

Committee(s): Housing Management & Almshouses Sub-Committee	Date(s): 11 July 2013	Item no.
Subject: Annual Report for Tenants 2013	Public	
Report of: Director of Community & Children's Services	For Information	
Ward (if appropriate):		
<u>Summary</u>		
<p>This report presents to Members our fourth Annual Report for Tenants.</p> <p>Producing an Annual Report is a regulatory requirement and good practice within the housing sector. It allows us to comply with national standards to ensure that social landlords are accountable to their tenants and provide them with clear information.</p> <p>The report has been designed for this year to be more user-friendly and available to residents in different formats. As in previous years, tenants have been involved in agreeing the content.</p> <p>Overall, we have delivered a high performing housing service and achieved high satisfaction levels.</p> <p>Recommendations</p> <p>Members are asked to note the content of the Annual Report, which will then be made available to tenants.</p>		

Main Report

Background

1. In 2010, the Tenant Services Authority (TSA) introduced a requirement for all housing providers to produce an annual performance report for their tenants. The TSA was abolished in April 2012, its responsibilities transferred to the Homes & Communities Agency. However, the regulatory framework laid down by the TSA remains in place and it is accepted practice that annual reports continue to be produced.

Current position

2. Producing the report each year helps to build a picture of our work and achievements on a rolling basis for a range of stakeholders, including tenants, Members and the regulator.
3. The draft report for 2013 is attached as Appendix 1. Final proofreading will be done immediately prior to printing.
4. In previous years a copy of the full report has been delivered to each household. This is expensive, as the report is lengthy and we have received feedback from some residents that they would like us to reduce the amount of information sent out to them. This year, therefore, we are producing a short summary to be delivered to each household. We are posting the full report on the City's website but residents can request a paper copy if they prefer.

Summary of performance

5. Overall, the City's Housing Services are provided to very high standards. Key achievements include:
 - 98.56% rent collection rate – although this is slightly less than last year, it is an excellent performance given the financial pressures facing many of our residents;
 - Only 1.1% of all households expressing dissatisfaction with overall customer services provided by our estate staff;
 - Increasing the number of involved tenants from 138 to 261 over the past year;
 - Completing repairs needed in an empty home before we can re-let it in an average of 7.5 days against a target of 10 days.
 - Providing support to 100% of vulnerable tenants who require help to maintain their tenancy which exceeds our target of 95%.
 - 91% of tenants indicating that they were either very satisfied or satisfied with the Repairs Service after a visit to their home.

Financial and Risk Implications

6. Producing the Annual Report meets a regulatory requirement and therefore reduces the risk of intervention from the regulator. Monitoring and reporting on performance on a regular basis reduces the risk of poor performance.

Strategic Implications

7. The Annual Report positively contributes to the Department's strategic objectives. Monitoring and reporting performance to tenants helps to ensure greater efficiencies, value for money, engagement with our service-users and on-going service improvements.

Consultees

8. The Town Clerk, Chamberlain and Comptroller & City Solicitor have been consulted in the preparation of this report.

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Appendix 1



ANNUAL REPORT FOR TENANTS

2013

(front cover photograph to be finalised)

**Find out what we do as your landlord,
how well we do it compared to others,
and how you can help us to get better...**

What is the Annual Report for Tenants?

Welcome to our fourth Annual Report!

Inside you will find details about the services we provide as your landlord and how well we perform against our targets.

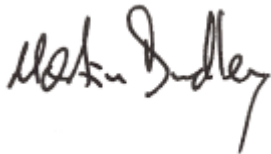
Sharing this information with our tenants is important, as we want to be as open as possible about how we work.

We hope that having information like this helps to increase our tenants understanding of what we do, how much it costs, and how tenants can help improve what we do.

We hope to show each year how we improve our housing services for the benefit of all of our tenants.



