Annual Report to Tenants 2013

Summary

Welcome to the 2013 report to Luton Borough Council tenants. The annual publication tells you how we have performed against local service targets over the last 12 months.

The report details how the Council is doing in key areas including resident involvement, repairs and maintenance, tenancy management, allocations and how we deal with issues such as empty properties and antisocial behaviour.

We are pleased to tell you that we have improved in many areas and we share this detail with you throughout this report.

It has continued to be a difficult time for many people over the last year and more change is on the way in 2014. Luton Borough Council is committed to working with tenants to minimise the impact of the Government’s welfare reform changes so please get in touch and let us know how we have been dealing with this and whether the information we are providing is suitable. We are always looking for ideas on how we can improve.

Due to the financial constraints placed on the Council, the ‘value for money’ aspect of our performance targets continues to be of paramount importance.

We are proud of our performance but know that with your involvement we can do even better in future.

Thank you to everyone who has helped to shape and produce this report. I hope you find it useful.

Mo Harkin
Head of Housing
Resident Involvement

We believe that getting your views about what you want from the housing service will help us to get things right and ensure that we are providing the best possible service for all tenants.

Successes

In 2012/13 we set up a Tenant Scrutiny Team and a Tenant Advisory Board. We also recruited more tenants to our Service Area Panels.

**Tenant Advisory Board (TAB)**
The TAB is a new group of seven elected tenants and leaseholders who advise the Council on tenants’ views. They also monitor the housing service.

**Tenant Scrutiny Team (TeST)**
The TeST is a new group of seven tenants and leaseholders who scrutinise the housing service. TeST members are appointed to look in detail at parts of the service that might be a concern.

Satisfaction

**Housing Matters**
Are you happy to continue with the printed version of Housing Matters?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Yes</th>
<th>No</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>66%</td>
<td>33%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Tenant Open Day**
How satisfied are you with the Tenant Open Day?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Very satisfied</th>
<th>satisfied</th>
<th>neither satisfied or dissatisfied*</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>65%</td>
<td>33%</td>
<td>2%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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**Complaints Review Panel**
This will start later in 2013. It is a tenant panel that will give a tenants’ viewpoint on the way we deal with complaints. The Panel will be part of the official complaints procedure and will give its opinion on individual complaints.

**Service Area Panels (SAPs)**
There are now four SAPs - ‘Leaseholder’, ‘Sheltered’ ‘Rents’ and ‘Tenancy and Asset Management’. The Sheltered SAP has been heavily involved in the review of the sheltered housing service. The Leaseholder SAP has reviewed service charges and will be recommending clearer service charge information to Leaseholders in the future. The Income and Tenancy and Asset Management SAPs are new groups.

**Key Customers (KCs)**
We had more Key Customers join us last year. Our officers now regularly visit 84 tenants across Luton to find out tenants’ opinions on our estate services. This helps us respond more quickly to problems such as fly tipping, antisocial behaviour and poor communal area cleaning.
Home - Repairs and maintenance

We carry out housing repairs and improvement works including renewing kitchens and bathrooms and heating upgrades. We have a ‘one stop shop’ service and through a dedicated call centre you can book your appointments for repairs and improvements.

Successes

- We introduced handheld mobile working for Officers doing day-to-day repairs
- We recruited four apprentices, one tradesperson, one administrator and one project officer
- We built four Council bungalows in Abbotswood Road

Performance

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Service</th>
<th>2011/12</th>
<th>2012/13</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Energy efficiency jobs</td>
<td>237</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rewires</td>
<td>324</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kitchen renewals</td>
<td>675</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Heating upgrades</td>
<td>585</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bathroom renewals</td>
<td>375</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Door replacements</td>
<td>92</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Window replacements</td>
<td>193</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Day to day repairs</td>
<td>29,044</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Repairs service satisfaction</td>
<td>94.8%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Repairs completed on time</td>
<td>98%</td>
<td>90.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jobs completed right first time</td>
<td>90%</td>
<td>91%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gas safety checks completed on time</td>
<td>96%</td>
<td>99.4%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Average number of days taken to repair an empty property: 18
Repairs and Maintenance Future Plans

- Improve the percentage of jobs completed on time and right first time
- More new building work
- Introduction of Homecall – where tenants can order their repairs online
- Energy efficiency work to help reduce tenants’ fuel bills

Home - Aids and Adaptations

We provide adaptations to help disabled people remain independent in their home. This includes fitting stair lifts and level access showers, and in some circumstances providing an adapted extension.

