Luton Borough Council's housing service is regulated by the Tenant Services Authority (TSA), which is the regulator for all social housing providers in England and Wales.

The TSA has produced a set of standards which have been designed to ensure that tenants receive outcomes from the service that meet their needs. We are obliged to meet these standards and to consult with you about some more detailed ‘local offers’ – i.e. a set of service standards specific to Luton and agreed between you (the Tenants) and us (the Landlord).

A further requirement of the TSA is that every landlord must produce an annual report for tenants. This is our first report and we have worked with members of the Tenants Consultative Committee and the Communications Service Area Panel in order to agree the content and style.

The report focuses on what happened during the 2009/10 financial year (1 April 2009 – 31 March 2010). It is set out in sections covering:

- Tenant involvement and empowerment
- Home (this refers to the repairs & maintenance service)
- Tenancy
- Neighbourhood and community
- Value for money and finance
- ‘Local offers’ - next steps.

Introduction

The report will tell you how well we are doing and, where possible, how we compare to other local housing providers (Central Bedfordshire Council and Aldwyck Housing Association). It will also tell you what we have not done so well and how we intend to make improvements. Information on what we have spent your rent and charges on is also included.

Our annual report needs to be of interest and value to you. We will be seeking a wider range of views on whether it has met your needs and this will inform the production of future reports. This will include your views on the content, style and method of publication / distribution.

This report has cost approximately 50p per copy to produce and print and has been distributed to every home with our regular newsletter, Housing Matters, to minimise additional costs.

To put the report into context, we are the major supplier of social housing in Luton with a housing stock of approximately 8,100 properties comprising:

- 1,100 high rise flats
- 2,800 low rise flats
- 4,200 houses

We let 597 properties during 2009/10.

We own 16 hectares of communal garden space – the equivalent of around 25 football pitches.
Knowing our customers

In September 2009 we sent out a tenancy audit form to all our properties to gain up-to-date information about our tenants and the properties in which they live - 59% were returned.

We intend to use this information to help us to plan better and offer services that meet your needs.

Customer information is now routinely collected during the sign up process and during tenancy visits, further helping us to build an accurate profile of our tenants.

Statement from Chair of Tenants’ Consultative Committee (TCC)

For many years tenants have found it hard to monitor Council performance. The new TSA standards and local offers change this.

As tenants and leaseholders we can now challenge performance and monitor results better. The outcome of this is that services should improve and waste be reduced.

As Chair of the TCC I hope you all find this report interesting and become more involved over the coming months and years.

Statement from Portfolio Holder for Housing

As Portfolio Holder for Housing I am committed to raising the standards of service to our tenants and to help do this we must be open, honest and accountable for our performance.

The annual report is one of the ways of reaching out to our tenants and letting you know what we have done well, what we need to improve on and how we are going to make those improvements.

I believe that as we move forward, the annual report will increasingly become an important and valued publication during each year allowing all tenants, whether they choose to be involved a little or a lot, to know about the service being delivered.

This will allow you as a tenant to see how we have done and will enable you to hold us to account. This is a great example of how we want to keep you informed and how we want to engage you in the future.
Tenant involvement and empowerment

Luton Borough Council works with its tenants to help improve council housing services for you. We have a small team who lead on ensuring that tenants are involved and empowered.

Our TCC meets eight times a year to scrutinise the strategic decisions that the Council makes about housing. We also have tenant panels who look at:

- Repairs
- Communication
- Disabled tenant issues
- Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic issues
- Rents
- Cleaning and grass cutting
- Tenancy and anti social behaviour.

We will be starting a tenant panel for sheltered housing tenants by April 2011.

We have six tenant and resident associations. These are in Ashcroft and Ramridge, Farley Hill, Hastings Street, Limbury, Park Town and Hart Lane.

In total, over 65 tenants were involved in these groups during 2009/10. We want more people to be involved and offer every new tenant the opportunity to register for the Housing Sounding Board.

We get lots of feedback from the white community in Luton but less from those from ethnic minority backgrounds and younger people.

We are making efforts to change this by attending ethnic minority events and talking directly to our Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic tenants. We still need to find ways of engaging with younger people and would like to hear your views on how we could do this.

Complaints and compliments

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Complaints</th>
<th>2008/09</th>
<th>2009/10</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Compliments</td>
<td>2008/09</td>
<td>2009/10</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

There were a total of 119 complaints received during 2009/10. Three complaints were referred to the Local Government Ombudsman and resulted in a finding of maladministration on the part of the Council. £7,300 compensation was paid. We learn lessons from complaints in order to improve the service. As a result of a review of the above Ombudsman cases, we have improved our links with mental health services and developed more effective working practices with the Housing Benefit department.

23% of complaints were not resolved within the standard time in 2009/10. We are working to improve this by ensuring staff are trained to handle complaints effectively.

