

# City of London

## Annual report for tenants 2012



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 third 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 providing 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 our tenants.



**Eddie Stevens**  
**Housing Services Director**



**Dr. Rev. Martin Dudley**  
**Chairman of Department of 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](mailto:resident.involvement@cityoflondon.gov.uk)**

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Each section gives details of our performance over the financial year 2011-2012 (April 2011 to end of March 2012), 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 and continues to change many aspects of social housing. 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

Over the past year, we have continued to recruit tenants onto our existing involvement mechanisms, and have used tenant choices and views to help us shape many of our services.

We have been flexible in our involvement offerings to ensure that as many tenants as possible are able to participate in the way they choose. For example, we started offering afternoon and evening meetings for each of our groups so that it suits as many tenants as possible.

We continue to support our six registered Residents' Associations to carry out the great work that they do on their estates, and to ensure that tenants continue to have a proper voice in these groups.



## Some of our achievements over the past year include:

### More tenants becoming involved!

We now have 261 residents, mainly tenants, involved in some activity with us; helping to improve our housing services, such as repairs, or on their estates in local groups. This time last year we had 198 residents involved, so we like to think that as tenants see what we're offering, more are wanting to be involved with us.

### Resident Involvement Improvement Group

This group is made up of tenants from across our estates who wish to work with us to help support and encourage more residents to get involved. The group monitors our Resident Involvement Plan to make sure we are doing what we have promised to do! Members are also becoming experts on Resident Involvement so that they can help us make on-going improvements. This group devised and approved our Customer Service Standards, gave us feedback on our Tenant Empowerment Programme, and helped us organise our very first Resident Celebration Day.

### Expanding the Repairs Working Group

We have 39 members, mainly tenants, in this important group. The group meets with City of London officers and representatives from Linbrook – our main repairs contractor – to monitor how well we are meeting our repairs targets and to suggest on-going improvements. One of the improvements they suggested that has now been implemented is a new texting service. This idea was suggested as a solution to save money on repairs 'no-shows' by reminding tenants of their repairs appointments. We have over half of our tenants signed up to the new service and will continue to get more.

### Residents' Association Training

We have been training the elected Committees of our Residents' Associations to help them carry out their roles effectively. Associations have welcomed this support. Residents' Association members are also invited to the Resident Involvement Improvement Group meetings, where they are able to share good practice ideas and help to strengthen one another. We will continue to work with our Residents'

Associations over the next year to support them in their roles and their networking.

Involvement in these groups provides residents with opportunities to help improve services for the good of *all* tenants, not just on their local estate.

**If you would be interested in joining any of these groups please contact the Resident Involvement Team on 020 7332 3916 or [resident.involvement@cityoflondon.gov.uk](mailto:resident.involvement@cityoflondon.gov.uk).**



### Tenant Satisfaction:

The independent survey which tests tenant satisfaction was carried out between January and March 2012, and was posted to all our tenants. 58% of all tenants returned it, which is the highest rate we've had.

Question asked	2012 results	2009 results
Taking tenants' views into account	58%	68%
Being kept informed	84%	80%
How we deal with general queries	73%	72%

Whilst we have achieved high ratings for keeping our tenants informed, the results suggest tenants are less satisfied with how we take their views into account. We are developing an action plan, with staff and residents, to agree how we can improve on this area of our work, and continue to place great emphasis on our front-line customer service.

### Customer Complaints:

The following table sets out complaints received between April 2011 and March 2012:

Number of complaints received	Nature of Complaint and Numbers	Number of Complaints referred to the Housing Ombudsman	Number of complaints upheld by Housing Ombudsman
41	Repairs - 15 Unsatisfactory Service/ General - 19 Noise/Neighbour - 7	2	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 call 'planned maintenance and improvement works'. These include 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. These works would include, for example, replacement windows or heating systems.

### Improving our Repairs and Maintenance Service

We have recently introduced a new texting service for tenants following a suggestion by residents in the Repairs Working Group. The group felt it may help to remind tenants when they have repairs, and therefore save money on 'no-shows'. We have over half of our tenants signed up to the new service, and will continue to sign tenants up as they update their mobile telephone numbers.

We are making our telephone repairs service easier for you to access by having more staff available to deal with telephone enquiries – so you should find it easier to get through to us. We are also looking at ways to improve our self-service repair reporting via our website, so that you can report routine repairs at a time that suits you.

