in August with the remaining two hubs to follow in early Autumn.

If you are interested or know of any groups in these areas that would benefit from a new venue please contact Amy Glendinning on a.glendinning@daleandvalleyhomes.co.uk or 01388 770973. Each hub can be hired at a bargain price of £5 per hour or £35 for a full day!

What's next?

Following a successful funding bid through NEProcurement we have secured £45k to develop the flat above Mickle Grove into a learning centre offering; IT training, tenancy training, healthy eating courses as well as practical skills such as plastering. Work will begin soon so watch this space!

"Mickle Grove has been turned into a one stop community hub, it will be a fantastic benefit for the community in so many ways. The money has been put in, now it has to pay for itself and people will have to make good use of it to keep it going in future."

Charlie Kay – Durham County Councillor for Coundon



Stanley Way opening ceremony



Get Connected, Get Online

As part of a Countywide project, Dale & Valley Homes recently held a series of 'Time to get Online' events throughout the Wear Valley area.

These free events were for customers of Dale & Valley Homes and aimed at those who had little or no experience of using the internet or a computer. The events have been very successful with 33 customers attending. They covered a wide range of topics including:

- finding your way around a computer
- staying safe online
- saving money on shopping and bills
- keeping in touch with friends and family

Check out the dates of future events on the back page. Contact the Customer Experience Team to book yourself on any of these events -

0800 083 0333 or **0300 2000 194** or email customerinvolvement@daleandvalleyhomes.co.uk

"The course was outstanding - it was very useful to learn how to create an email account. Since the event I have used the internet several times . . ."

"The course was interesting and even though I had little experience of computers, I found it quite easy and I would definitely recommend it to anyone wanting to get online"

Customer Comment



DID YOU KNOW? DID YOU KNOW?

Check out our new website

Launched this summer it is mobile friendly meaning that you can interact with us easily from your mobile phone and tablets. With a simple and fun design it is very easy to navigate to help ensure our customers can find out about all the great services we offer as quickly and easily as possible. Did you know you can pay your rent, report a repair and even apply for a home online?



Visit www.daleandvalleyhomes.co.uk today to find out more!



Home Standard

The home standard focuses on the overall quality of your home, ensuring it meets the Decent Homes standard. It is important that our customers homes are watertight, have adequate heating and modern facilities. The standard also addresses repairs and maintenance ensuring that the service is cost effective and right first time.

There are 2 elements to this standard:

- ✓ **Decent homes**
- ✓ **Repairs and maintenance**



Decent Homes, Quality Accommodation

In 2007 Dale & Valley Homes was awarded Decent Homes funding to invest in improving customers' homes. Six years on, in September 2013, we were pleased to announce the completion of the final home in the programme with all of our homes now meeting the Decent Homes plus standard. This investment has not only improved the quality of life for our customers, but has also made a measureable positive impact on the local economy.

In partnership with
ESH PROPERTY SERVICES
HOUSING & REGENERATION

The works undertaken includes:

- PVC window replacements
- Front and back door replacements
- Kitchen and bathroom upgrades
- Electrical rewiring
- Installation/upgrade of heating systems.

We have modernised

homes, and spent over
£49.4 million

HOW DID WE PERFORM?

During 2013/14 we received:



98% of customers felt they had been kept informed throughout the process



96% of properties had their decent homes works completed within 28 calendar days



100% of faults were corrected within 14 calendar days



95% of customers were satisfied with the contractors response to faults



We agreed a support package with 4 vulnerable customers to help them best manage the improvement works to their home

But that's not it...

Whilst this is the end of the programme our challenge now is to maintain this standard.

Last year we worked in partnership with Durham County Council and East Durham Homes to develop and implement a strategic partnering agreement. We have since completed a mini competition (based on cost) which was awarded to Wates. This programme will deliver a number of internal elemental replacements such as new kitchens, bathrooms, heating systems and replacement doors and windows. In addition to this, we have procured further contracts from the NEProcurement framework for the delivery of a range of external works such as roofing, fencing and rendering.

What is the Durham Standard

Through partnership working with other providers and our customers we have develop a new standard known as the 'Durham Standard' which will succeed the decent homes standard. From April 2015 this standard will apply to all new elemental replacement works undertaken by Dale & Valley Homes, Durham City Homes and East Durham Homes.

Customer Guarantees Our promise to you We will...

- Provide you with details of the improvement works to be undertaken in your home and keep you regularly informed of progress
- Complete improvement works to your property within 28 calendar days
- Correct any faults within 14 calendar days of them being reported
- Agree a support package with vulnerable customers to ensure they can cope with the work and that any improvements are adapted to their particular needs

DID YOU KNOW?

We now decorate kitchens and bathrooms following decent homes works. This has been welcomed by all, especially our more elderly and vulnerable customers.