The vast majority (91%) of the compliments related to our repairs and maintenance service.
In all our past surveys, tenants have considered repairs and maintenance to be the most important of the services we provide.

In 2009/10, we carried out 34,219 day to day repairs – which works out to be around 4 per property.

19% of repairs carried out were day to day repairs, including emergencies, and 81% were planned works.

In November 2009 we opened our Repairs Control Centre and launched our freephone repairs hotline (0800 0147000). At this time we also began offering appointments for day to day repairs.

We give gas servicing the highest priority given the potential risks of fires, explosions or carbon monoxide poisoning. Regular servicing reduces these risks and we have a legal duty to carry out an annual gas safety check.

In our last servicing programme, 99.4% of homes were serviced and provided with a Landlord Safety Certificate. This compares to 98.4% in Central Bedfordshire.

Of the remaining 0.6%, we implemented our firm procedures to gain access to carry out the service and safety check, including instigating legal proceedings.

At the end of 2009/10, the percentage of our homes classed as “decent” under the Decent Homes scheme was 97.7%.

We are on course to reach 100% by December 2010.

Last year we arranged for adaptations on 100 properties for people with physical disabilities. This cost £567,512.

The average time people wait for an adaptation is 28 months. We are looking at ways in which we can more quickly meet tenant’s needs; including ways we can assist people to move to properties that immediately meet their needs.

What is ‘Decent Homes’?

‘Decent Homes’ aims to provide a minimum standard for social housing. This is based on set criteria which include: meeting the current statutory minimum standard for housing; being in a reasonable state of repair, having reasonably modern facilities and services; and providing a reasonable degree of thermal warmth.

As our repairs and maintenance service is largely provided by our in-house team – BTS – we have been able to provide an efficient and value for money service.

We are facing challenges within the service due to changes in the way that we pay and incentivise our operative workforce.

This may mean that we will need to consider alternative ways of providing the repairs and maintenance service, or reduce the amount of work that we carry out each year.

We will be monitoring this situation very closely and will take the necessary action that allows for the best service to be provided within available finances. You will be kept informed of the situation and involved in major decisions that may be required.

Number of Day to Day Repairs – 2009/10

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Luton</th>
<th>Aldwyck</th>
<th>Central Bedfordshire</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>34,219</td>
<td>18,274</td>
<td>14,677</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Appointments made and kept

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Luton</th>
<th>Aldwyck</th>
<th>Central Bedfordshire</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2008/09</td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td>92%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2009/10</td>
<td>n/a*</td>
<td>96%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Repairs completed in target time

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Luton</th>
<th>Aldwyck</th>
<th>Central Bedfordshire</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2008/09</td>
<td>99.3%</td>
<td>90%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2009/10</td>
<td>98%</td>
<td>96%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Satisfaction with repairs services

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Luton</th>
<th>Aldwyck</th>
<th>Central Bedfordshire</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2008/09</td>
<td>94.82%</td>
<td>91%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2009/10</td>
<td>98.6%</td>
<td>95%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* As we have recently implemented our new computer system and appointments software, we are unable to report on this figure. We will report on this during 2010/11.
**Tenancy**

During 2009/10 we changed our way of allocating properties to Choice Based Lettings. This has given applicants greater choice and allowed them to bid for properties that they are interested in.

During the year it took an average of 36 days to re-let our empty properties. This is not good performance and we are working hard to improve this, and have assigned an officer from the Business Development Team to focus on solving the problems which include:

- inefficient processes
- poor enforcement of the 28 day notice period
- low sheltered housing uptake.

Family sized houses are in high demand but there is a shortage of availability.

We run an assisted transfer scheme to encourage tenants with spare rooms to move to smaller properties offering up to £5,000 to assist in a move. Last year £35,000 of the £50,000 we budget for this activity was spent allowing us to re-house 12 families into more suitable accommodation.

Over the past two years the amount of money owed by tenants (rent arrears) has fallen by 31%. The amount owed by current tenants at the end of 2009/10 was £718,322 – the lowest figure in 16 years.

The reduction of arrears has been complemented by an increase in the total amount of rent collected. In 2009/10 97.8% of the total rent due was collected.

Our approach to rent arrears is to help people to keep their homes and repay their debt to us. This means that we evict fewer people as this action is only taken as a last resort.

£1.4 million is owed in former tenant arrears. We recognise that this is a problem and we are taking steps to target former tenants’ arrears and recover the debt. We have assigned an officer with specific responsibility to chase these debts and are looking at more targeted use of debt collection agencies.

Sheltered Housing

We have 22 sheltered housing schemes across Luton. Our scheme managers help people to sustain their tenancies and remain living independently and in 2009/10 we supported 1,042 people to do exactly that.

We have an increasing problem re-letting sheltered housing for older people which impacts on the overall re-let time. We are addressing this through actions to improve and promote the take up of sheltered housing, including open days and the setting up of a show flat.