Later this year, and as part of our commitment to providing service quality, calls to the repairs contact centre may be recorded and monitored for staff training and development purposes.



### How we have performed:

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 2011 – end of March 2012 which are very encouraging:

<b>Total Number of repairs completed (all contractors)</b>		<b>6064</b>	
<b>Performance Indicator</b>	<b>Target to Meet</b>	<b>Result Achieved</b>	<b>Top 25% Nationally</b>
Number of Appointments made and kept	100%	<b>97.1%</b>	n/a
'Immediate' repairs (complete within 2 hours)	93%	<b>100%</b>	99%
'Emergency' repairs (complete within 24 hours)	93%	<b>98%</b>	99%
'Urgent' repairs (complete within 3 working days)	93%	<b>96.5%</b>	n/a
'Routine' repairs (complete within 5 working days)	93%	<b>95%</b>	n/a
'Routine' repairs (complete within 20 working days)	95%	<b>96%</b>	97%
Post-Inspections to be carried out	10%	<b>10%</b>	Industry standard
Average time taken to complete works in empty properties (to prepare for re-let)	10 working days	<b>4.07 days</b>	Not collected anymore

## Tenant and Resident Satisfaction with the Repairs and Maintenance Service

The independent survey which tests this was carried out between January – March 2012 and was posted to all our tenants. 58% returned it which is the highest rate we've had.

Questions asked	2012 results	2009 results
How satisfied are you with the repairs and maintenance service?	73%	73%
How satisfied are you with the quality of your home?	79%	80%

The results for this service area have largely remained the same since 2009. As tenants will be aware, we have made many changes to our repairs service over the past 18 months, most notably employing a new customer-focused contractor, and will continue to make improvements to our services and involve residents in these processes.

### Decent Homes

The Decent Homes Standard has ended nationally. 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, we are reviewing what our new standard should be. We are able to explore options for additional works to be included in the standard due to our new self-financing status. Residents are being consulted on this new standard, and it is likely to be adopted in 2013.

### Energy Efficiency

**Our SAP rating is 67.** The SAP (Standard Assessment Procedure) rating is the national calculation for measuring the energy efficiency of a house. The national figure is 100, and our figure of 67 is a good rating for our older housing stock.

## Gas servicing

**97% of our properties have a valid CP12 certificate for gas safety.** The national target is 100%. We have not been able to achieve the target because some tenants persistently refuse to allow us access to their homes. We are continuing with the various initiatives, including no repairs in the property, Saturday appointments, and legal action. We have also reviewed our internal processes to ensure that we contact those who have a service coming up earlier.

## Planned Maintenance and Improvement Works

Between 2011 and the end of March 2012, we invested £1.7 million in our housing stock. This included carrying out the national Decent Homes works. All residents were sent written details in May 2011 of all improvement works carried out and those approved for the next year.

## Planning for future investment in our housing stock

We are now a self-financing Local Authority landlord. As such, we have more freedom to plan longer-term for the maintenance of our properties because we have a longer-term picture of our finances.

In order to ensure we plan properly, and financially cost-up 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 aim to agree a five-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. Over the past year, we have agreed new Estate Plans for three of our estates in order to maintain these standards. Residents were consulted on these plans, and they set out the priorities for their estates. We intend to develop plans for all of our estates by the end of the year.

Last year, we reported on a pilot group of residents and staff on the Avondale Square estate who came together to agree new cleaning standards. This has been a success, and the approach is being adopted across our other estates too.

#### Improving our Estate Services

In the coming year, we will be running a project called 'Our Place' on three of our estates in partnership with Waste Watch and the City's Environmental Services Department.

Residents will be invited to get involved in activities which will encourage everyone to look after their estate and to treat it – and their neighbours – with respect. The activities, which will be chosen by the residents, will be designed to be fun for all and will also help people to get to know each other better.

#### Tenant and Resident Satisfaction with Estate Services

The independent survey which tests this was carried out between January – March 2012 and was posted to all our tenants. 58% returned it which is the highest rate we've had. The results show our tenants have a high level of satisfaction with their estate:

Question asked	2012 results	2009 results
How satisfied are you with your estate as a place to live?	85%	84%

## Resident Involvement on Estates

During 2010-11 we introduced a range of new ways to improve how we keep residents informed, and for residents to have their say to local staff on a regular drop-in basis. These are as follows:

- Estate Surgeries with housing managers (open drop-in for any resident to attend and ask questions/raise concerns, etc.)
- Estate Walkabouts\* (to inspect communal parts of estates)

\*Dates of the walkabouts and surgeries are displayed in estate offices.