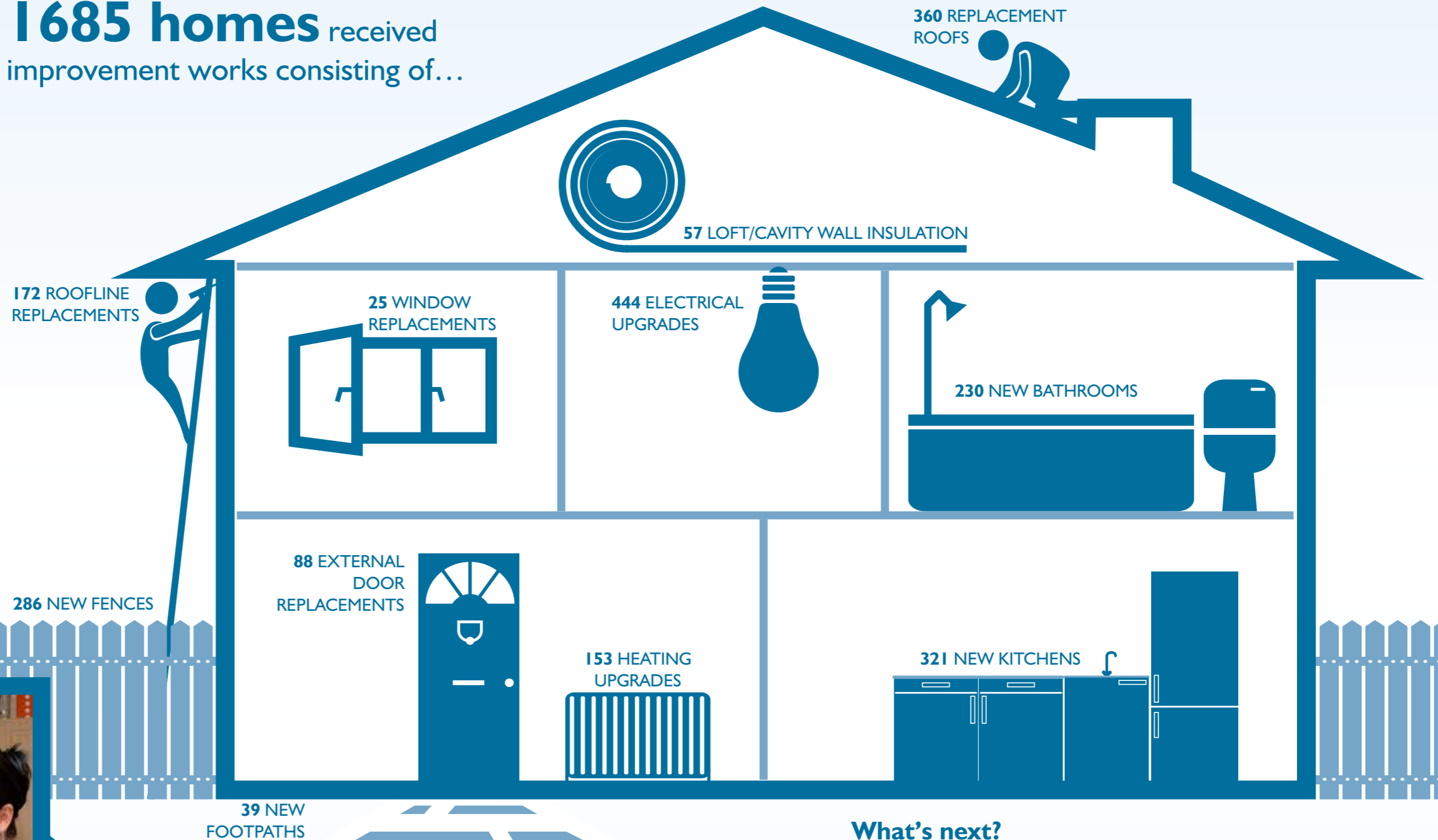
Planned Maintenance

Last year Dale & Valley Homes were allocated £8 million investment from the council to spend on improving our customers' homes and neighbourhoods. A large proportion of this money was spent on completing the Decent Homes programme along with carrying out a range of environmental improvement works.

Here is how we spent that money.

1 685 homes

received improvement works consisting of...



“ The workmen have done an excellent job... now it looks like I have a new home. ”

Customer Comment



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Home

What's next?

We have received a further **£7.5 million** investment from the council to spend on improvement works over the next year. This money will be spent on ensuring our homes continue to meet the Decent Homes plus standard, as well as carrying out a range of environmental improvement programmes.



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Home

Repairs and Maintenance

Repairs and maintenance is the most important service we provide to our customers. Through partnership working with Gentoo, last year we delivered an even better service.



Our new appointment system has meant that all customers reporting a repair have been offered a convenient appointment at their first point of contact. This has led to improved levels of customer satisfaction.

HOW DID WE PERFORM?

100% of emergency repairs were completed within 24 hours

82% of appointed routine repairs were completed within 30 calendar days*

98% of appointments were kept

97% of repairs were completed in one visit

When visiting your home...

97% of customers stated that staff and workmen showed them identification

96% of customers were satisfied that workmen kept dirt and mess to a minimum

98% of customers were satisfied with the attitude of the workmen

Customer Guarantees Our promise to you We will...

- Carry out all emergency repairs within 24 hours
- Arrange a convenient appointment with you when carrying out routine repairs within 30 calendar days
- Undertake all repairs at the first visit

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

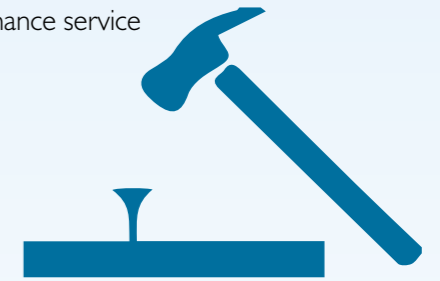
- Let you know who we are and why we have come
- Leave your home clean and tidy when we finish the work
- Be polite, friendly and knowledgeable at all times

*Increase in empty properties

Last year we saw a significant increase in the number of empty properties we received. Consequently, resources were stretched to carry out repairs to these properties which adversely affected our ability to complete appointed routine repairs within the 30 day target. Work is taking place to reduce the number of empty properties which will improve these results in the coming year.

