



Council Housing Annual Report

**What we did for our tenants
and leaseholders**

between April 2014 and March 2015

Contents

1	Introduction	3
2	How did we spend your money?	4
3	Complaints, compliments and comments	5
4	How we made things better for Council tenants and leaseholders	8
	Empowering tenants and leaseholders	8
	Quality of accommodation	10
	Managing tenancies	14
	Neighbourhood and community	15
	Providing a value for money service	18
5	Our plans for improving services in the next months 12 months	19
6	Get involved	21
7	Contact us	22

1 Introduction



Welcome to this new look annual review which contains information about our performance over the last year and includes information on what we plan to do better during 2015/16.

As you are aware we want to be the country's best landlord and yet again during this year we think we have made further progress to realising this ambition with an overall reduction in complaints and our highest level yet of gas servicing compliance to date.

Our repairs and maintenance service has continued to improve with an increase on

our already high levels of empty property turnaround times. The number of overall complaints for repairs have reduced by fifty percent compared to the previous year and 98% of repairs were completed right first time.

We have handled 220,000 customer enquiries and have worked hard to act upon customer feedback and ensure value for money. We have continued to work with our customers affected by welfare reform, and have recruited two new tenancy support officers to provide financial advice and give support to tenants having difficulty paying their rent.

Throughout the year the Council has saved over £2m on management and administration costs which we now plan to

spend on supporting capital improvements to the housing stock over the next few years.

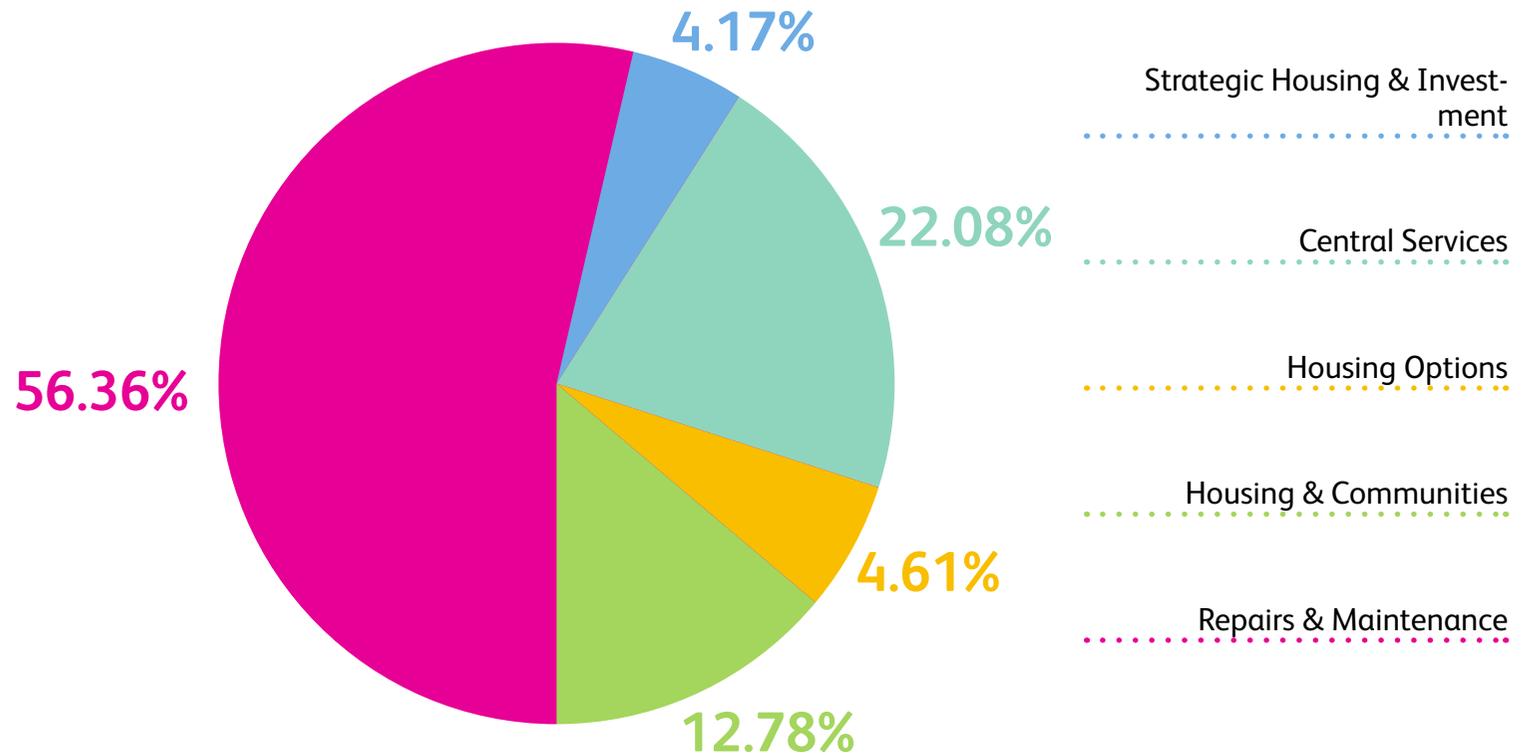
As we look to next year, we will continue to investigate ways in which we can improve our performance and ensure tenants have the right opportunity to get involved in shaping our services. This will include more regular communication and more opportunities to access information digitally 24/7.