These complement mechanisms that we already offer and support:

- Estate newsletters
- Residents' Associations
- Estate Focus Groups
- Service Level Agreements

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

## Allocated Members

Each estate also now 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 have recently introduced themselves to residents in local newsletters.

## Tenant Profiling Data

It is really important for a landlord to have accurate and up-to-date information about its tenants. This helps us to identify what people's needs are now, and where we may be able to provide advice or support. It also helps to identify longer-term changes we may need to make to our services.

We now obtain this data from new tenants as we sign them up, and estate staff will check the data with tenants as and when they have contact to see if anything needs updating. So please continue to co-operate when asked.

## 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 tenancies. 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:

Target and Indicators	Planned target	Actual result
<b>% of vulnerable people achieving independent living</b> (those who have successfully moved out of supported housing – it <u>only</u> applies to residents at the Middle Street service and Salters’ City Foyer, which closed at the end of June 2011)	<b>85%</b>	<b>85%</b>
<b>% of vulnerable people supported to maintain independent living</b> (this applies to residents in our sheltered accommodation and those who receive support in their own home)	<b>95%</b>	<b>99%</b>

**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. We now have a Supported Housing Manager who oversees these services and manages the staff.



## 5. How We Allocate Our Properties

The City of London holds a Housing Register of people who need accommodation, and all applications are prioritised depending on housing circumstances. We are currently reviewing our Allocations Policy to ensure we take into account recent legal changes to this service area. Tenants are 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 as efficiently and quickly 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 have performed:

Target and Indicators	Planned target	Actual result	National Figure
Average time it takes to re-let an empty property*	17 days	17.5 days	31 days
Total number of properties let	n/a	151	n/a
Number of properties let under Choice Based Lettings	n/a	134	n/a
Total number of people on the waiting list	n/a	1184	n/a
Number of households living in temporary accommodation	17	17	n/a

## 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 the majority of these services, with home owners also contributing through service charges, as you can see:

**2011-2012 rent and charges from City of London tenants collected = £10.39m**

**2011-2012 service charges from home owners collected = £1.412m**

In addition, we also collected approximately £1 million from the rent we charge on our commercial properties.

Without this money, we cannot deliver our services and maintain your home and estates. We therefore place great emphasis on collecting rent from tenants, advising and supporting tenants so they do not go into rent arrears, and in chasing former tenant arrears.

Over the past year, we collected 98.88% (£9.396m) of all the rent that was owed by our tenants. This is a great result, but we recognise that the current economic climate may be affecting some tenants' ability to pay their rent.

### **Keeping up with your 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 some tenants may get into difficulties over the next year as the recession continues, and the many changes to welfare benefits take hold.

If you are in debt, we can help.

Our staff, and our free advice provider, Toynbee Hall, are here to help any tenant who may be in debt, is in rent arrears, or is at risk of going into arrears. If this is you, please speak to someone earlier rather than later. It is always much easier to sort things out before debt builds up.

**Why not set-up a Direct Debit? Your rent payments will be made automatically. Please contact our Rents Team on 020 7332 1807.**

## 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.

Over the past year, 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

We are now officially self-financing, as are 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. This year, we are putting our 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 for you to be involved—particularly at estate level, where most people are interested.

### Estate budgets

Last year we said we were looking at introducing estate-based budgets, where staff and residents can have more say in what should be spent on each estate. We are glad to say that we now have these small estate budgets, and will be advertising to residents how they can influence what this money is spent on for the benefit of individual estates. This money has come from the savings we have made across all of our work.

\*Please note, we are unable to report on how the costs for running our services compare with other landlords (as we did in this report last year) because the independent company that supplies this data will not complete it until the Autumn. We will therefore report on it in our next edition of Your Homes.



## 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 has a **Housing 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.

Some Members of our Committee also take a more in-depth interest in our housing estates and are 'Allocated Members' (see page 12 for details). This helps the Committee have a greater understanding of Housing Services and our residents.

**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.**