Eddie Stevens
Housing Services Director



Dr. Rev. Martin Dudley
Chairman of the Community & Children's Services Committee



Mr. Billy Dove
Chairman of Housing Sub-Committee

If you have any feedback about how we can improve our Annual Reports in future, or if you may be interested in getting more involved with us, please email us at:

resident.involvement@cityoflondon.gov.uk

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Each section gives details of our performance over the financial year 2012-2013 (April 2012 – end of March 2013), unless stated otherwise.

Each section also gives details of resident satisfaction where we collect it and ways that tenants are involved in helping us to improve our services.

1. Tenant Involvement and Empowerment



What is this?

Tenants have the right to comment on what their landlord does, and to work with their landlord to help improve housing services. Making sure this happens, and that tenants are supported to have their say and be involved is an important part of Tenant Involvement and Empowerment.

It is also about having fun! Supporting residents to set up community groups on their estates and getting people together to build community spirit is also an important part.

Tenant Involvement and Empowerment is very important today. Social housing is under-going significant changes. The Coalition Government has changed many aspects of social housing, and these changes will impact upon the City as a landlord, and our tenants. We want to work with our tenants to ensure we make the best of these changes.

Improving our Tenant Involvement Service

We are now in the third year of our Resident Involvement Plan, and the strategy sets out how we encourage and support more tenants and residents to be better informed and involved.

Each year, we send a Resident Involvement survey to all residents. Last year, we had a total of 261 residents return their survey, up from 138 the previous year. As we set up new methods of involvement, we draw on the list of people who say they want to be involved.

We have also been working closely with our registered Resident Associations to help them in their role and to ensure tenants have a proper voice within these groups.

Some of our achievements over the past year include:

Service/Policy Consultations

You helped us develop the revised Allocations policy, and Resident Involvement co-ordinated the public consultation process. You also provided feedback to us on the creation of the HRA Business Plan.

You gave us your views on an updated Decent Homes standard, the results of which have been fed into our asset management strategy development.

Residents were supported to be involved in the re-development project on the Avondale Square Estate and in the Great Arthur House Cladding project, ensuring that you have the opportunity to be meaningfully involved in decisions that will affect you.

Customer Service

We co-ordinated and launched a texting service for residents. It is currently in use for the repairs service and tenants are able to text to receive their rent balances. Estate staff can also use the service to send bulk one-off texts to inform people of estate matters quickly, like when there is a lift breakdown or power outage affecting the estate.

Community Spirit

We helped residents fund and plan their estate parties for The Queen's Diamond Jubilee and the London 2012 Olympics to increase community spirit. We also offered free First Aid training to residents who were hosting Jubilee events. You held Jubilee parties on seven estates.

Housing Services has piloted a Good Neighbour Scheme in Middlesex Street Estate. As part of this, a Gardening Group has been formed and is being supported. Three estates also had 'Our Place' projects, run in partnership with Wastewatch to encourage a sense of community spirit and responsibility for the environment of the estate.

Residents who participate are earning SPICE credits, a system of time credits where each hour of volunteering to help other residents earns credits that can either be exchanged between residents, or 'spent' at participating businesses, like the Barbican Centre and the Golden Lane Sport and Fitness.

Communications

We co-ordinated production of a new tenant Welcome Pack, working with other teams, and Residents' Associations put in their own welcome letters and their newsletters. We also appointed a Communications Apprentice, who helped to set up the Housing Facebook page, launched this year.

Customer Complaints:

The following table sets out our complaints received between April 2012 and the end of March 2013:

Number of complaints received	Nature of Complaint and Numbers	Number of Complaints referred to the Housing Ombudsman	Number of complaints upheld by Housing Ombudsman
40	Repairs - 21 Unsatisfactory Service/General - 16 Noise/Neighbour - 3	0	0

2. Repairing and Maintaining your Home



The City of London has legal and health and safety duties to maintain the external fabric, and fixtures and fittings in all of our rented properties. These duties, and your responsibilities as a tenant, are set out in your Tenants' Handbook or the new Welcome Pack when you sign up as a new tenant.

The Repairs and Maintenance service is split into two broad parts. The first is the day to day repairs service. This is when tenants report repairs that crop up in their home from time to time.