We are also working with colleagues in Adult Social Care to understand the current and future need for sheltered housing so that we can continue to provide the correct levels of accommodation and support.

### Average re-let time 2009/10

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Luton</th>
<th>Aldwyck</th>
<th>Central Bedfordshire</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>36 days</td>
<td>27 days</td>
<td>66 days</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Current tenant rent arrears

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>2007/08</th>
<th>2008/09</th>
<th>2009/10</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>£1,200,000</td>
<td>£1,000,000</td>
<td>£800,000</td>
<td>£600,000</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Average management cost per property

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>2008/09</th>
<th>2009/10</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>£14.79</td>
<td>£15.20</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Current rent arrears as a percentage of rent due

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Luton</th>
<th>Aldwyck</th>
<th>Central Bedfordshire</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2009/10</td>
<td>2.59%</td>
<td>2.82%</td>
<td>2.64%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### % of total rent collected

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>2008/09</th>
<th>2009/10</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>97.2%</td>
<td>97.8%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### No. of evictions due to rent arrears

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Luton</th>
<th>Central Bedfordshire</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2008/09</td>
<td>85</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2009/10</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Average weekly rent by property Size 2009/10

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Luton</th>
<th>Aldwyck</th>
<th>Central Bedfordshire</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Bedsit</td>
<td>£46.64</td>
<td>£68.97</td>
<td>£85.75</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 Bed</td>
<td>£52.61</td>
<td>£75.66</td>
<td>£83.61</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 Bed</td>
<td>£63.54</td>
<td>£88.18</td>
<td>£90.70</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 Bed</td>
<td>£74.20</td>
<td>£98.41</td>
<td>£99.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4 Bed</td>
<td>£81.81</td>
<td>£107.03</td>
<td>£116.32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5 Bed</td>
<td>£87.83</td>
<td>£103.92</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
As a result of what you told us were the priority areas at the last major tenant survey in 2008, we have directed more resources towards dealing with Anti-Social Behaviour (ASB) and the condition of estates.

Our Estate Services team deal with issues such as high and low rise block cleaning, fly tipping, graffiti and grounds maintenance, carrying out daily inspections of our high rise blocks and fortnightly inspections of all low rise blocks.

During the past two years we have changed our cleaning and grounds maintenance providers and now work in partnership with Connaught. The feedback you have given us indicates that you are happier with the services since Connaught took over, but we need to properly test customer satisfaction. This is something we will be looking at doing in the future.

We are making improvements around how we monitor standards on the estates by recruiting a number of Key Customers who act as our eyes and ears on estates. Key Customers free up time for our Estate Officers to target problem ‘hotspots’ rather than carrying out routine inspections on blocks that do not require such regular attention.

We understand why tackling ASB is important to you - it can ruin people’s lives. Not only does it make life unpleasant, but it can create an environment which could lead to more serious crime occurring.

Our Tenancy Management team deal with lower level cases and the more serious cases are handled by our Tenancy Enforcement team. We work in partnership with colleagues from across the Council, the Police and other agencies including Victim Support to tackle instances of ASB firmly and offer support to our tenants who have been affected.

During the latter part of 2009/10, we started to measure tenants’ satisfaction with the ASB service, but do not yet have enough information for this report.

We are having to ensure that we find a way of measuring both the satisfaction with the service provided (how well we treated you) and the outcome of the case (what happened to the perpetrator). Sometimes people can be unhappy with the end result of the work we do, often because they have an expectation that the perpetrator will be evicted but the law does not allow us to take that action.

We will report satisfaction information once we are routinely collecting it and we are sure it is reliable.

Neighbourhood and community

Anti-social behaviour actions taken 2009/10

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Action</th>
<th>Count</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Acceptable Behaviour Contracts (ABC’s)</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Acceptable Behaviour Contract Notices</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Injunctions</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anti Social Behaviour Order (ASBO)</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Notice of Seeking Possession (NOSP)</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Notice of Possession (NOP)</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Evictions</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Warning Letters</td>
<td>358</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

2009/10 Estate Maintenance

- 2,703 incidents of fly tipping
- 22 missed cleans
- 20 emergency cleans
- 7 ‘hot spot’ litter picks
- 17 grass cuts (increase from 12)
- £300 – average cost of graffiti removal
- £350 – average cost of blocked chute clearance

179 - Number of the most serious ASB cases raised with our Tenancy Enforcement Team in 2009/10
Value for money and finance

We work hard to ensure that the services we provide offer value for money. For example, our repairs and maintenance service has been externally assessed by the Housing Quality Network as offering value for money.

However, we are not complacent. We know that we must continue to make improvements that deliver either more efficient or lower cost services, and involve you in helping us to do this.