We will also continue to enhance our approach to tackling anti-social behaviour, and ensure our customers have access to decent affordable homes in quality neighbourhoods.

Dave Richmond
Assistant Director
Housing and Neighbourhood Services



2 How did we spend your money?



- Repairs to Housing stock
- Empty Homes

- Key Choices – Property Shop
- Medical Mobility & Community
- Homelessness & Advice
- Adaptations Service

- Sustainable Communities
- District Heating
- Stock Management

- Communal Centres
- Area Assemblies
- Neighbourhood Services
- Estates Management

- Management & Administration

3 Complaints, Compliments and Comments

The Council Housing Service received fewer complaints than in 2013/14. There was also a reduction in the number of complaints fully upheld and partially upheld. Cases progressing to Stage two and Stage three remain low. The figures suggest a continued improvement in case handling. This view is supported by the fact the Local Government Ombudsman (LGO) did not uphold any of the complaints referred – for the third successive year.

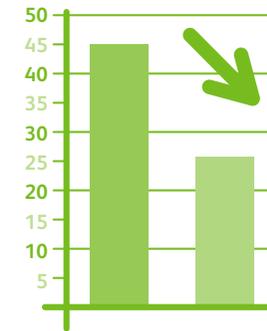
The figures:



The total number of complaints received during 2014/15 was 328, compared to 341 in 2013/14



90% of all complaints were responded to within the timescales



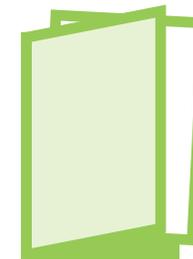
Complaints about lack of service decreased by 42% from 45 in 2013/14 to 26



There was a **3.5%** decrease in the number of complaints during this financial year



The total number of complaints fully upheld was 91 – fewer than the 104 fully upheld in 2013/14. The combined total of upheld and partially upheld complaints was 137 compared to 159 in 2013/14



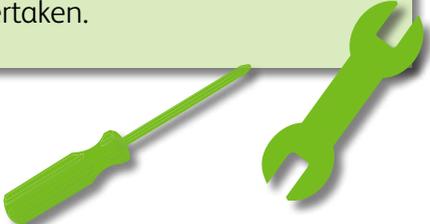
Four LGO Housing Ombudsman enquiries were received but none were upheld.

Of the complaints received many related to 'perceived' delays in service delivery and poor management of anti social behaviour. We saw large reductions in complaints about repairs and housing options.



Repair Contractor Performance

During 2014/5, there was a 44% reduction in complaints about Willmott Dixon Partnership and Mears. This continues a year on year reduction in the number of complaints about the contractors from the peak of complaints in 2010/11. This reflects the partner's willingness to learn from complaints and use of 'tool box talks' to promote service improvements to the work force. The main complaints were about perceived delays in works being completed and the quality of the work undertaken.



Contract and Service Development

The vast majority of complaints were about perceived delays and the quality of the service. A number of these complaints were about damp which the complainants believe had been incorrectly diagnosed as condensation. In the vast majority of cases, the damp complaints were not upheld. The service now takes a more proactive stance to condensation by installing positive airflow devices into properties suffering from severe condensation.