The second is what we called the 'planned maintenance and improvement works'. This includes works that we do to bring our properties up to the national Decent Homes standard, and other works that need doing periodically to maintain the fabric of our buildings for the future. For example, replacement windows or heating systems.

Improving our Repairs and Maintenance Service

During 2012, Property Services started a restructure, which is almost complete. The focus was on delivering a high quality, co-ordinated service to all of our estates. The call centre is fully operational and with nearly 10,000 orders raised during 2012/13. We have performed well against our performance indicators.

The Asset Management Strategy is being finalised, and if approved by our Committees, we hope to deliver a bold programme of works over the next five years.

We continue to explore energy saving measures and obtain grants to deliver them. We recently delivered a project valued at £200,000 which was fully funded by Department of Climate Change. We are also in discussions with British Gas, who are proposing to fund cavity wall insulation and some external wall insulation.

How we've performed:

Tenant and Resident Satisfaction with Repairs and Maintenance Service

When a repair is carried out, we ask residents to either fill in a paper satisfaction survey, or answer questions via text messaging. We ask for residents' overall satisfaction with the repairs service, and their satisfaction with the repair.

Questions asked	2013 results	2012 results
Overall, how satisfied are you with the repairs and maintenance service?	91%* from satisfaction surveys	73% from the 2012 STAR survey
How satisfied are you with the repair carried out in your home?	97%	Not asked in the 2012 STAR survey

The results for this service area have improved since we changed to a new customer-focused contractor. We will continue to make improvements to our services and involve residents in these processes.

We have a number of repairs targets that we work towards as a Social Housing Landlord. The table below reports on the results from April 2012 – end of March 2013 which are very encouraging:

Total Number of repairs completed (all contractors)	9956
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Performance Indicator	Target to Meet	Result Achieved
Number of Appointments made and kept	100%	98%
'Immediate' repairs (complete within 2 hours)	95%	100%
'Emergency' repairs (complete within 24 hours)	95%	98%
'Urgent' repairs (complete within 3 working days)	95%	96.5%
'Routine' repairs (complete within 5 working days)	93%	96%
'Routine' repairs (complete within 20 working days)	96%	97%
Post-Inspections to be carried out	10%	15%
Average time taken to complete works in empty properties (to prepare for re-let)	10 working days	7.5 working days

Decent Homes

The national Decent Homes standard has ended. It is now up to each social housing landlord to adopt a local standard that will ensure their properties do not fall below this minimum standard, and we have the options to agree a higher standard where this is financially possible.

As part of improving our service to residents and as we are now self-financing, we are able to explore options for additional works on our estates. Resident consultation has been carried out and the feedback we have received is being incorporated into future plans.

Efficiency

Our Standard Assessment Procedure (SAP) rating is 67.

The SAP rating is the national calculation for measuring the energy efficiency of a house. A perfect rating is 100 and our figure of 67 is a good rating for our older housing stock.

Gas servicing

93% of our properties have a valid Gas Safety Certificate, or CP12, for gas safety.

The national target is 100%. We have not been able to achieve this because some tenants persistently refuse to allow us access to their homes. We continue to make every effort to address this, with various initiatives including Saturday appointments, stopping non-emergency repairs in the home and legal action.

Planned Maintenance and Improvement Works

Between 2012 and end of March 2013, we spent **£3.85 million** investing in our housing stock. This included carrying out the national Decent Homes works.

Planning for the future investment in our housing stock

It is important that we have long-term plans to maintain and improve your homes. In order to ensure we plan properly, and know the costs of the works that need doing (based on property surveys), we are developing a new Asset Management strategy which will be in place in 2013. The strategy will establish a 5-year programme of capital improvement works to our properties.

3. Looking after our Estates



The City of London prides itself on the quality of its housing estates, indeed they are amongst the best maintained in the country.

Estate Service Standards

We have very high standards for cleaning, gardening and caretaking. These are the services that both tenants and home owners pay service charges for. In order to maintain these standards we have agreed Estate Plans for all of our estates after successfully piloting Estate Plans on three estates initially. Residents were consulted on these plans and they set out the priorities for the estate.