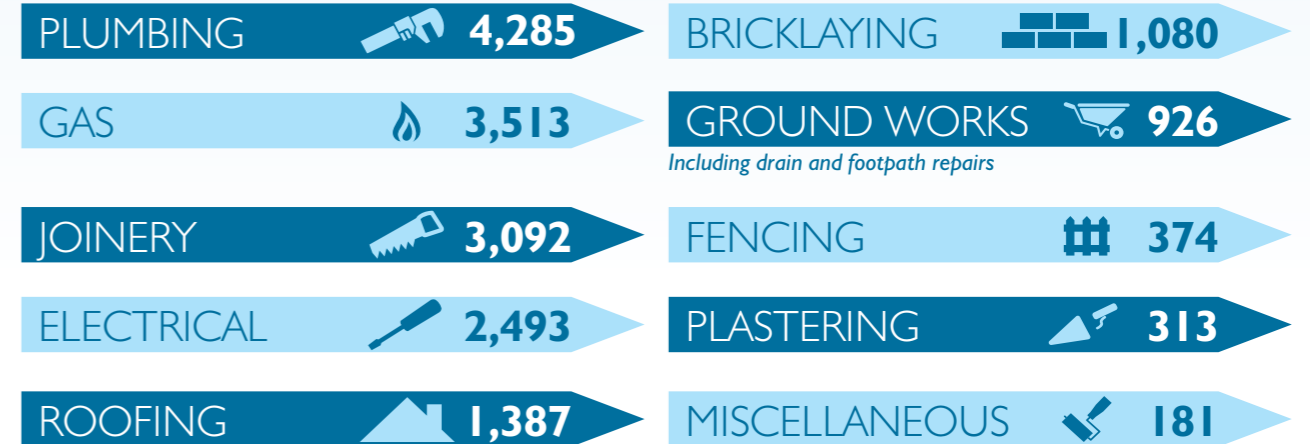
- ✓ **Overall, 93%** of customers were satisfied with the repairs and maintenance service
- ✓ **95%** satisfied with being told when workers would call
- ✓ **93%** satisfied with the time taken before work started
- ✓ **94%** satisfied with the time taken to complete the work
- ✓ **94%** satisfied with the quality of work

(Source: September 2013 Satisfaction Survey)



Last year we completed **17,644 repairs.**

The following works were undertaken:



DID YOU KNOW? DID YOU KNOW?

We have reduced the average repair cost per property from **£425** in 2012/13 to

£421
in 2013/14



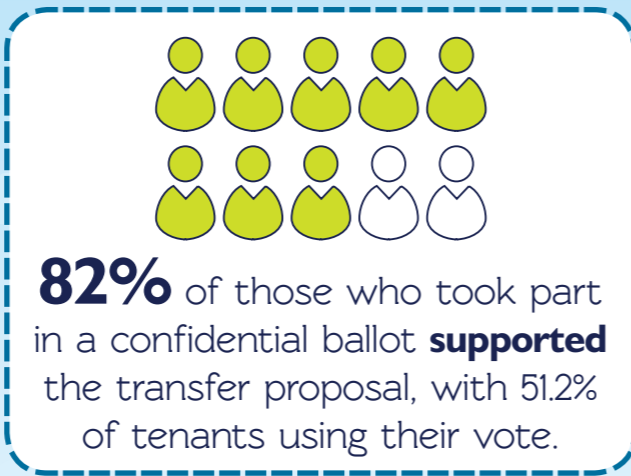
Gentoo have replaced their full fleet of vans with more fuel efficient vehicles. This has resulted in reduced leasing costs whilst also having a positive impact on the environment.



Following successful funding bids we have worked in partnership with Gentoo to recruit 5 apprentices during 2013/14 to specialise in various trades.

The Road to Transfer

Tenants have voted in favour of transferring the ownership and management of their homes to Dale & Valley Homes, Durham City Homes and East Durham Homes, making them landlords in their own right, as part of the new County Durham Housing Group.



“The council has always believed that the future of its homes should lie in tenants’ hands. This result highlights that tenants have been able to make an informed decision and have chosen to support the transfer, which the council firmly believes is in their best interests and those of local communities across the county.”

Cllr Eddie Tomlinson,
Cabinet member for housing and rural issues

By voting yes tenants can now expect more than **£800m** of investment over the next 30 years.

NOVEMBER 2013
Consultation launches and first round of home visits take place.
The transfer website, www.yourhomeyourchoice.info, goes live.

JANUARY 2014
'your home, your future, your choice' newsletter highlights the protection of tenancy rights.

MAY 2014
Offer Document is approved by the council and partner boards and is sent to print, in preparation for the next round of home visits.

JUNE 2014
Home visits take place across the county where staff hand-delivered tenants their copy of the Offer Document.
Tenants attend drop-in sessions with questions about the council's offer.

AUGUST 2014
51.2% of tenants use their vote on the council's proposal, with 82% of those in favour of transfer.
For more information visit www.yourhomeyourchoice.info


FEBRUARY 2014
The next issue of 'your home, your future, your choice' reassures tenants about rents and introduces the shadow board.

APRIL 2014
The name for the new group, County Durham Housing Group, is announced.
Tenants attend transfer information sessions.
Lights, camera, action – transfer DVD is filmed.