Successes

- Approved more schemes than the previous year
- Completed more schemes than the previous year

Satisfaction

Positive impact
Tenants who felt the work made a positive impact on their life.

Living independently
Tenants who felt the work would allow them to live more independently.

90.2% 91%

Performance

Cost of Council property adaptations

2011/12 2013/14

£690,436 £726,402

People on the waiting list at the end of the year

2011/12 2012/13

26 1

Number of Council property adaptations

114 in 2011/12 110 in 2012/13

Future plans

Adaptations Officers have received training to enable them to carry out assessments for simple adaptations without reference to an Occupational Therapist. This will speed up delivery.
Tenancy - Tenancy Management

We own 8,069 homes that we rent to tenants and we are responsible for managing the tenancies in all of these homes. We investigate all initial complaints of antisocial behaviour, work with tenants to resolve breach of tenancy issues, do tenancy inspections and audits, provide accompanied viewings on all new offers, and do pre-exit interviews and transfer inspections.

Successes

- Tenancy Audits now completed on over 64% of total housing stock (4,242 general needs plus 900 sheltered homes)
- We investigated 298 cases of antisocial behaviour. 44 of these were serious cases that were passed to the Tenancy Enforcement Team
- 624 tenants were visited to give advice on options regarding the implications of the ‘bedroom tax’

Performance

**Mutual Exchanges**

Number of mutual exchanges completed = **68**

**Assisted Transfers**

Number of assisted transfers carried out = **16**

- Number of transfer visits carried out = **336**
- Total cost of assisted transfers = **£54,500**
- Number of pre-exit interviews carried out = **66**
- Number of new tenant visits carried out = **373**
- Number of Tenancy Audits carried out = **2173**
- Number of accompanied viewings completed = **528**

Future plans

The seven Senior Housing Officers in the Tenancy Management Team currently manage an average of 1,400 properties each. We recognise this is too large an area to allow us to achieve the high standard of service we wish to provide.

As a result, Tenancy Management will amalgamate with Neighbourhood Management later this year. The team will have 19 Generic Housing Officers under two Managers, giving them an average of 450 properties each to manage.

This reduction in properties will allow the Generic Housing Officers to get to know their area and tenants really well and respond quickly and efficiently to any issues as they arise.
Tenancy – Allocations

We allocate empty Council and Housing Association properties using a Choice Based Lettings system where applicants can bid for vacant properties. This gives applicants more choice over where they eventually live, and leads to more settled communities and satisfied tenants. We also manage the Council’s transfer list for social tenants who wish to move home.

Successes

- 86 people on our housing registers were helped to move to areas of Bedfordshire outside Luton
- We introduced a new Assisted Transfer scheme to help tenants who have been affected by the Government’s Welfare Reform under-occupancy rules (commonly known as the “bedroom tax”) by financing their move to a smaller home
- From December 2012 to July 2013 we helped 43 under-occupying tenants find new homes

Performance

Housing register

Number of people registered to find an LBC home

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<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>2011/12</th>
<th>2012/13</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>6200</td>
<td>7538</td>
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Lettings

Number of new tenancies.

- New LBC tenancies: 335
- Transfer of existing LBC tenants: 133
- New housing association tenants: 201

Right first time

LBC properties let right first time

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<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>2011/12</th>
<th>2012/13</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>88%</td>
<td>89%</td>
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577 LBC properties were let in 2011/12 compared with 468 in 2012/13. We are pleased to report that a larger percentage of properties were let right first time in 2012/13 despite the lower number of actual properties

Future plans

We’re currently working to implement a new Housing Allocations Policy and online Housing Register service in late 2013. We are also working to bring down the time it takes to move new tenants into empty properties. This will reduce the rental income that is lost by properties standing empty. From September 2013 “cross border” moves are no longer available as there is no longer a common Housing Allocation policy in operation throughout Bedfordshire.
Tenancy - Temporary Accommodation

We have a specialist team who provide and manage temporary accommodation for homeless households. This includes emergency bed and breakfast accommodation, temporary tenancies provided by the Council and properties leased in the privately rented sector.

