



Summary annual report to tenants and leaseholders 2010

Our vision is to provide excellent
housing management services,
with our residents at the heart of
everything we do



Brighton & Hove
City Council



I'm pleased to report that we achieved some big improvements to our services in 2009/10, working in partnership with tenants and leaseholders

Maria Caulfield,
Cabinet Member for Housing

Welcome to this summary annual report setting out our performance as a landlord in the year ending 31 March 2010 and our commitments to council tenants and leaseholders for this current year.

Residents have a very powerful influence at Brighton & Hove City Council. In this report council tenants and leaseholders show how closely residents are involved in shaping our housing policies and priorities and the ways we provide landlord services, and in checking on our performance.

I'm pleased to report that we achieved some big improvements to our services in 2009/10 and better value for money, working together with tenants and leaseholders. For example, the new repairs partnership we have developed with residents will help us to bring every tenant's home up to the Decent Homes Standard and provide a better service to all of you. And the new ways of working with residents to improve life on estates that we have been trying out in the Turning the Tide pilot in East Brighton have been so successful that we expect to extend them across the city.

We still have room for improvement, however. This report reflects the feedback we've had from tenants and leaseholders on how

you think we perform and where we need to improve. It sets out how we intend to work with you to provide excellent housing management services, with our residents at the heart of everything we do.

I would like to thank all our tenant and resident representatives, members of the Housing Management Consultative Committee and staff who have worked very hard in the last year to bring about real improvements in our housing service. By working closely together, we are making steady progress towards achieving excellence in all our housing services and making the improvements we set out in our Service Improvement Plan 2009-12.

I would also like to thank the council tenant representatives and other board members of Brighton & Hove Seaside Community Homes, the housing company set up by the council to raise investment for improvements to council tenants' homes. They have been working hard to get our 'Local Delivery Vehicle' project up and running and we hope that will be achieved in this financial year.

Maria Caulfield,
Cabinet Member for Housing

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The sections in this annual report set out how we meet the standards set by the Tenant Services Authority for council and housing association landlords, any gaps and our improvement plans. They include feedback from tenants and leaseholders who gave us their views in questionnaires, exercises and one-off focus group meetings to talk about the TSA standards.

At 31 March 2010 Brighton & Hove City Council owned and managed 12,302 rented homes across Brighton, Hove and Portslade, including 848 flats in 23 sheltered schemes. Another 2,235 flats in our blocks were owned by leaseholders.

Introduction

How tenants and leaseholders have been involved in producing and checking this annual report

This is your annual report and we have tried to involve as many tenants and leaseholders as we could in reporting how we perform as a landlord and what we need and intend to do to improve. We set out to produce an informative, honest and accurate annual report – a true picture of our strengths and weaknesses and what tenants and leaseholders think of us, in their own words.

Representatives from our many residents' associations and working groups explain what they have achieved in 2009/10. We also include the views and comments of tenants and leaseholders who helped us assess how we meet the new standards for social housing landlords set by the Tenant Services Authority (TSA). Their feedback indicates we need to make some improvements to fully meet all the TSA standards. We will work with residents to do this. We have outlined in the report how we meet the standards, any gaps and what we plan to do by 31 March 2011 to improve our services to you.

Throughout July we consulted all resident associations and groups on a draft of the full annual report. We also put it on our website for comment, emailed residents on our resident

involvement database for their views and made copies available at our housing offices. It also went on our Tenant Forum. Over 100 comments were gratefully received from residents and the Homing In Tenant Editorial Board, which helped us shape the final report. It was agreed by the Housing Management Consultative Committee including tenant and leaseholder representatives.

"There will always be shortcomings and failings, but I am impressed by determination to improve as shown in draft annual report." Resident comment on the consultation draft report

This summary of the full annual report has been sent to all tenants and leaseholders with September's Homing In magazine. If you want to know more about our performance and plans, you can get a more detailed report from your housing office, our website www.brighton-hove.gov.uk/council-housing, by email council.housing@brighton-hove.gov.uk or phone 01273 290591. Please contact your housing office if you have any other queries.

Nick Hibberd,
Assistant Director Housing Management

HMCC meeting scrutinising draft annual report 1 September 2010

Tenant and leaseholder representatives at the Housing Management Consultative Committee (HMCC) are consulted before all key decisions are made about Housing Management, including our priorities, policies and the ways we provide housing services. They are involved in setting our budget and monitor our performance.



"Housing Management Consultative Committee makes the council officers and managers account for their performance."

Beryl Snelling, HMCC
tenant representative



Section 1

Resident involvement and empowerment

With tenants' and leaseholders' involvement, we will learn from what you tell us and provide excellent customer service that meets your needs. We will agree our aims and targets with residents and report our performance so you can hold us to account and check that we meet our commitments.

Customer service, choice and complaints

Customer service

How are we doing?

Resident volunteers have been trained as 'mystery shoppers' to test our customer service at housing offices and the Repairs Desk. They found most staff were friendly, helpful, knowledgeable and polite. The few staff who did not meet the standard were supported and coached to improve their customer service skills.