JULY 2014
The ballot begins.



TOP TIPS FOR KEEPING **WARM** THIS WINTER

1. Use your central heating system if possible to keep the whole house healthy. Recommended temperatures are 21°C for your main living area and 18°C for bedrooms; use the thermostatic radiator valves to help regulate the heat in different rooms.
 2. Have an energy price comparison done to check you are getting the best deal and cheapest prices from your energy supplier, our Energy Advisors offer this service for free.
 3. Keep internal doors closed and radiators clear from obstruction, use keyhole covers and draft proofing where necessary, draw your curtains as soon as it gets dark to stop the heat escaping and any draughts coming in.
 4. Wear several thin layers of clothing rather than one thick layer. If you are sitting down for a while a blanket will provide extra warmth and keep your feet up because air is cooler at ground level.
 5. Loft and cavity wall insulation helps to keep the heat in your home. Our Energy Advisors can check to make sure your home is adequately insulated.
 6. Always make sure you have had your yearly gas safety check done so that your heating system is in tip top condition and working as efficiently as possible.
- 



GAS SAFETY

Badly fitted, poorly serviced and faulty gas appliances can put you at risk of gas leaks, fires, explosions and carbon monoxide poisoning.

Dale & Valley Homes is responsible for carrying out a yearly safety check on all gas boilers and fires to make sure they are safe to use.

We will contact you at least 2 weeks in advance to arrange an appointment. 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.

At the end of March 2014, **100%** of our properties had a valid gas safety certificate



Tenancy Standard

The tenancy standard is all about making sure we let our homes in a fair, transparent and efficient way, taking into account the housing needs of both existing and potential customers. It looks to ensure we provide adequate support to help customers sustain their tenancy as well as offering assistance should they need to move.

There are 2 elements to this standard:

- ✓ **Allocations**
- ✓ **Tenancies**



“ As a new tenant who had owned my property I was rather apprehensive in moving to rented accommodation but the care and friendliness I have received from all staff at Dale & Valley Homes has been outstanding. I am very happy with my bungalow and hope to be here for many years. Thank you. ”

Customer Comment



HOW DID WE PERFORM?



We registered 99% of housing application forms within 7 calendar days



83% of customers were satisfied with the literature given to them when applying for a new home



78% of fast tracked repairs were completed within 7 calendar days*



75% of customers felt we were responsive when addressing any problems which occurred soon after moving into their new home

* Rising to the challenge!

The recent changes to the welfare system have had a major impact on both Dale & Valley Homes and our customers. However, the way in which the changes affected us was not as originally anticipated. Rather than seeing an increase in rent arrears we have instead seen a significant rise in tenancy terminations, particularly in larger family homes. Consequently empty properties have been one of our greatest challenges over the past year.

Our repairs and maintenance team have been working hard to bring these empty homes up to a lettable standard; some of which were left in a poor condition, requiring a significant amount of work. This has inevitably affected our performance for relet times and completing 'fast tracked' repairs within 7 calendar days.

So far this year we are making progress in reducing the number of empty properties. This will free up resources to enable us to respond more swiftly to fast tracked minor repairs which are reported to us at the start of a new tenancy.

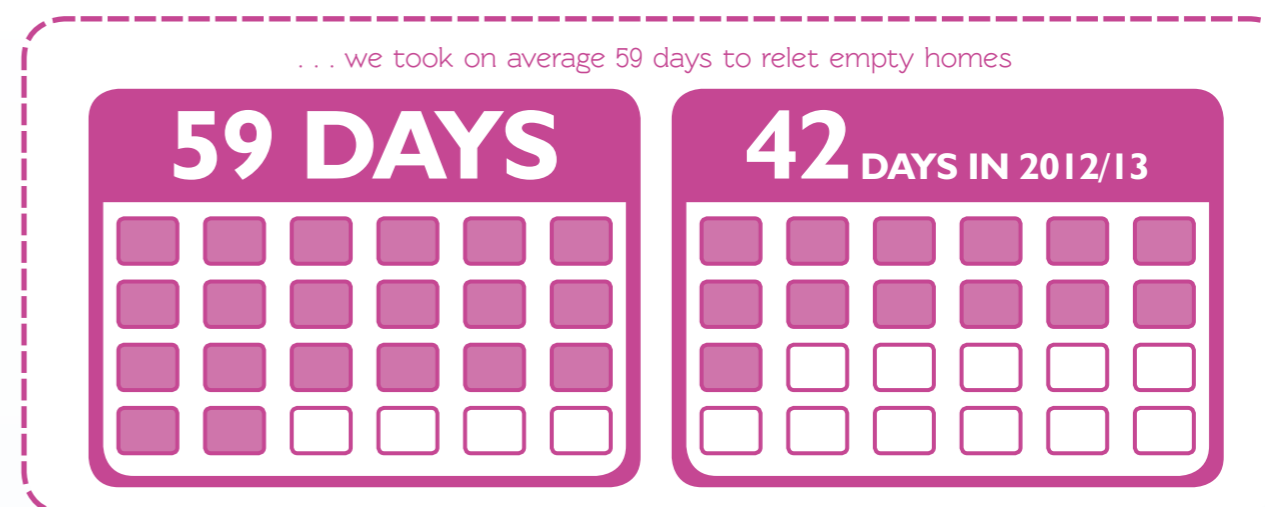
Customer Guarantees Our promise to you

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
- '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

DID YOU KNOW? DID YOU KNOW?

During 2013/14 ...