Given the current financial situation the country is in and the impending cuts across the public sector, being financially prudent and doing more for the same (or less) have an even greater importance.

Across Luton Borough Council we have a Corporate approach to service improvement and improving efficiency and cost effectiveness known as ‘lean thinking’. This approach focuses on the customers requirements and getting rid of anything that does not add ‘value’ in the way we operate - known as waste.

Each year we revise our service plan to focus on priority areas for improvement. During 2009/10 the key priorities were:

- Implementation of a new computer system
- Introduction of Choice Based Lettings scheme
- ‘Go live’ of our Repairs Control Centre and appointments system.

For 2010/11 our broad areas of focus will be:

- Maximising income
- Reducing costs
- Being better able to direct services to meet individual needs.

An example of this our plan to move to ‘target rent’ for new tenants. Target rent is the weekly rent amount that central government has said that we must charge and that we are steadily moving towards.

Payments to Government £0.16*
Staffing and Housing Management £0.19
Repairs and maintenance £0.29
Depreciation of assets £0.21
Other £0.15
How council housing money was spent - 2009/10
For every £1 we spent

During 2009/10 our income and expenditure was:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Income</th>
<th>£32,320,239</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Spend</td>
<td>£33,550,537</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The shortfall between income and spend was due to unforeseen contractual liabilities and was made up from Housing Revenue Account reserves. Reserves are required to ensure that there are adequate contingency resources to deal with unforeseen major emergencies and crises. The minimum level of reserves is set at £1million and the current level is £1.2 million.

In addition to the above, we received (and spent) approximately £7 million in grants from central government to assist with achieving decent homes.

Lean thinking

Issuing a rent receipt was once simply a matter of printing the computer screen and inserting the receipt into a window envelope. However, some new software meant that the screen receipt could not be easily folded to display the address in window envelopes, and additional steps were needed to get the same job done.

This change and the associated increase in work caused the team to think more critically about what they were doing and why.

Applying some ‘lean thinking’ techniques to look at the problem from the customers’ point of view, it was found that the primary customer concern was making sure the payment was correctly attributed to their account and that the receipt was a ‘safeguard’ against a mistake being made.

It was calculated that issuing receipts cost up to £5,198 each year in both staff time and stationery and postage costs. We needed to find a way to provide the ‘safeguard’ but at a lower (or no) cost.

It was found that other organisations and even departments within the Council simply issue a payment reference number on the phone for the customer to use in the event of any queries, so it made sense to adopt the same practice within housing. This commenced from 1 July 2010 and has meant that the time and money spent on issuing receipts can be used in other, more ‘value adding’ ways.

*The payments to government is part of a national subsidy system that ensures all councils are able to maintain their stock.
‘Local offers’ are the housing service standards that we are proposing to offer tenants as part of our compliance with the Tenant Services Authority regulations.

Local offers are the standards specific to Luton, but can be tailored to apply to more local areas such as wards, your neighbourhood or your street. These offers need to be agreed between ourselves (the Landlord) and you (our Tenants).

We started the consultation on the local offers in July 2010 at our tenant open day and we will be talking to you until February 2011 to find out what you think about our offers in order to gain agreement or revise them to meet your needs.

We are visiting different neighbourhoods in Luton to talk to tenants in their communities. We will also be holding focus groups to discuss them in detail during the Autumn of 2010.

Every tenant will have the chance to tell us what they think about the local offers which will be fully publicised in our ‘Housing Matters’ newsletter and the Luton Borough Council website.

From April 2011, you will be able to test us against these offers to see how we measure up.

**Timeline**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Event Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>July 2010</td>
<td>Tenant open day</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>September 2010</td>
<td>Neighbourhood consultation on local offers in nine areas of Luton.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>October - November 2010</td>
<td>Focus group consultation on local offers.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>November 2010</td>
<td>Tenants feedback on local offers through the ‘Housing Matters’ newsletter.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>November 2010 to February 2011</td>
<td>Tenants feedback on local offers through the Council website.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>January 2011</td>
<td>All tenant representatives review local offers together.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>February 2011</td>
<td>Final report on local offers to the Tenant Consultative Committee.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>March 2011</td>
<td>Update to all tenants on the agreed offers in the ‘Housing Matters’ newsletter.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>April 2011</td>
<td>Local offers come into effect.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
For housing advice or assistance contact one of the following numbers:

- Tenant Involvement: 01582 54 66 60
- Rent Arrears: 01582 54 66 20
- Rent Collection: 01582 54 60 60
- Anti Social Behaviour: 01582 54 72 78
- Allocations: 01582 54 66 46
- Tenancy/Estate Management: 01582 74 54 00
- Grass cutting and communal area cleaning: 01582 51 03 33

Repairs and Maintenance
Calls from a landline (Freephone): 0800 014 7333
For mobiles it might be cheaper to call: 01582 51 03 40