Successes

- We reduced the number of bed and breakfast placements to one by Christmas 2012
- Awarded contracts to six landlords to provide temporary accommodation
- Purchased nine flats in Bletchley to reduce the cost of providing Bed & Breakfast in Luton

Performance

Temporary accommodation

Total no of homeless applicants in Temporary Accommodation (31st March 2013)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Total no of Homeless Applicants</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2011/12</td>
<td>696</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2012/13</td>
<td>814</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Future plans

- Improve service delivery and reduce duplication by merging the Temporary Accommodation Team with other housing teams
- Work with local landlords to help the Council to meet its duty to homeless households in the private rented sector
- New temporary accommodation tenants to have an early tenancy visit within two weeks of starting their tenancy
- Introduce tenancy audits for temporary accommodation
- Work with temporary accommodation tenants to minimise the impact of welfare reform
- Reduce the number of bed and breakfast placements to zero by Christmas 2013
Tenancy - Rents and Service Charges

We recover rent debt from tenants, licensees and leaseholders. We work with tenants to tackle arrears at a very early stage to prevent the debt from becoming unmanageable and help sustain the tenancy by working in partnership with other departments and external voluntary agencies such as Penrose and Luton Rights.

Successes

- Reduced the number of evictions from 26 in 2011/12 to 15 in 2012/2013 saving around £44,000
- Put our leaseholder records onto the same computer system as our rents – this will save costs and improve customer access
- Worked with the 700 families affected by the bedroom tax. Over 100 of these have opted to downsize
- Changed our policies and procedures to accommodate those affected by the ‘bedroom tax’ to help them to make informed choices
- Worked in partnership with the Job Centre to help those affected by the welfare reform
- Designed a Budgeting Course and invited all tenants facing court action to attend

Performance

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Percentage of rent owed that was collected</th>
<th>Rent owed by current tenants</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>98.4% 2011/12</td>
<td>£464,680 2011/12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>98.3% 2012/13</td>
<td>£501,583 2012/13</td>
</tr>
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</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Rent owed by former tenants</th>
<th>Amount collected in former tenant arrears</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>£1,457,584 2011/12</td>
<td>£114,970 2011/12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>£1,353,950 2012/13</td>
<td>£97,534 2012/13</td>
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</table>
Average weekly rent

In 2012/13 the average rent per property was:- Bedsits £54.61, 1 Bedroom £62.08, 2 Bedroom £72.39, 3 Bedroom £84.63, 4 Bedroom £92.68, 5 Bedrooms £99.08.

Future plans

- Set up online rent accounts so that tenants can view and pay their rent online
- Review our processes and procedures in view Welfare Reform
- We are exploring using technology that will enable us to take direct debit payment over the phone
- Work with partner organisations to expand our budgeting course to help tenants into work
- Take over the recovery of rechargeable repairs

Tenancy - Void Properties

Void properties are those that have been vacated by the previous tenant and are waiting to be re-let.

Re-let times

Average number of days taken to re-let Council homes

Rent loss due to properties being void

£309,421 (1.05% of rent roll) 2011/12

£393,588 (1.26% of rent roll) 2011/13
Tenancy - Sheltered Housing and Telelink Care Services

We have 922 sheltered housing properties in 22 schemes. Our service supports 2100 tenants in these schemes and in the wider community. Telelink Care Services provides an emergency alarm, monitoring and response service support 24 hours a day, 365 days a year to sheltered tenants and other Luton residents.