Attracting new customers

As well as advertising available homes through Durham Key Options, we also now advertise through Rightmove, which has resulted in an increased number of telephone enquiries.

In addition to this, properties are advertised on our newly designed website and will also be displayed in our community hubs.



HOW DID WE PERFORM?



90% of customers were satisfied with the information provided by staff when signing up to their new home



Following further improvements to our rent statements, 92% of customers felt they were easy to understand compared to 87% in the previous year



97% of customers were satisfied with the different ways to pay their rent

“ Since moving into my new home staff from Dale & Valley Homes have given me so much help I couldn't ask for more. ”

Customer Comment



Customer Guarantees Our promise to you

We will...

- Give all new tenants information at the start of their tenancy, which will tell them all about our services
- 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

Supporting you in your home

Money and Debt Advice

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 2013/14:

- ✓ **322** customers were referred to the service (70 cases more than the previous year)
- ✓ **80%** of the customers who were referred engaged with the service
- ✓ The team have helped customers access over **£41k** of unclaimed benefits and have successfully managed almost **£230k** of debt

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.

Discretionary Housing Payment (DHP)

Last year we worked in partnership with Durham County Council and other housing providers to review and introduce an enhanced DHP Policy. This crisis fund is available to families who are impacted by the Government's welfare reforms, including the spare bedroom tax.

During 2013/14:

- ✓ We supported **791** customers in applying for DHP



In November 2013, 729 customers were identified as being in receipt of housing benefit and under occupying

Tenancy Sustainment Service

Last year we supported **267** vulnerable customers through our Tenancy Sustainment Service. Here is an example of the excellent work the team undertakes.

CASE STUDY

Mr X started his tenancy with us following a lengthy period of homelessness. He was given most of the furniture he needed to set up home from family members but was without carpets and blinds. Mr X was unable to afford to buy them due to his low income so an application for welfare assistance was made which was successful. Through our handyman service our caretakers helped Mr X fit the blinds he had been able to buy with the welfare assistance he had been awarded.

Mr X was also in receipt of Employment Support Allowance due to mental health problems but was not receiving the correct amount of benefit. A referral was made to CAB who were able to get his benefits increased. They also identified he was entitled to Disability Living Allowance which gave Mr X even more income.

DID YOU KNOW? DID YOU KNOW?

We referred 74 customers to the Employability Project to help them access work to afford their rent.

30 customers have since found employment.



We were accepted as a food bank referral and helped **28 families** access emergency supplies.

We have supported **40** customers in applying for the Welfare Assistance Scheme which provides one off emergency support to customers in financial difficulty. Last year customers received a total sum of **£33k**.

We revised our rent recovery procedure to enable neighbourhood officers to be more supportive to customers who were struggling to pay their rent. Following the introduction of the new system the company has:

Reduced the number of cases in arrears by 24%

Reduced rent arrears by 22%

We have introduced a new way for you to pay your rent. You may have already noticed a barcode now appears on your rent letters and statements. These barcodes can be used at any post office or pay point when making a payment on your rent account.



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Neighbourhood and Community Standard

The neighbourhood and community standard focuses on ensuring neighbourhoods are clean and safe. It looks at how well we work with customers and other organisations to improve neighbourhoods and tackle anti-social behaviour.

There are 3 elements to this standard:

- ✓ **Neighbourhood management**
- ✓ **Local area co-operation**
- ✓ **Anti-social behaviour**



Neighbourhood Management

HOW DID WE PERFORM?

Last year we undertook **199** estate inspections.



98% of inspections were completed when planned



84% of customers were satisfied with their neighbourhood as a place to live



89% of customers were satisfied with being kept informed about things that might affect them

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



DID YOU KNOW? DID YOU KNOW?

Last year 907 homes received environmental improvement works through the planned maintenance programme. Works included fencing, rendering, roofing and structural repairs.

90% of customers told us they were satisfied with the appearance of their new roof

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.

Last year Durham County Council issued 148 fixed penalty notices for dog fouling across the County. Within the same period there were 1579 stray dogs taken to the kennels.



In 2013 we demolished 5 properties in Honister Square, Crook. These properties have been standing empty for a long period of time and were attracting high levels of anti-social behaviour. After consulting with customers in the area, last year we invested £40k in developing this land to make way for additional car parking.



It is an offence if you do not clean up your dog's mess and you could be issued with a fixed penalty notice of £80.



If there is a problem with dog fouling in your area or you see someone failing to clean up after their dog contact Durham County Council on **03000 26 1000**. Please give as much information as possible such as date and time, location, description of the dog and owner, and if possible an address. This information will enable neighbourhood wardens to make enquiries and take the necessary action against the offender. All reports are dealt with in confidence

Local Area Co-operation

We work very closely with our partners 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.

ST MARYS CLOSE – WOODHOUSE CLOSE

Since 2009 we have been working on a project aimed at improving the communal area surrounding the bungalows at St Marys Close on the Woodhouse Close Estate.

The area was split in half by a footpath which ran from Abbey Road, through the close to Hardisty Crescent. The pathway was regularly used as a short cut particularly at night, bringing with it a number of issues for local residents including anti social behaviour, litter and noise nuisance.

Through the project, part of this footpath has since been removed which means that the communal area in the centre of the close is no longer used as a thoroughfare. This in turn has created a safer and more secure space with an attractive garden for residents to enjoy.

The project was funded by Durham County Council and would not have been possible without effective partnership working with local councillors, residents and police, the Area Action Partnership and Groundwork.