Improving our Estate Services

Last year we listened to your feedback on management resources on the estates, and as a result, reorganised Housing Services to address some of the issues you've highlighted. You now have new Estate Managers on your estates who will work with you and local partners to review your Estate Plans and review and set priorities for your estate.

We will be introducing weekly bulletins to update residents on issues specific to your estate, and will introduce 'participatory budgeting' on estates where income is generated by the rental of sheds and/or guest flats (where available).

Tenant and Resident Satisfaction with Estate Services

Satisfaction surveys allow us to measure how residents feel about the services we provide so that we can identify areas where improvements are needed. This year, we have focused on measuring **dissatisfaction** because people who are unhappy with a service are more likely to fill in a survey than those who are happy.

The surveys were delivered to every household in January 2013.

Performance Indicator	Target	Percentage dissatisfied
% of households expressing dissatisfaction with cleaning standards on their estate	Fewer than 15%	1.3%
% of households expressing dissatisfaction with the appearance of their estate (gardening etc.)	Fewer than 15%	1.4%
% of households expressing overall dissatisfaction with the customer service on their estate	Fewer than 15%	1.1%

Our staff work hard to look after your estates so they are clean, safe and attractive environments. The responses to the survey included many favourable comments received regarding our staff. There were also suggestions for improvements which we welcome and are including in our plans for the next year.

Resident Involvement on Estates

During 2012-13, we have maintained and added to the range of ways to improve how we keep our residents informed on estates, and for residents to have their say to local staff on a regular, drop-in basis. These include:

- Estate Walkabouts to inspect communal parts of estates – dates displayed in estate offices
- Estate newsletters
- Residents' Associations
- Estate Focus Groups (involved in major projects on some estates)
- Estate Plans

- Cleaning standards sub-groups
- Estate satisfaction surveys

Details of the above can be found in your local estate office, and are in the Resident Involvement Plan.

Allocated Members

Each estate has a Member of the Department of Community and Children's Services Committee allocated to it. This means that our Committee Members will take a more in-depth interest in their allocated estate to better understand how we operate. They often try to attend local community events.

4. Supporting People and Supported Housing



Above: Mais House, Isleden House and Harman Close – the City’s sheltered accommodation.

Tenancy Support:

The City provides support to some tenants who need help to maintain their tenancy. Support can include help to:

- manage money
- claim benefits
- establish personal safety and security
- set up/maintain a home or tenancy
- find other accommodation
- develop domestic or social skills
- access other services
- establish social contacts & activities

Housing-related support can help to prevent people from becoming homeless, from building up debts or rent arrears or from needing hospital treatment. It can also help people to have a better quality of life.

How we’ve performed:

Performance Indicators	Planned target	Actual result
% of vulnerable people achieving independent living (those that have successfully moved out of the Middle Street accommodation for homeless people into permanent accommodation).	85%	75%
% of vulnerable people supported to maintain independent living (this applies to residents in our sheltered accommodation and those who receive support in their own home)	95%	100%

Sheltered Housing : The City of London owns and manages three sheltered housing services for older people – Isleden House in Islington, Harman Close in Southwark, and Mais House in Lewisham. Each has a Scheme Manager who is responsible for the day-to-day running of the service. A Sheltered Housing Manager oversees these services and manages the staff.

5. How we allocate and let our properties:

The City of London holds a Housing Register of people who need accommodation and all applications are prioritised depending on housing circumstances. The Allocations Policy was reviewed in 2012 to ensure we take into account recent legal changes to this service area. Tenants were involved in this process.

Once someone is accepted onto our Housing Register by meeting our Allocations Policy requirements, they are then encouraged to actively 'bid' for our empty properties through our Choice Based Lettings scheme.

When properties owned by The City of London become available to rent we advertise them on the internet and through our estate offices. Interested applicants can then 'bid' for these properties on-line. If you do not have access to the internet, bids can be made on your behalf by the Housing Options Team.