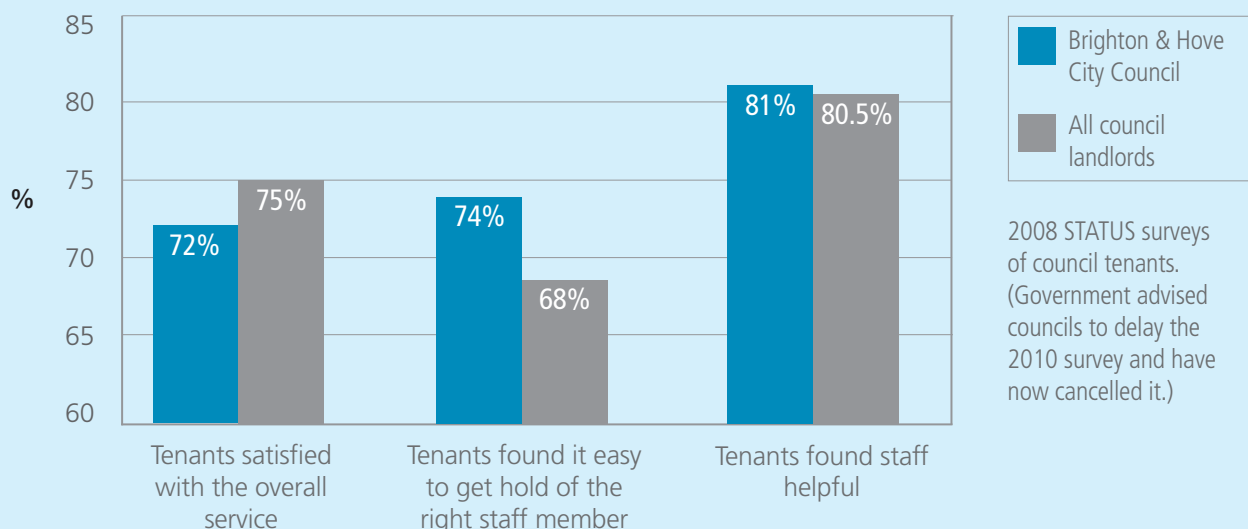
"Mystery shopping helps ensure the standard of customer service within Housing Management remains constantly high." Tenant mystery shopper

We regularly ask tenants and leaseholders how satisfied they are with different parts of our service. For example, 93% of the 39 sheltered tenants who completed a survey in February-March 2010 were very satisfied (57%) or satisfied (36%) with our sheltered service overall. No-one was dissatisfied.

"I have now been here for three months and can say I am very happy with all aspects of living here." New tenant at a sheltered scheme, February 2010

We use residents' feedback to make improvements. For example, we're working to improve customer satisfaction with our out of hours sheltered service and worked with the Community Payback Team to revamp sheltered scheme gardens.

How do we compare? Tenant satisfaction with the Housing Management service





"The payback team were courteous and considerate to tenants, they worked hard and we were pleasantly surprised by what they achieved."

Charles Penrose, Sloane Court Tenants Association

72% of leaseholders who answered a survey in early 2010 were satisfied with the council as their leasehold manager, compared to 68% in 2007.

What did tenants and leaseholders say?

Most residents who gave us their views felt the council fully or partly provides information which meets tenants' needs and communicates with residents appropriately.

"Email/internet access is a godsend for those, like me, who have hearing problems."

"Information also available (on request) in other languages." One person suggested that the council should: **"Ask tenants to feed back on every communication."**

"Homing In does help you and gives you information."

But tenants in the TSA standards focus groups wanted a more honest view of what's going on: **"Homing In only tells you the good things that are happening."** Many would like to receive updated information on the website or by email.



"I'm very glad to work on Homing In as it provides a valuable source of information for all residents."

Su Hansen, Homing In Tenant Editorial Board

How will we improve?

We will improve customer service by making it easier and quicker for you to get things done, in a way that suits you.

We will carry out a service improvement programme for sheltered housing agreed with residents and deliver a revised out of hours service for the sheltered service.

We will increase the ways that we ask you to tell us what you think of our services, for example by telephone, events and regular mystery shopping exercises. We will report the results back to you and how we use them to make improvements to our services.

We will improve our communication with you by involving residents in developing our publications, letters and forms, putting more useful information on our website and looking at other ways to communicate with you.

Choice

How are we doing?

Residents control a yearly £540,000 Estate Development Budget (EDB) for improvements to communal areas around their homes and suggest and vote on improvements to be carried out each year at Area Housing Management Panels.

The EDB money spent on fencing and bin sheds has really improved the appearance of estates."

Mick Tompkins, Whitehawk South Central Residents Association





“The Car Parks and Garages Working Group selected the best clamping contract, giving residents what we wanted. We also developed the standards and interview questions for evaluating the tenders.”

Muriel Briault, Car Parks & Garages Working Group

We have tried to increase the amount of choice tenants have within our services. For example, the choice of appointment time for repairs and gas servicing now includes evenings and Saturday mornings.