“ I would like to thank you for your assistance throughout the past 12 months on Woodhouse Close Estate. Working together we have managed to bring to a close issues that would have otherwise spiralled out of control. What springs to mind instantly are the issues on West Lane, Scott Road and Walker Drive all of which we have, working together, managed efficiently and effectively. ”

Police Community Support Officer Iain Osborne



Better Homes, Better Lives

Dale & Valley Homes manages a fund which gives small grants of up to £500 to community projects. We call this the 'Better Homes, Better Lives' fund. Our key partners also contribute to the scheme which aims to benefit our customers and their families by supporting communities and improving opportunities

Last year, **34 groups were successful** in receiving over **£15k**. Below are just a few examples of these grants and how they have helped worthwhile causes:

£500 to the Willington Community Action Centre to help set up a knit and knatter group



£500 to the Eastgate Village Lights Committee to help fund the Christmas lights in the village



£500 to the Durham Christian Partnership to contribute towards setting up new food banks in the area



£500 to Wolsingham Toddler Group to purchase arts and crafts materials, new toys and Christmas presents for the children's party



Anti-social Behaviour

HOW DID WE PERFORM?



92% of customers felt we had clearly explained what we would do with their case



88% of customers felt we had kept them informed of the progress of their case

141 customers complained about anti-social behaviour during 2013/14



Customer Guarantees 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

During last year we . . .

- ✓ **Carried out over 500 joint visits with the police** to address reports of ASB
- ✓ **Served 8 notices** to customers who were causing ASB
- ✓ **Obtained 2 anti-social behaviour injunctions**. An injunction is a court order which prevents someone from continuing with ASB. The punishment for breaching an injunction is a fine or imprisonment.
- ✓ **Evicted 2 customers** for breaching their tenancy and causing ASB.

DID YOU KNOW? DID YOU KNOW?

Our staff have been trained to facilitate joint mediation sessions with the police between both the offender and the victim. They have used this approach to help resolve 12 cases last year.



93% of customers have told us they feel safe in their neighbourhood – 2013 STAR Survey

We have trained staff to work with the police to deliver a 'Restorative Justice' project to help tackle low level crime. Two cases of Restorative Justice were carried out last year.

CASE NO.1

Damage to customer's property

OUTCOME:

Restorative justice was used where the perpetrator paid fully for the damage caused and apologised in person to the victim.

CASE RESOLVED ✓

CASE NO.2

Youth damages customer's wall

OUTCOME:

As part of the restorative justice initiative the youth voluntarily carried out some work with one of the Dale Valley Homes caretakers.

CASE RESOLVED ✓



Rent Standard

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).

DID YOU KNOW? DID YOU KNOW?

During 2013/14 we collected over **£16.7 million** in rent and kept rent arrears below our target of 3%.

Making sense of the money

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

- Major repairs and other works e.g. the Decent Homes Programme
- Management and maintenance costs not relating to Dale & Valley Homes
- Interest payments on borrowing used to fund major works e.g. the Decent Homes Programme
- Management fee paid to Dale & Valley Homes for day to day management including the maintenance of properties



How we spent our management fee

- 64% Managing major works
- 19% Day to day repairs and works to empty properties
- 5% Rent arrears and collection
- 5% Resident involvement
- 3% Tenancy management
- 2% Anti-social behaviour
- 2% Lettings





Value for Money Standard



What is Value for Money?

Value for money is not just about cutting costs but making sure we get the best return for every pound we spend. It measures costs, performance and satisfaction, and is often defined as achieving the right balance between economy, efficiency and effectiveness.

81% of customers are satisfied that their rent provides value for money

Source: 2013 STAR survey

Value for Money

Our progress so far

- ✓ Our Value for Money Strategy was reviewed last year. It provides us with a clear framework to assist us in delivering value for money services to our customers.
- ✓ Within the strategy it was agreed that we would undertake an annual value for money self-assessment that meets the requirements of the HCA. Although this is not a regulatory requirement for ALMO's we chose to complete the assessment to ensure we meet regulatory standards in preparation for stock transfer.
- ✓ Last year we completed benchmarking exercises with Housemark and Best Companies and have also benchmarked our performance and customer satisfaction against partner organisations through a county-wide STAR survey.
- ✓ A value for money objective is now included within each staff members performance development review to help embed the importance of value for money across the company.

What's next?

- We need to establish a Value for Money working group involving our customers so we can have their input in what value for money means to them and what they feel is important.
- We need to develop a programme of value for money reviews and implement their recommendations. The working group will play an important part in these reviews.
- We are currently exploring different methods of measuring the social value of our services.
- We will undertake another annual value for money self-assessment to ensure we comply with the regulatory standards.
- We will carry out another satisfaction survey to ensure our services continue to deliver high levels of satisfaction.

How have we achieved value for money?