Housing and Communities

In this area, the single largest cause of complaint was regarding the perceived poor management of anti-social behaviour cases, with reports being made by both the reporters and alleged perpetrators of ASB. However, only a small percentage of these complaints were partly or fully upheld. These complaints increased during the year, which may have been due to a more robust approach being taken to tenancy enforcement.

Safer Neighbourhoods

Nearly half the complaints made about the Community Protection Unit were also about the actions of staff in relation to enforcing tenancy conditions. Only one of this type of complaint was upheld.

Housing Options

The number of complaints reduced from the previous year, but there was an expected increase in the number of complaints from applicants removed from the waiting list as a result of the revised Allocation Policy. Applicants were reinstated onto the waiting list where evidence was available to support their appeal.



Housing Finance

There was an increase in complaints from customers disputing debts or the action of officers in the Housing Income Team pursuing debt. The increase may reflect the difficult financial situation faced by tenants on low incomes, although a number of complaints about the officer's approach to enforcement action have either been fully or partly upheld.



MP Enquiries

238 MP enquiries were received in 2014/15, a rise of 62% from the **147** reported in 2013-14. Common themes included anti-social behaviour and environmental issues such as garden maintenance and boundaries. There was a significant number of requests to rehouse constituents, carry out adaptations work, and to resolve issues around repairs.

62% 

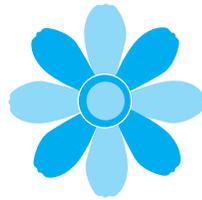
4 How we made things better for Council tenants and leaseholders

Empowering Tenants and Leaseholders; Involving Tenants and Leaseholders, Customer Choice and Service, Providing Support, and Responding to the Diverse Needs of Tenants.

How did we do?



Handled **220,000** housing telephone calls and emails



Held the annual Garden competition which attracted new entrants and recognised how gardens make a positive contribution to our estates



Supported Area Housing Panels who meet every eight weeks across all seven areas in the borough, in addition to regular Area Housing Panel Chairs' meetings

Offered an emergency Council House repairs service 24/7, with normal hours from 8am to 8pm Monday to Friday and an established Out of Hours Repairs Team



Supported community groups to organise estate clean ups

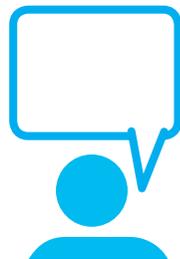


Organised the Locks Project, an initiative to reduce the number of outbuildings being broken into due to an increase in acquisitive crime.

This has enabled local tenants to have free shed locks, alarms and signage fitted to their outbuildings



Worked to strengthen its online service offering, interacting more with customers through digital channels to make services more accessible



Consulted with residents to address issues amongst neighbours and introduced a Good Neighbour Agreement in an area of East Dene with two more in line in Wharnccliffe and Catcliffe



Arranged a number of tenant Roadshows across the borough during the summer to promote tenant involvement and showcase services available to tenants

Joined the Tenant Participation Advisory Service (TPAS) to give staff and tenants the opportunity to share good practice and information with other services across the country



Created a new tenant involvement page on the Council's website to enable tenants to have their say on line

Introduced a pre-sale meeting with prospective leaseholders planning to purchase their property under the Right to Buy scheme to ensure customers are fully informed when deciding whether leasehold home ownership is right for them



Customer Comments:

'Mrs Earnshaw would like to pass her thanks onto John for an excellent customer experience in reporting a repair.'

'Mrs Rogers wanted to thank Pippa for being very helpful and nice to speak to someone that has been very helpful.'

'I phoned today with an enquiry about my rent and was dealt with by a delightful Scottish lady called Lynne. I have to say what a credit to our Council she is. She was friendly, patient, efficient and a delight to deal with. It is so good to be able to give really positive feedback to our much maligned but wonderful Council. Thank you (and give her a pay rise immediately!).'



Case study:

Resident Support

A resident arrived from Spain to join his wife and daughter in Rotherham. Originally from Romania, he had worked as an HGV driver for the last 7 years, driving routes throughout Europe. Though fluent in Romanian, Spanish and German, he was less practised in English. His technical vocabulary was limited and he struggled to understand the local accent.