Successes

- 99.5% of calls to Telelink Care Services were responded to within the Council’s target of three minutes. The set target is 98.5%
- Reduced the response time for diverted Alarm Calls to connect through to Telelink Care Services from four minutes to just 90 seconds
- Working with Age Concern to monitor the installation of basic lifeline/pendant alarms for Luton residents. This has given reassurance to a greater number of vulnerable residents

Satisfaction

Tenants activating their alarm and receiving a response within three minutes: 98%

Tenants receiving a satisfactory outcome to their call: 90%

Tenants said their call was dealt with in a polite way: 99.5%

Tenants rating the service ‘good’ or ‘very good’: 97%

Performance

- Tenants wanting daily contact - 62.2%
- New Tenants inducted into the service - 100%
- New Support Plans/Support Plans reviewed - 100%/97.1%
- New Needs and Risk Assessments/Reviewed - 100%/98%
- *Pull Cord and Smoke Alarm checks completed - 99.6%
- *Tenancy Audits completed - 97.8%
- Communal Fire Alarm tests completed - 100%

*The outstanding is due to Tenants’ admission to Hospital and Residential Care which accounts for short term inability to achieve 100%.

Future plans

We are looking at new ways of working that will ensure that sheltered housing tenants receive the service they need. We are currently refurbishing and modernising sheltered housing communal areas.
Neighbourhood and Community – Estate Services

We manage the internal and external communal areas on estates. We have six Neighbourhood Officers who carry out regular inspections of all flat blocks to check for any issues with cleaning, repairs, garden maintenance or any other issues. These are then reported to the relevant service. The Neighbourhood Officers all have their own area and make regular contacts with all the Key Customers on their patch.

**Successes**

- Essex Close bin project – has reduced fly tipping, created greater capacity for rubbish disposal and improved the environment
- Shaftesbury Road improvement project – has created a more attractive and secure environment for residents
- Secured a new cleaning contractor at a reduction in cost of £110,000 per year with an improved cleaning specification

**Number of and cost of fly tipping removals**
- 1,379 - £102,973

**Number and cost of bulk rubbish removal**
- 989 - £10,704

**Number and cost of emergency cleans**
- 68 - £10,704

**Number and cost of graffiti removals**
- 85 - £12,952

**Number and total cost of high rise and low rise communal area cleans**
- 23,280 - £507,324

**Number and cost of blocked rubbish chutes**
- 64 - £4014

**Performance**

**High level ASB**
Number of high level cases of ASB
- 412

**Closed cases**
Number of cases closed
- 325

**Injunctions**
- 6

**Evictions**
- 2
Neighbourhood and Community – Antisocial Behaviour

We manage all cases of more serious antisocial behaviour (ASB) affecting housing tenancies. This includes all hate crime, harassment and other serious breaches of the tenancy agreement. We have four Senior Tenancy Enforcement Officers who take enforcement action where cases cannot be resolved. This enforcement action can include informal actions such as warnings through to injunctions and eviction.

Successes

• Preventative work to avoid evictions through multi agency working and informal actions - for example 44 Notices were served, but we only needed to carry out two evictions
• Founder member of the multi agency Dogs Intelligence Group looking at dog related issues in Luton
• Specialist work on cases of Domestic Abuse to support victims

Leaseholders

We manage just over 700 former Council flats and maisonettes. Once a flat or maisonette is purchased from the Council the purchaser owns the interior of that unit and the Council provides services and maintenance to the communal internal & external areas which it recharges to the leaseholder.

Successes

• All leaseholders received their final accounts for the previous year and estimated service charges for 2012/13 on time
• Introduced Buy-Back of former Council properties and completed the re-purchase of 3 leasehold properties that can now be let out to those on our waiting list.

Performance

• At the end of 2012/13 there were 712 leasehold properties managed by Housing.
• The average Estimated Annual Service Charge for a Low-Rise Flat was £509.00
• The average Estimated Annual Service Charge for a High-Rise Flat was £1148.00
• There were 4 new leasehold properties purchased under RTB.
• There were 3 former leasehold properties re-purchased by the Council.

Future plans

• To set up a Leaseholders webpage on the LBC website
• To set up a Leaseholders SAP to meet quarterly