- ✓ Since 2009 we have reduced the management fee we charge Durham County Council by £1 million without compromising performance and customer satisfaction.
- ✓ Our revised rent recovery procedure has allowed staff more time to be proactive when dealing with customers who are in arrears, providing support and assistance wherever possible. Following the introduction of the new system the company has:
 - Reduced the number of cases in arrears from 1,390 in 2012/13 to 1,050 in 2013/14
 - Reduced total rent arrears from £257k in 2012/13 to £199k in 2013/14
- ✓ Last year we completed the Decent Homes Programme on time and within budget. By the end of the programme customer satisfaction with this service reached its highest ever level at 97.7%.
- ✓ In February 2014 we undertook a cost benchmarking exercise to establish if the Strategic Partnering Agreement was providing value for money. The exercise found that the agreement had delivered total savings of over £57k during 2013/14.
- ✓ In 2012 the company was successful in receiving grant funding from NEProcurement and Durham County Council to recruit two energy advisors. The posts are not only fully funded but also generating significant savings for our customers. Last year the advisors identified:
 - Potential savings of £11k through cost comparisons
 - Potential savings of £41k through Warm Home Discounts

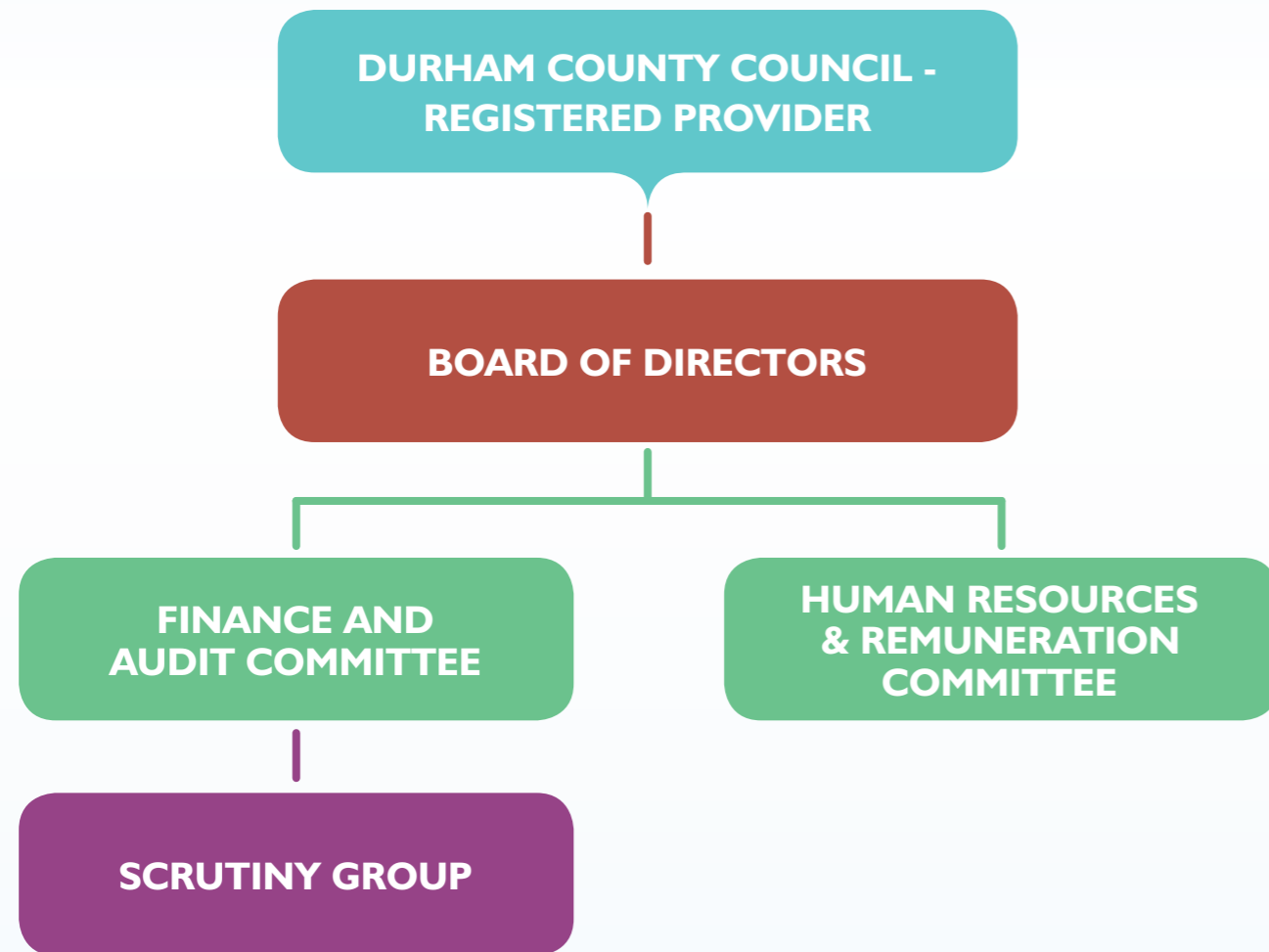


Governance Standard

Good governance is all about having the correct processes in place for making and implementing decisions. It leads to good management, good performance and ultimately good outcomes for 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. They provide a wide range of skills and experience from a variety of backgrounds.

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 customer 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 Resources & 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

Our customer led Scrutiny Group is 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.

DID YOU KNOW?

This year . . .

We completed an annual self assessment against the National Housing Federation's Code of Governance. The code is highly recognised and demonstrates the highest standards of corporate governance.

An external appraisal of Board performance was completed which identified that our Board is fit for purpose and provides a well developed and appropriate challenge to senior managers.



Equality Statement

All partners in the development of this document fully endorse the removal of all barriers to effective participation arising from age; disability; gender reassignment; marriage & civil partnerships; pregnancy & maternity; race; religion or belief; sex and sexual orientation.

All documents can be produced in other formats, such as braille; **large print;**
on audiotape; on CD-Rom; or in other languages.