Tenants and leaseholders are involved at all stages of choosing new contractors, such as for the new repairs partnership, laundry contract and car clamping contract in 2009/10.

What did tenants and leaseholders say?

Most residents who gave us their views said the council partly provides choices which meet tenants’ needs. However, a few weren’t convinced: **“They like to appear to give you choice and affect decisions. I’m not sure if they really do.”**

How will we improve?

We will continue to look for ways to give you more choice, including working with residents to develop a choice of grounds maintenance and cleaning services.

We will find out what sort of choices residents would like.

Complaints

How are we doing?

In 2009/10 we received 318 formal complaints about our housing management services, 178 of them about repairs and maintenance. Overall we met our target of replying within an average of 10 working days. We replied to 68% of complaints within 10 working days, just missing our target of 70%.

Some examples of how we’ve acted and learnt from your complaints:

- We reviewed our procedures and trained staff to provide a more sensitive approach after a tenant has died
- We reviewed and re-launched our process for recharging repairs and trained staff to make sure it is applied fairly and consistently
- We introduced uniforms for Community Wardens so you can spot them easily.

In 2009/10 we dealt with 59 Stage 1 leaseholder disputes, 15 at Stage 2 and four at Stage 3. The council’s record on resolving leaseholders’ complaints over the last five years is 82% resolved at Stage 1 and 65% at Stage 2 .

What did tenants and leaseholders say?

“Making a complaint is relatively easy - the action taken to resolve problems is relatively non existent.”

“I have had cause to make a complaint once and found the response quick and efficient and the problem was eventually solved, although it took a complaint to solve it.”

“Complaints is brilliant, they are really happy when they talk to you. You can’t really get annoyed by them. They are too nice! It’s done pretty quick.”

Tenants in the TSA focus groups agreed it is clear and easy to make a complaint. But they felt that, due to the overwork of housing officers and cumbersome procedures, complaints are not resolved quickly.

How will we improve?

We know we need to listen and learn from your complaints. We will work with residents to make improvements to make sure we manage and resolve complaints promptly, politely and fairly.

We will report our complaints performance and the outcome of complaints to all tenants and leaseholders each year so you can see how we’re doing.



“It’s important that representatives from residents’ groups city wide meet together and discuss the important issues.”

Chris Kift, Chair of City Assembly

Involvement and empowerment

Offering all tenants a wide range of opportunities to be involved

How are we doing?

Around 70 tenant and resident associations, four Area Housing Management Panels and nearly 20 other resident groups have a key role in influencing our priorities, developing policy and shaping the way we provide our services. Residents’ groups also monitor our performance and set performance targets for us to meet.

Residents’ associations meet and debate issues of interest to council tenants and leaseholders across the city twice a year at the City Assembly. You are welcome to attend.



“We congratulate the council on their agreement to retain scheme managers of sheltered housing onsite at their scheme in response to SHAG’s tenant petition. This is now being carefully developed.”

Tom Whiting, Sheltered Housing Action Group

We have been working with the residents’ Tenant Compact Monitoring Group to increase the range of ways tenants and leaseholders can get involved in the management of their homes and neighbourhood. Over 2,000 residents returned the Tenant and Leaseholder Involvement Questionnaire sent with Homing In in December 2009. We now have a database of over 1,800 tenants and leaseholders who

What did tenants and leaseholders say?

Most who gave us their views thought that the council definitely or partly offers a wide range of opportunities to be involved in the management of their housing. Resident representatives made some positive comments: **“Too many opportunities, not enough hours in the day!”**

But some views were mixed: **“The council focus groups have really worked well and are making ground. Generally though the council listens but doesn’t always act.”**

“Some things you do feel involved in, like the tenancy agreement. They did take on-board suggestions. In other things, when they know they don’t have much choice or funds, they don’t.”

Some tenants in the TSA standards focus groups pointed to a need for more opportunities to get involved outside of the structure of residents’ associations: **“Only on tenants’ associations and all of us don’t want to be on one and certain people are on everything.”**

“Residents’ associations do have their place but bring in more residents so it’s less exclusive.”

are interested in getting more involved in the management of their homes and neighbourhood in a variety of ways, such as phone surveys.

With the Tenant Compact Monitoring Group we have produced and consulted on a draft Tenant and leaseholder involvement strategy. This explains our resident involvement structure and sets out a choice of ways for tenants and leaseholders to have a say in how their home and neighbourhood is managed, including informal ways. Involving a wider pool of people will help us arrange our services to reflect residents’ needs and wishes.



"TCMG want more residents to be involved and are waiting for your views."

Stewart Gover, Tenant Compact Monitoring Group

How will we improve?

We are building on our strong resident involvement structure to offer a wider range of opportunities for all tenants and leaseholders to have a say in how their home and neighbourhood are managed, in ways that suit them.

We will use the resident involvement database to involve residents on the issues they are interested in, and encourage residents from under-represented groups to get involved.