One of our Neighbourhood Development Officers arranged to meet him at a community library to go over his documents and to help him transfer his Spanish HGV license for a UK one. He was shown how to use online job search sites and helped with his CV. References were arranged and the following week he was able to apply for jobs online. Two weeks later he was interviewed and accepted a job with a haulage company in Doncaster. Your Home

Quality of Accommodation, Repairs and Housing Maintenance

Levels of customer satisfaction with the repairs and maintenance service continues to run at exceptionally high levels, whilst the number of complaints against the repairs contractors continues to fall, with a 44% reduction of complaints from 57 in 2013/14 to 32 in 2014/15. Overall customer satisfaction above 99%.

How did we do?



More than **98%** of repairs were completed 'right first time' during 2014/15

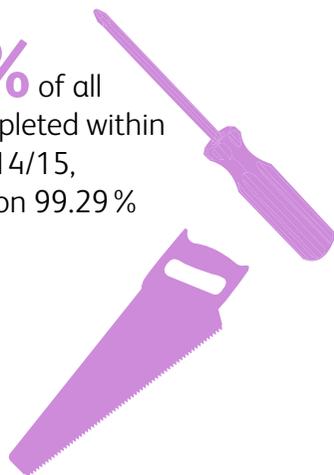


Average length of time waiting for major adaptations from assessment to work beginning was around 8 weeks, from an average of 16 weeks the previous year. Although this was a positive result, the team is keen to improve this even further

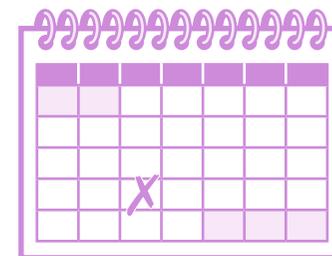
99.24% of repairs appointments were made and kept during the year, compared to 99.21% on 2013/14



99.51% of all repairs were completed within target during 2014/15, a slight increase on 99.29% the previous year



The gas servicing figure has hit historically high levels of compliance, with only two properties not having an up-to-date gas safety certificate



It took on average, 22 days to re-let a home in 2014/15, an improvement in the 29 days it took during 2013/14. However, the service plans to decrease this further in the future

“

“The Willmott Dixon staff were true gentlemen. The customer in question is a vulnerable lady who does not feel very safe in her own home and she said that the men who visited really made her feel safe and reassured. She said that nothing was too much for them and she was very impressed.”

”

“

“I would like to thank Adaptations staff for all you did for me for getting me a shower in and having it tiled. I have had it all done and appreciate it its very nice and I am highly satisfied and thank you once again Craig for all your help.”

”

“

*“I would like to tip the workmen for a good job, well done! £20 enclosed.”
(The money was returned!)*

”

“

“Two employees from Mears attended my property to give my garden its first cut - they were absolutely brilliant and did a fantastic job of clearing and tidying my garden and I therefore commend them and say they are a credit to the Council.”

”

“

“Thank you for all you help, hard work and patience with regards to the situation. I would also like you to say thank-you to Andy Lumb as he has also been a big help.”

”

“

“On Fri night June 6th I rang the response team regarding a hot leaking tap. Being disabled I could not turn the water off at the stop cock. I reported it at 21.45pm and at 22.10pm I had a plumber called Dean Allott of the Mears response team come. He fixed it for me with little mess and intrusion. Could you please pass on my thanks to Dean and his team that was involved from taking the phone call to Dean himself.”

”

“

“More than pleased with the help and assistance provided for my adaptation. Don't know what would have happened without you all.”

”

Focus on our staff:

Mark Nearney, the new Contracts and Service Development Manager has been appointed in July 2015. Mark brings a wealth of experience of contract management and expertise within the Asset Management and Housing sector. Mark has worked for several Housing Associations, ALMOs and local authorities over the past 15 years throughout the UK.

Mark is keen to develop RMBCs services further, delivering value for money at all levels of the organisation, excellence within customer service and providing leadership in challenging times for housing sector.

Focus on safeguarding:

There has been a significant amount of resource invested into training activity in relation to CSE and Safeguarding training for both Mears and Willmott Dixon. These training sessions have primarily focused on those employees and operatives who have greater contact with vulnerable children and families as they are carrying out repairs and maintenance in the resident's home. All employees, of both partners have attended the various training courses and any new starters will also be trained as a mandatory provision within their induction period.