All documents can be reproduced in the following languages: Bengali, Cantonese, Hindi, Mandarin, Punjabi, Urdu, Polish. **You can get a copy by ringing: 0300 2000 194.**

সমস্ত নথিগুলিকে নীচের ভাষায় পুনর্প্রযুক্ত করা যেতে পারে : বাংলা, ক্যান্টনিজ, হিন্দী, ম্যান্ডারিন, পাঞ্জাবী, উর্দু, পোলিশ। আপনি 0300 2000 194 নম্বরে ফোন করে একটি কপি পেতে পারেন।

所有文件均可提供以下語言版本：孟加拉語、粵語、印度語、國語、旁遮普語、烏都語、波蘭語。您可致電 0300 2000 194 獲取影印件。

सारे दस्तावेज निम्नलिखित भाषाओं में पुनः प्रस्तुत किये जा सकते हैं : बंगाली, कॅटोनीज़, हिन्दी, मैन्डरिन, पंजाबी, उर्दू, पोलिश। आप नंबर 0300 2000 194 पर फोन कर इसकी प्रति प्राप्त कर सकते हैं।

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ਸਾਰੇ ਦਸਤਾਵੇਜ਼ ਹੇਠਾਂ ਲਿਖੀਆਂ ਭਾਸ਼ਾਵਾਂ ਵਿਚ ਮੁੜ ਤਿਆਰ ਕੀਤੇ ਜਾ ਸਕਦੇ ਹਨ ਬੰਗਾਲੀ, ਕੈਟੋਨੀਜ਼, ਹਿੰਦੀ, ਮੈਂਡਾਰਿਨ, ਪੰਜਾਬੀ, ਉਰਦੂ, ਪੋਲਿਸ਼। ਤੁਸੀਂ 0300 2000 194 'ਤੇ ਕਾਲ ਕਰਕੇ ਕਾਪੀ ਪ੍ਰਾਪਤ ਕਰ ਸਕਦੇ ਹੋ।

تمام دستاویزیں درج ذیل زبانوں میں فراہم کی جاسکتی ہیں: بنگالی، کینٹنی، ہندی، مندرین، پنجابی، اردو، پولینڈی۔ آپ 0300 2000 194 پر فون کر کے کوئی کاپی حاصل کرسکتے ہیں۔

Możliwe jest przygotowanie kopii wszystkich dokumentów w następujących językach: bengalski, kantoński, hindi, mandaryński, pendzabski, urdu, polski. Kopię można uzyskać dzwoniąc na numer 0300 2000 194.

Our Annual Report 2014 is also available on our website www.daleandvalleyhomes.co.uk.

If you need some help in understanding this report please contact the Performance Team on **0800 083 0333** or email dvhperformanceteam@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.

INTRODUCING OUR COMMUNITY HUBS

The hubs will provide a focus for local community activity and bring residents together. They are fully kitted out with a brand new kitchen and Wi-Fi facilities, and are a great venue to host meetings or events.

Mickle Grove in Coundon
Stanley Way in Billy Row
Wheatbottom in Crook
Selby Close in St Helens
Dovedale in Sunnybrow

If you are interested or know of any groups in these areas that would benefit from a new venue please contact **Amy Glendinning** on a.glendinning@daleandvalleyhomes.co.uk or **01388 770973**.

EACH HUB CAN BE HIRED AT A BARGAIN PRICE OF **£5 PER HOUR OR £35 FOR A FULL DAY!**



WANT TO GET CONFIDENT AND EXPLORE MORE ONLINE?

Why not come along to a 'Time to get online' event and make the internet work for you.

WHAT WILL HAPPEN?

- Bring your own device (laptop, tablet or smartphone) OR use one of ours.
- We will match you with a friendly volunteer 'digital champion' who will answer your questions and show you what you can do online.
- Receive information to take away with you.
- Book a place on as many dates as you like.
- If you need transport to the event, let us know when you book and we will provide this for you.



WHEN AND WHERE?

DATE	TIME	VENUE
THURSDAY 25 SEPTEMBER	10AM – 12PM	CITY WEST CONFERENCE CENTRE, MEADOWFIELD
TUESDAY 14 OCTOBER	10AM – 12PM	THE MANOR HOUSE, WEST AUCKLAND
FRIDAY 17 OCTOBER	10AM – 12PM	WINGATE CHILDREN'S CENTRE
THURSDAY 23 OCTOBER	10AM – 12PM	STANLEY WAY COMMUNITY HUB, CROOK
TUESDAY 4 NOVEMBER	4PM – 6PM	CITY WEST CONFERENCE CENTRE, MEADOWFIELD
WEDNESDAY 19 NOVEMBER	4PM – 6PM	GLOBAL SPORT ACADEMY, PETERLEE
WEDNESDAY 3 DECEMBER	10AM – 12PM	CITY WEST CONFERENCE CENTRE, MEADOWFIELD
WEDNESDAY 10 DECEMBER	10AM – 12PM	MICKLE GROVE COMMUNITY HUB, LEEHOLME

Contact the Customer Experience Team to book yourself on any of these events - **0800 083 0333** or **0300 2000 194** or email customerinvolvement@daleandvalleyhomes.co.uk

For further information on how you could get involved in the work of Dale & Valley Homes please contact the Customer Experience Team on **0800 083 0333**.

For further information on how you can get involved in reviewing and developing Dale & Valley Homes Annual Report please contact the Performance Team on **0800 083 0333**.



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Check out our new website
www.daleandvalleyhomes.co.uk
today to find out more!

can do, will do