Agreeing 'local offers' for service delivery

As well as meeting the TSA's own standards, social landlords must agree local standards with tenants which reflect their local priorities. The TSA calls these 'local offers' and they must be in place by 1 April 2011.

How are we doing?

We already have some locally agreed service offers and standards. For example, a new Housing and Estates Forum in Moulsecoomb, set up under the 'Turning the Tide' pilot to tackle social exclusion and anti-social behaviour, aims to increase resident involvement, meet residents' local priorities and improve services to what they want. Residents can set local standards and be involved in monitoring performance against them and give feedback to the council and other partners.

"The Housing and Estates Forum will transform the way communities are inspected. Residents, councillors and housing officers all inspect areas together and work in unison to make cleaner, safer neighbourhoods."

Dave Murtagh, East Moulsecoomb Tenant and Resident Association



How will we develop and agree 'local offers' with you?

We will:

- Consult as many tenants and leaseholders as we can to find out your priorities for our services. We will use our resident involvement database, community events and a variety of ways to get the views of all sections of the community.
- Use the results of that consultation to develop service pledges for all aspects of our landlord service with our resident working groups. These will set out the standards of housing services that residents can expect and replace our current customer charters. They will include how performance will be monitored, reported to and checked by residents and what we will do if we fail to meet those pledges.
- Consult again with residents on the draft service pledges, then put them to the Housing Management Consultative Committee for scrutiny and comment before they go to the Cabinet Member for Housing for approval.
- Agree arrangements with residents for reviewing the local offers from time to time.

The service pledges will come into effect by 1 April 2011.

Meeting the TSA's standards

How are we doing?

We told residents about the TSA's standards through Homing In, our website, reports to Housing Management Consultative

Committee and presentations at the City Assembly and Area Panels. We also sent all associations a copy of the TSA's guide to the standards and made copies available at our housing offices. We have involved resident associations and groups and residents on our resident involvement database in assessing how we meet the TSA standards and in producing this report.

How will we improve?

We will provide a range of opportunities for you to influence how we meet all the TSA's standards, scrutinise our performance against the standards and develop the next annual report.

We will work with residents to make sure we are reporting on the issues that are most important to you and presenting information in a clear and easily understandable way. We will aim to include, where possible, residents' assessment of the quality of services. We will make information about our performance widely available and let you know how we take residents' views into account.

"Participation creaks, but it works!"

John Melson, High Rise Action Group

Providing support so tenants can be more effectively involved

The Community Participation team and other Housing Management staff support resident associations and groups. We grant fund the Resource Centre, which provides a range of training and support to residents and associations, such as in setting up accounts, working in a committee and producing a newsletter. Resident representatives also attend conferences etc. to build their knowledge and skills.

How will we improve?

We will improve the training and development programme for residents who want to become involved, including developing training in monitoring our performance, becoming a resident assessor and energy efficiency advice.

"We offer support and advice, and encourage all residents to get involved."

Peter Mustow, Community Participation Officer



"The Resource Centre is a really helpful organisation for tenant reps. We'd be lost without them."

Jean Davis, Leach Court Tenants Association.

What did tenants and leaseholders say?

The largest group of residents who gave us their views agreed that the council provides support to help residents be effectively involved: **"Have been doing it through home visits, workshops/ training courses."**

"Very happy with involvement of housing office, estate warden and community development team in helping local community association."

Understanding and responding to the diverse needs of tenants

How are we doing?

We do all we can to make sure our services are open, welcoming and easy to use for people of every age, religion or faith, gender including transgender, sexual orientation, race or ethnicity, and people with disabilities or care and support needs. For example, when we consulted with all residents on the new tenancy agreement last year, we sent information in large type or other formats where we knew tenants needed them.

85% of sheltered tenants who completed our survey in February- March 2010 told us they were very satisfied or satisfied with

how we planned support to meet their needs. Supporting People checks of sheltered residents' support plans showed that on average 90% of their needs were met.



"The Tenant Disability Network works on behalf of all residents with disability to advocate and help purchase appropriate equipment."

Barry Kent, Tenant Disability Network

We are achieving and working towards excellence in the national Equality Framework for Local Government.

What did tenants and leaseholders say?

Residents who gave us their views generally agreed that the council treats all residents with fairness and respect: **"As part of a minority group myself, I have always been treated respectfully, but this should be expected."**

Most felt that the council fully or partly demonstrates that we understand the different needs of our tenants: **"It always seems to."** But one commented that we: **"Should listen more."**

Generally, tenants in the TSA focus groups thought the council tries to be fair. Some felt it tried too hard and could be tougher on certain tenants. Others felt that it only listened to the loudest.

How will we improve?

We are committed to equal opportunities and valuing diversity. We will continue to build up a better understanding of our residents' needs and tailor our services to meet them.

We will update how we deal with racist and religiously motivated hate crime in line with the arrangements across Sussex and review how we deal with domestic violence.

Section 2

Home

Quality of accommodation

How are we doing?