We have targets for letting our properties efficiently and as speedily as possible in order to reduce the amount of rent lost and to prevent illegal occupation. To do this, we have very strict guidelines to follow.

We ask people who want a home to help us with this by viewing and accepting the home they have bid for as quickly as they can. We have been successful in keeping down the number of days a home stays empty.

How we've performed:

Performance Indicators	Planned target	Actual result
Average time it takes to re-let an empty property	17 days	18.38
Total number of properties let	n/a	90
Number of properties let under Choice Based Lettings	n/a	83
Total number of people on the waiting list	n/a	1086
Number of households living in temporary accommodation	17	15

6. The Rent you pay:

The rent and service charges that our tenants pay, and the service charges that home owners pay, fund a lot of our housing services. Tenants pay for most of these services, with home owners contributing through service charges:

2012-2013 rent from City of London tenants collected = £11.29m

2012-2013 service charges from home owners collected = £1.55m

In addition, we also collected approximately £1.05 million from the rent we charge on our commercial properties.

Without this money we cannot deliver our services and maintain your home and estates. This is why collecting rent from tenants, advising and supporting tenants so they do not go into rent arrears, and chasing former tenant arrears is very important. Estate Officers now offer advice to any tenant who may be struggling with their rent so please contact them if you need to – they are there to help.

Over the past year we collected 98.56% of all the rent that was owed by our tenants. This is a great result, but we recognise that the current economic climate and the effects of Welfare Reform may be affecting some tenants' ability to pay their rent.

1.44% of unpaid rent amounts to £165,000 over the past year. In hypothetical terms, this would have been enough money to pay for 30 new kitchens or 55 new bathrooms! So you can see how every penny counts.

Services such as dealing with homelessness, preventing/tackling rough sleeping, and administering housing/council tax benefits are *not* paid by rents or service charges. They are paid out of the City of London Corporation's 'City Fund' (called the 'General Fund' in other Local Authorities) and sometimes external grants too.

Keeping up with rent payments

It is extremely important that you do not fall behind with your rent payments. Getting into rent arrears can lead to you being evicted so you should always pay your rent before other less important bills.

We recognise that many tenants may get into difficulties over the next year as the recession continues and the many changes to welfare benefits take hold. Our staff, and our free advice provider City Advice, are here to help any tenant who may be in rent arrears or at risk of going into arrears – if this is you – please speak to someone sooner rather than later.

7. Ensuring Value for Money Services

The City of London is committed to providing quality housing services at the most cost effective levels. We know that many tenants are facing difficult times concerning money, so we take this part of our work seriously.

We have continued to review our services and identify how much different things cost. This means we can tell tenants how much things cost, therefore you can be involved in making decisions to change or introduce new services.

'Self-financing'

In April 2012, the City of London officially became 'self-financing,' along with all Local Authority Landlords who own council housing. In a nutshell, it means we keep all the rent and service charges we collect without it going to national Government for redistribution across the country.

Last year we put some of the foundations in place to make sure we manage the risks of this – but also to maximise opportunities to do things better for our tenants - by using new accurate financial information (something that was a bit 'vague' under the previous national system).

As we progress with this, we will of course continue to keep our tenants informed and offer opportunities to be involved – particularly at the estate level, where most people are interested.

8. Our Democratic Mechanisms

As a Local Authority Housing Services provider, we report to an elected Committee. This Committee is called The Community and Children's Services Committee, which now has a **Housing Management Sub-Committee** dedicated to housing services. This was set up in April 2011 reflecting the increasing priority housing has within the City.

These Committees have overall responsibility for ensuring we abide by all rules that apply to social housing, including legal, regulatory and budgetary rules. They also 'scrutinise' our decisions, asking why we may have chosen one particular action over another. This provides a good balance to our decision-making.

Our Resident Involvement groups and activities are also an important part of making sure we are accountable to tenants by regularly reporting on what we are doing as your landlord. Over the next year we will be looking at increasing this involvement by putting mechanisms in place for tenants to scrutinise our performance and decisions.