This demonstrates the 'real' commitment the partnership has in delivering safer communities in which we work.

Focus on new homes

Plans are underway to construct four specially adapted dwellings in Rotherham called 'Brayshaws Bungalows'. These are specially adapted homes for vulnerable and disabled residents which are being funded from efficiency savings within our partnering contracts. This investment was the original idea of valued staff member John Brayshaw whom sadly passed away suddenly earlier in year and these dwellings will be a permanent memorial to him and his family.

The bungalows located within the Borough of Rotherham will be two to three bedroom family bungalows, fully adapted and built to the 'life time homes' specification. This will include, level access into the dwellings providing easy access and egress into the low maintenance garden, lowered kitchen units, sinks and worktop, accessible light switches and sockets and level access shower with specialist bathing facilities.

The bungalows will feel spacious and will allow easy access for disabled and wheelchair users.

Focus on communication:

Reducing complaints about the time taken to complete repairs

It became apparent in the year that complaints were being caused by the service failing to communicate where it intended to undertake programmes of work on issues like plastering and non-urgent footpath repairs.

This communication issue has been overcome by the inspector confirming by letter or text that the work is to be completed, logging the work on the system as pending so all officers can see what's intended and then the contractor confirming the work has been released to them and making an appointment with the customer.

Focus on quality of lettings:

The Quality of Empty Homes

A number of improvements have been made to the empty homes service, including:

- Introducing an improved process to ensure lofts are inspected and previous occupants contents removed.
- Ensuring that boundary hedges for empty properties comply with the guidance for high hedges as outlined in the Anti-Social Behaviour Act 2003,
- Introducing an information sheet for new tenants for works due to be completed after the tenancy commences, which gives assurance the work will be completed reducing complaints about delays or lack of repair service.
- Using sticky bug traps in all empty properties to identify any potential insect infestation issues.

Focus on tenant safety:

Gas Safety Certificates

Just six properties with a gas safety certificate outstanding at the end of March 2014 - you wouldn't think it could get any better than this but, by March 2015, only two properties were without a certificate!

An astounding achievement, particularly when you look at the fact that in March 2013, 19 properties had certificates outstanding.

Over the last three years, performance has shown significant improvement - at the beginning of 2011 there were 472 properties without a valid certificate!

Focus on apprentices:

Contractors in the Community

Housing repairs and maintenance service Willmott Dixon has adopted Clifton School and given 26 students a week of practical construction work experience.

Staff met with the executive head of the school to plan the continuation of support throughout 2015/16.

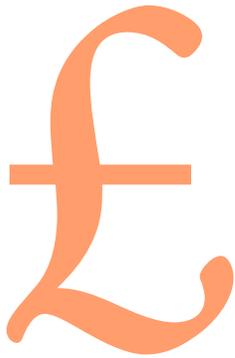
In addition, Willmott Dixon has taken a further four trade apprentices, bringing the total number of young people from Rotherham currently on traineeships within the company to 13 - nearly 10% of its local workforce!

Mears has also recruited 47 apprentices from the local area since the contract commenced in November 2010. In total, Mears has employed 65 work placements over the life of the Rotherham contract helping a wide range of people. The majority of these placements have been young disabled people, hard-to-reach unemployed and the long term unemployed.

The Mears Academy has sponsored 105 Adult learners, giving them valuable life and work skills, preparing them for the world of work.

Managing Tenancies – Allocations, Rents and Tenure

How did we do?



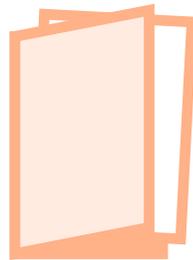
Worked with Age UK and supported 140 elderly tenants to complete applications for Attendance allowance; 130 tenants were successful in their applications and received on average extra income of £55 per week



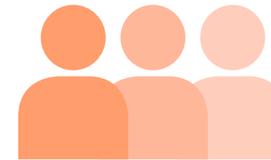
Recruited two new tenancy support officers to provide financial advice and give support to tenants having difficulty paying their rent



Amended our rent collection policy to provide support to tenants in rent arrears before taking legal action



Saw an improved performance on resolving anti-social behaviour complaints with 98.5% of cases resolved putting the Council in the top 25% performance nationally when compared to other housing providers



Introduced a team of three tenancy support officer to help vulnerable tenants who are in debt and at risk of eviction



Focus on security:

Security fobs

During the year, a number of tenants and leaseholders had problems with security fobs and access to flats, the fobs being prone to damage if dropped or placed close to devices such as mobile phones.