Following tenants' vote against transfer of their homes to a new housing association in 2007, the council was millions of pounds short of the money needed to bring all homes up to the government's Decent Homes Standard by the end of December 2010. Last year bringing all tenants' homes up to standard was our main priority. By 31 March 2010, 60.5% of tenants' homes met the Decent Homes Standard.

We installed 581 new kitchens, 525 new bathrooms, 2300 new doors and 1051 new boilers in 2009/10. We also started a programme of works to sheltered schemes with shared bathroom facilities to provide tenants with self-contained homes with their own shower.

Our new Repairs & Improvement Partnership with Mears will give big cost savings that will help us bring all tenants' homes up to the Decent Homes Standard by the end of 2013. Residents from the Asset Management Panel were fully involved in selecting the contractor and setting up the partnership with Mears which started on 1 April 2010.

"The Asset Management Panel was set a task of finding the best repairs contractor, and after much work and deliberation we agreed that Mears was the best."

Ted Harman, residents' Asset Management Panel



After a series of meetings with residents, in February 2010 the council agreed a £76 million three year investment plan to bring all tenants' homes up to the Decent Homes Standard by the end of 2013, subject to funding.

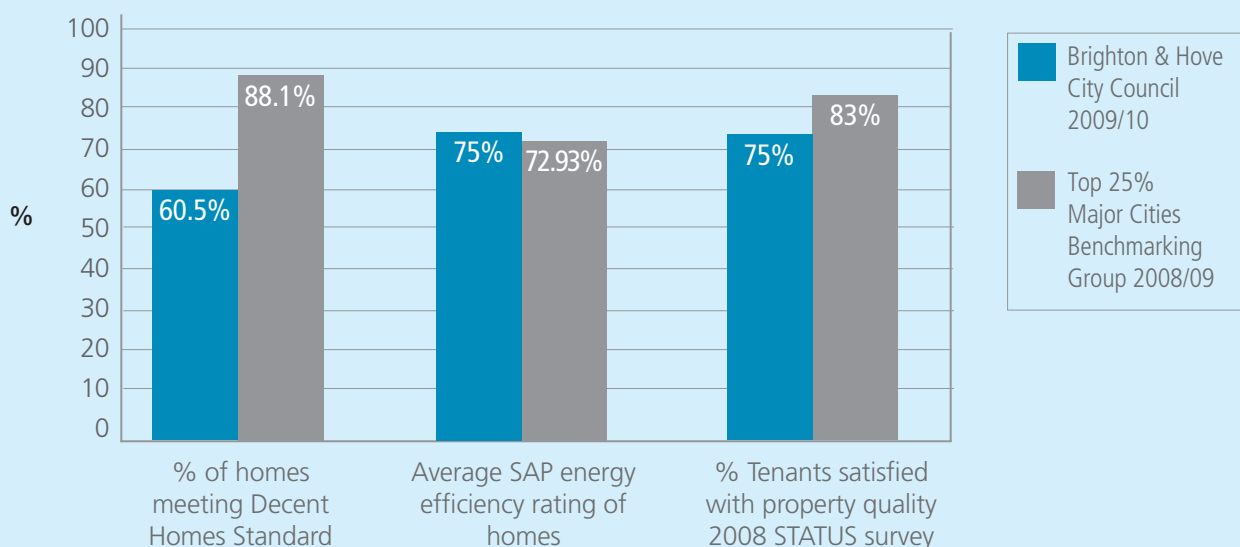
In 2009 we put insulated cladding on two high rise blocks which will cut tenants' fuel bills and carbon emissions. We also installed a communal solar hot water system at a sheltered housing scheme, cutting energy costs. Some of this work was supported through grant funding from energy companies. The average energy efficiency rating of our homes is amongst the best for council landlords, saving on residents' fuel bills.

"The four tenant board members of Brighton & Hove Seaside Community Homes are working hard to raise money for improvements to council tenants' homes."

Trish Barnard, Tenant Board Member



How do we compare? Quality of accommodation



How will we improve?

We will bring 74% of tenants' homes up to Decent Homes Standard by 31 March 2011, with a £24 million programme of improvements in 2010/11.

We will start a review of shared facilities at those sheltered schemes that still have them.

We will consult with residents to agree the Brighton & Hove Standard, a higher standard for homes developed by the residents' Asset Management Panel, as part of our 'local offers.'

We will investigate ways of improving the energy efficiency of homes, reducing electricity and gas costs for residents and improving the sustainability of the stock.

Repairs & maintenance

How are we doing?

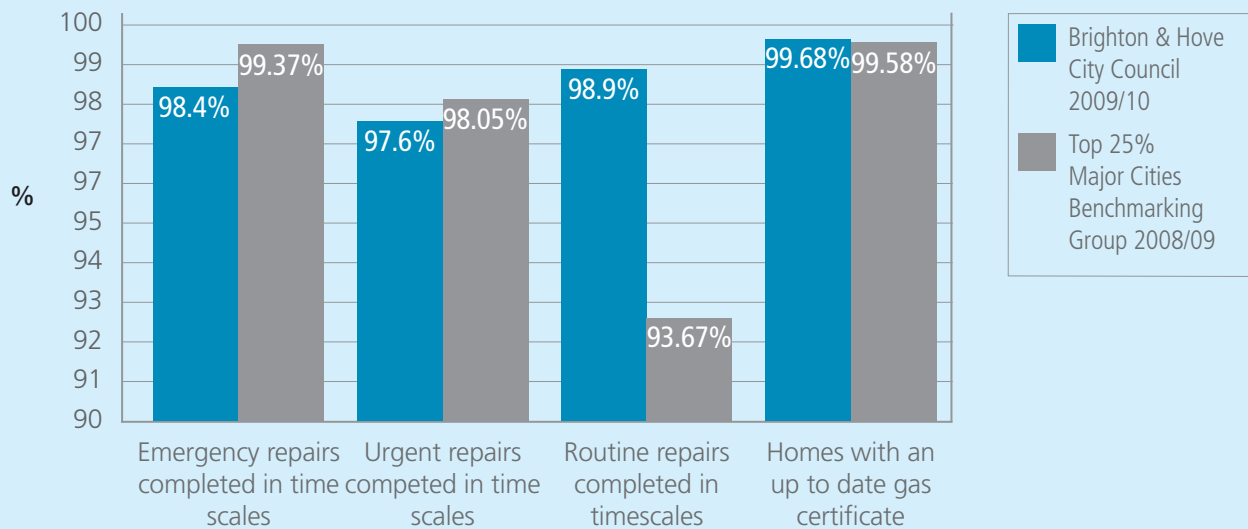
We made big improvements to repairs and maintenance costs, customer service and

performance in 2009/10. The average time to complete routine repairs was cut from 15 days in 2008/9 to 12 days in 2009/10. We had to do 2,337 fewer emergency repairs in 2009/10 than the year before. In the last two years we have improved our repairs performance from being in the bottom 25% of landlords we compare ourselves against to the top 25% in 2009/10.

Repairs performance in 2009/10

- 29,706 repairs completed
- 98.9% Routine repairs completed within our target of 20 working days
- 97.6% Urgent repairs completed within our target of three working days
- 98.4% Emergency repairs completed within our target of 24 hours
- 93% of tenants who completed our satisfaction cards were satisfied with the service

How do we compare? Repairs and maintenance performance



- 98% of those replying to Mears or Kier were satisfied with their repair.

The resident-led local base for Mears, the police and local residents in Whitehawk was shortlisted for best customer service for the national Housing Excellence Awards this year. Mears are committed to working in partnership with residents in other areas of the city, to tailor services to meet their local priorities.



"The Mears Whitehawk base has improved the estate. We can access repairs more quickly and residents now know who their operatives are."

Chris El-Shabba, Our neighbourhood local base

New Repairs and Improvement Partnership

As well as cost savings, the new repairs and improvement partnership which started on 1 April 2010 aims to give excellent customer service, get repairs 'right first time' and give high levels of customer satisfaction. You can now report repairs 24 hours a day by phone, text, email or on-line. Appointments can also

be made straight away with the Repairs Desk at a time that suits you, including evenings and Saturday mornings.

We will report the performance of the Repairs Desk regularly to residents and continue 'mystery shopping' exercises by trained resident volunteers to test whether performance is of an excellent standard. Mears also carry out satisfaction surveys with residents after works are completed and inspect 10% of responsive repairs to check them. In addition, the council also now has four Clerks of Works to check the quality of works.

The Government watchdog the Audit Commission reviewed our new repairs and maintenance contract in May 2010 and reported: "The housing management service has made good progress over the last 18 months. It is working effectively with a clear commitment from all partners to deliver improvement in the repairs and maintenance service for council residents."

Residents helped develop and are involved in managing and monitoring the new repairs and improvement partnership. Members of both the Asset Management Panel and Repairs & Maintenance Monitoring Group sit on the partnership Core Group which has overall responsibility for monitoring the contract.



“The Asset Management Panel worked with the council and Mears to build a relationship that strengthened the repairs contract - including a 24 hour service for tenants.”

Samantha Griffiths,
Asset Management
Panel



“The Repairs & Maintenance Monitoring Group helps make sure major works are completed to the best possible standard.”

Brian Balchin, Repairs
& Maintenance
Monitoring Group

Adaptations

We made 525 adaptations for disabled or elderly tenants to help them stay in their homes in 2009/10 and have a budget of £750,000 a year. The Chairman’s Adaptations Focus Group of residents helped develop a new approach designed to improve customer satisfaction, speed up the process and give us better value for money.

When we carry out kitchen and bathroom works and work to empty properties, we now assess whether the tenant needs any adaptations and whether the home is suitable for adaptation in the future.

Health & safety

We have effective processes, monitoring and controls in place to comply with all health and safety requirements for gas, water, electricity, asbestos, fire risk and the Housing Health and Safety Rating System. At 31 March 2010, 99.68% of homes had up to date gas safety certificates. 34 properties were overdue as tenants would not give us access. Our target for 2010/11 is 100%.