In response to this, the service introduced a more robust fob which is damaged less easily and a web based key Management System, which allows the contact centre to allow customers into blocks remotely if they can answer recognised security questions.

The service is retrospectively installing readers into those blocks where high security doors have been installed and will install the reader as part of the security door installation programme. It is anticipated that this programme will be completed during 2016/7.

An additional advantage to the new system is it may help in the enforcement action in anti-social behaviour cases because it records access against individual fobs.

“Thank you to Lianne Hancock, for all her help and also Suzanne Davey for her work at the moment...I do not know what I would have done without you.”

“On behalf of Thomas I’d like to say thank you for the support that Housing Income Officer Tom Bilby has given the family. I know that it could have been a much worse outcome for everyone had he not have been so on the ball with this complicated case.”

“I’m extremely grateful to everyone involved but I’d like to pay particular tribute to Trevor Wilson who has been exemplary in every contact I have had with him to date. His skills, approach and diplomacy make him a tremendous ambassador for the council and I just wanted to place on record my appreciation for his efforts.”

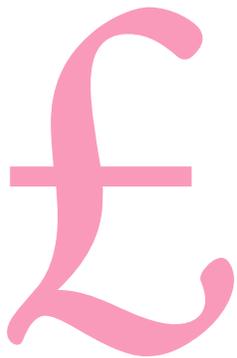


“Lianne Hancock in the property shop pulled out all the stops – she was fantastic and her support was very much appreciated.”

Neighbourhood and Community: Caring for Your Neighbourhood, and Tackling Anti-Social Behaviour through

How did we do?

98.5% ASB cases closed as resolved at putting us in the Housemark Upper Quartile national performance for housing providers



Year-end outturn on Safer Homes budget (2014/15 Budget – £60,148) delivering target hardening measures to individual homes and localities, including security lighting, additional locks, intruder alarms etc

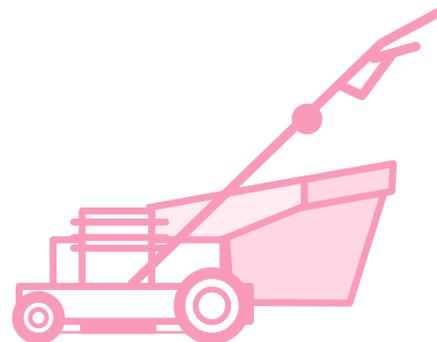
In resolving ASB issues, we have employed a range of tools available to us and have issued the following since January 2014

Acceptable Behaviour Contracts	283
Anti-Social Behaviour Orders	59
Anti-Social Behaviour Injunctions	19
Injunctions	3
'New' Criminal Behaviour Order	2
'New' Closure Notice	1
'New' Community Protection Notice	1
Tenancy Evictions	19
Notice to Extend and Introductory tenancy	13
Notice of Possession Proceedings (Introductory Tenancies)	12
Notice of Seeking Possession (Secure Tenancies)	40
Suspended Possession Orders	13

We have invested an additional £125k into estate caretaking services, which has enabled us to tackle ‘grot spots’ around the neighbourhoods, including garage sites, and also to provide intensive estate stewardship work to areas such as the Wharnccliffe estate in Rotherham Town Centre

A further £125k has been allocated to estate caretaking in 2015/16 to enable this intensive stewardship work to continue in other areas, such as Masbrough estate, within the Ferham/ Masbrough deprived community

We have invested £286K additionally in grounds maintenance of Housing land and communal areas this year, delivered via Streetpride, enabling us to increase grounds maintenance frequency and improved standards



Focus on caretaking:

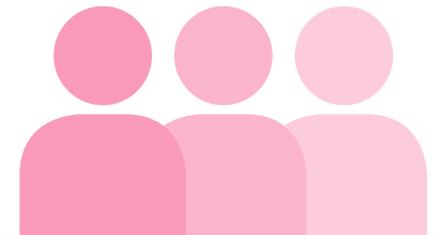
Estate Caretaking

Working with our contract partners Mears and Wilmott Dixon, the way estate caretaking is delivered has been re-organised. This involves a move away from a reactive approach to dealing with caretaking work to a more structured approach.