Fire safety works

The council’s fire safety and fire risk assessment programme to improve fire safety across our stock involves tailored solutions for the different types of buildings we manage. We have carried out a thorough review of fire safety arrangements in blocks of flats, working closely with the fire service. We have completed all priority work to tower blocks and put improved fire doors in many tower blocks as part of an ongoing city-wide programme. Priority work has also been carried out on other medium-height council blocks.

What did tenants and leaseholders say?

Tenants in the TSA focus groups saw repairs as a priority: **“Repairs is the main issue.”** Some were happy with repairs and the quality of work: **“I’m very happy with them. My block is clean and well maintained.”** Most with a complaint about repairs wanted the council to monitor contractors’ work and check that it had been done satisfactorily.

How will we improve?

We will work with residents to develop and agree the repairs and maintenance ‘local offer’ service pledge.

We will produce a new Tenant Guide to Repairs with Mears and resident groups.

We will maintain and develop resident involvement at all levels of the repairs partnership.

We will train the Neighbourhood Response Team to do minor adaptations for tenants with disabilities, such as hand rails, to speed up the process.

Section 3

Tenancy

Allocations

How are we doing?

We let 819 council homes in 2009/10, 30% of them to existing tenants transferring. At 31 March 2010, 21% of the 10,674 applicants on the Homemove joint housing register for council and housing association homes in the city were transfer applicants.

We brought in local lettings plans to make best use of our stock and to balance communities after wide consultation. For example, giving priority to working families in the most deprived areas of the city, for sheltered residents to move within and between sheltered schemes and keeping some other blocks just for the over 50s.

"After detailed consultation with Housing Management we were delighted to retain the policy of priority allocation to persons over 50 in our blocks."

Keith Cohen, Nettleton & Dudeney Residents Association



Older people applying for sheltered accommodation now have their support needs assessed by our sheltered co-ordinator, as well as their housing and medical needs, to make sure they are offered appropriate housing and support.

Sixty-nine tenants moved through the tenant incentive scheme in 2009/10, getting up to £3,500 for downsizing from a family home or wheelchair adapted property they no longer needed or finding their own home in the private sector. This released 43 large homes for families in housing need. 149 council tenants moved by doing a mutual exchange.

In 2009/10, we cut two and a half days off the time it takes to carry out work to empty council homes and let them to new tenants. We are now near the top 25% of landlords we compare to, at 25½ days.

How will we improve?

A tenant led group is reviewing the choice based lettings system and allocations policy, including exploring ways to relieve overcrowding. We will consult tenants and homeseekers in the city about any proposed changes.

"Since the Choice Based Lettings Review started things are a lot more positive – communication has greatly improved now that we meet together with officers and can express the tenants' views and anxieties. Communication has never been better."

Heather Hayes, Choice Based Lettings Review Group



Tenure

How are we doing?

In 2009/10, we worked with residents to produce a new, clearer tenancy agreement and a tenant handbook. We had 2400 responses to the consultation on the draft agreement which included valuable feedback on our services and service improvements and shaped the final agreement. We also produced an easy to read, illustrated tenancy guide to go with it.

"Tenants worked closely with council officers to produce a tenancy agreement that clearly sets out the rights and obligations of both parties."

Barry Hughes, Tenancy Agreement Focus Group

In response to the findings in the mystery shopping exercise in December 2009, we are making sure all front



line staff can provide consistent, accurate information about other council and local services.

In 2009/10 we met our targets for helping tenants maintain their tenancy. 14 households were evicted for rent arrears, putting us in the best 25% of landlords. We served 753 Notices of Seeking Possession compared to 917 the year before. Three tenants were evicted for anti-social behaviour.

We visit new tenants and around half our tenants each year to check on their needs, pick up any problems with the property or that tenants may have and direct them to support where they need it. We found a low level of sub-letting and took legal action in two cases.

Turning the Tide

The draft Social Exclusion Strategy “Turning the Tide” outlines our response as a landlord to a Reducing Inequalities Review in 2007, which highlighted the levels of multiple deprivation and inequality experienced by residents in social housing in Brighton & Hove. We are currently trying out new approaches and actions to deal with these issues, including an enhanced tenancy check, which will be evaluated and then developed citywide. This will feed into a final draft of the Turning the Tide strategy which will go for consultation in spring 2011.

What did tenants and leaseholders say?

Tenants in the TSA focus groups thought the council makes it clear what is expected with the tenancy. They know where to go for support and guidance: **“From personal experience they will take it seriously”, “They would listen. Good to know there is support.”** But some said housing officers can be hard to get hold of.

How will we improve?

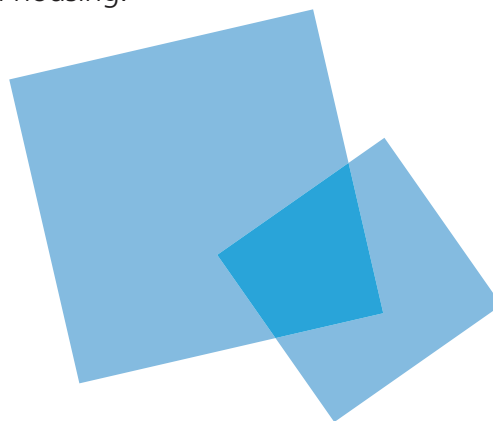
We will continue to work with tenants and leaseholders to provide an effective housing management service and support to fulfil their rights and responsibilities.