We now have a clear schedule of work that will be undertaken when caretakers visit an area and a timetable of when areas will be visited and how often. The arrangements are monitored on a monthly basis with our contract partners and the work programme adjusted to ensure that estate caretaking resources are being deployed as effectively as possible.



The noise issue has caused some upset and stress to a number of residents, but was so quickly resolved due to Enforcement Officer Trevor Greave’s quick and professional intervention.”



“On behalf of myself and the other tenants affected by this horrendous behaviour, I would like to thank Rob Finlayson in the Anti-Social Behaviour Team for his hard work and support through this difficult time.”



Providing a Value for Money Service

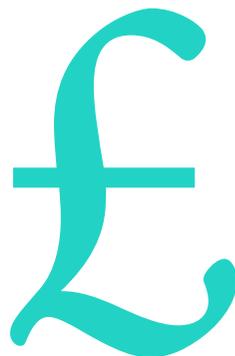
How did we do?



99.83% of rent was collected during 2014/15, an improvement on 99.77% collected the previous year

Total income was **£83.6m**, with £1.02m arrears for 2014/15

Throughout the year the Council saved over £2m on management and administration costs which we now plan to spend on supporting capital improvements to the housingstock over the next few years.



Cumulative rent arrears increased to 2.72% of rent due. This was a deterioration on the previous year's performance due to ongoing reduction in benefits paid to our tenants but we still performed well nationally, and were ranked 136 out of 271 organisations

Focus on efficiency:

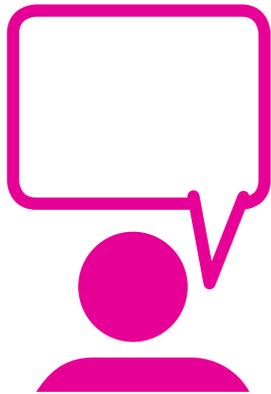
Smarter Working

The Council saved over £400k through working smarter with its two repairs and maintenance contractors. This includes improvements such as securing better prices on products and getting repairs right first time. The Council is using these savings to build four disabled person bungalows which will be completed in March 2016

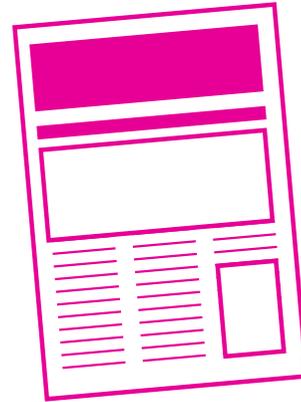
£400,000 saved ✓

5 Our plans for improving services in the next months 12 months

We will significantly improve the way we involve and respond to our customers. This will include:



Making it easier for tenants to understand what we do and how they can influence it

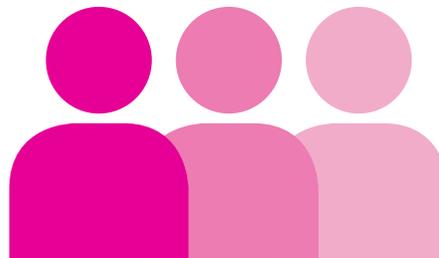


Reintroducing a newsletter to improve communication with tenants



Engaging with more leaseholders and work with them to determine service standards.

Doing more to understand our tenants needs, including undertaking a STAR survey



Becoming a TPAS member and secure accreditation.

We will ensure that people are able to live in decent affordable homes by:

Continuing to improve the quality and responsiveness of the Council housing Repairs and Maintenance Service



Implementing an Integrated Housing Management System and revise processes to ensure more services are available to customers online

Enhancing our approach to tackling anti-social behaviour, utilising all available tools and powers, and introducing the selective licensing of private rented properties.



Reviewing and if necessary revising the joint assessment protocol for Homeless 16/17 year olds



Supporting and ensuring private sector housing landlords meet their responsibilities in improving standards in the sector. In part through the commencement of the Selective Licensing Scheme



6 Ways to get involved

Tenant involvement could be one of the best ways of finding out what's happening where you live and it's a great way to meet new people. Ways to get involved include the following:

Area Housing Panels – formal tenant meetings to improve the local environment

Quality Standards Challenge Group (QSCG) – challenging and scrutinising housing services.

Customer Inspection Service (CIS) and Learning from Customers Forum – mystery shopping activities.

RotherFed – A charity that supports communities and tenants to grow and develop. RotherFed works with them to build their sense of belonging, community pride and spirit. RotherFed works with and through community groups that are committed to bringing communities together. This helps to give all residents and tenants a voice and create local solutions to local issues.

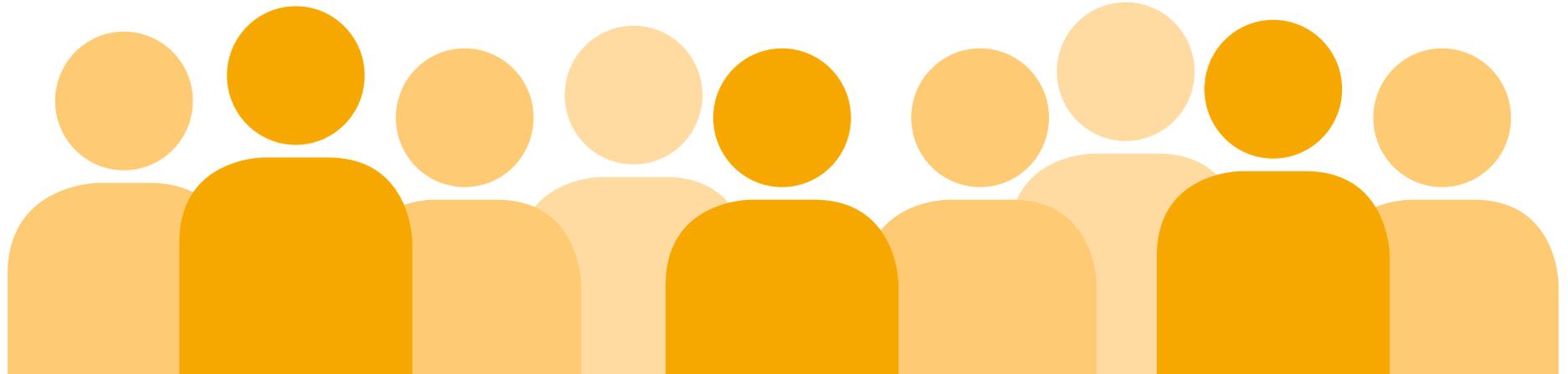
If you would like to get involved or would be interested in setting up a group, then please contact us and we will be happy to help.

Telephone: 01709 822786 or email customerinvolvement@rotherham.gov.uk

Follow us on Twitter



twitter.com/RotherhamTI



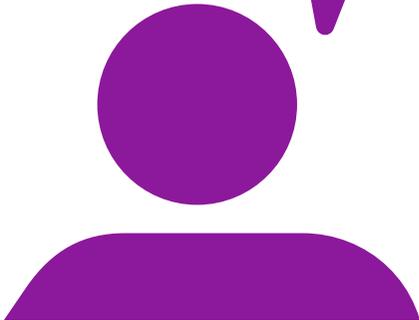
7 Contact us

We would like to encourage you to contact us about our performance and plans and you can do this in any of the following ways:

Email:
ServiceQuality@rotherham.gov.uk

Telephone contact:
Performance and Quality Team
01709 822661/822328

Letter:
Performance and Quality Team
2nd Floor, Wing C
Riverside House
Main Street
Rotherham
S60 1AE



Other useful links and telephone numbers, if you wish to contact the Council regarding either Council Housing or other services:

- **Council Housing (general enquiries):** 01709 336040
- **Council Housing Repairs:** 01709 336009
- **Key Choices:** 01709 336005
- **Streetpride:** 01709 336003
- **Website:** www.rotherham.gov.uk/contactus
- **Council General Enquiries:** 01709 382121 minicom 01709 823256
- **Council Tax and Benefits:** 01709 336006

Request a non-urgent repair online:

- www.rotherham.gov.uk/forms
- **By email:** councilhomes@rotherham.gov.uk

Contact your local Housing Officer

Housing Officers across the borough are responsible for looking after you and your home. We can put you in touch with your local Housing Officer.