We will set up a tenant panel to consult about our tenancy management policies and procedures and publish clear policies outlining our approach to managing tenancies.

After consulting with residents, we will put a new financial inclusion strategy into practice. This was developed with residents and aims to make sure they have access to appropriate financial products and services.

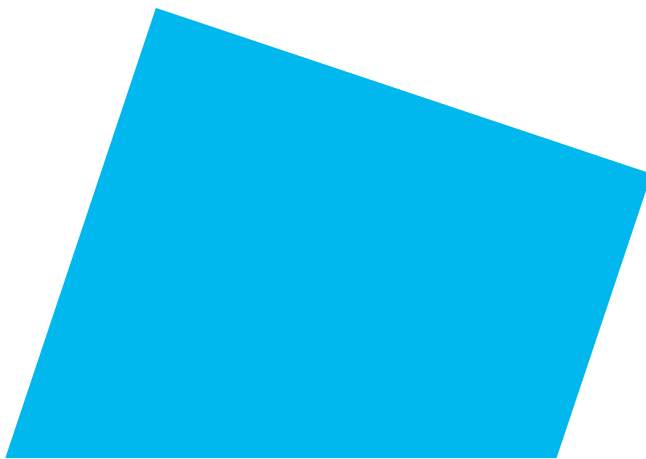
We will review our processes for new tenants to make sure we know about any support needs before they move in and that all new tenants have a full understanding of their rights and responsibilities.

We will continue our work on identifying and dealing with people fraudulently living in council housing.



“We are working to achieve our aims of becoming a Tenant Management Organisation.”

Maggie King, St James' House
Community Alliance



Section 4

Neighbourhood & Community

Neighbourhood management

How are we doing?

The residents' Estates Service Monitoring Group reviewed our Estates Service and worked closely with staff in 2009/10 to improve our cleaning and estates services. Since April 2009 dedicated cleaners have been based at all high rise buildings. We reviewed service charges when the changes were introduced so the cleaning service now covers its costs.

"The cleaning in our block has really improved after the Estates Service Review."

Linda King, Estates Service Monitoring Group



In 2009 the Neighbourhood Response team was re-organised as part of the Estates Service review. They do small landlord repairs and help vulnerable residents who are locked out or who need small repairs. Community Wardens now work closely with local residents' associations and local services to keep areas clean and safe.

We work closely with the council's refuse, recycling and park services in the management of our neighbourhoods and invited them to Area Panel meetings to discuss local issues of concern to residents. In 2009/10, 98.6% of bulk refuse and 84.3% of graffiti we treat as emergency works were removed within our target of 24 hours.

Residents have told us they have concerns about how communal areas outside our blocks are maintained so we have launched a project with the residents' Estates Service Monitoring Group

to review grounds maintenance and present a range of options to improve the service.

"The Estates Service Monitoring Group has worked with Housing Management to begin pilot projects that will improve green spaces in Brighton & Hove."

Rita King, Estates Service Monitoring Group



"After a two hour inspection of our grounds, managers provided an honest and forthright report which will help the grounds maintenance review."

Valerie Paynter, Clarendon & Ellen Residents Association



We are also improving our estates by taking action against people whose gardens are not of an acceptable standard and recharging tenants the cost of work to put this right.

In 2009/10 local residents, councillors and staff carried out 420 estate inspections to pick up any outstanding or unreported works that are needed. Our Turning the Tide project in Moulsecoomb and Bevendean is piloting new estate inspections with 'Rate Your Estate'. Residents are trained to assess and take photos of areas that need improvement.



▲ Estate inspection, Wiltshire House

The Housing and Estates Forum being tried out in Moulsecoomb receives performance information, provides feedback to the council and the partners we work with and aims to increase the level of resident participation.



“I’m very excited about Rate Your Estate - I think it’s a fantastic idea which could transform areas! I hope a lot more residents will get trained and join us!”

Michelle Guyatt,
Bevendean Tenants
Association

Fire Safety

East Sussex Fire & Rescue are working closely with us to improve fire safety across all the council’s housing stock and fire officers came to all Area Panels to advise on arrangements to keep residents safe. As a result, we have introduced a clean, clear and safe approach to items left in common ways which could be a risk to residents and fire fighters if there were a fire.

We are making sure residents know what to do in the event of a fire with more signs and publicity on fire safety for all residents. And personal emergency evacuation plans are being put in place for the most vulnerable residents. We also reviewed our procedures for supporting our most vulnerable residents in the event of emergencies such as lift breakdown. We now have a record of which residents to contact as a priority in an emergency.

Fire safety in sheltered schemes

In 2009 we made sure all sheltered schemes had a publicly displayed ‘delayed evacuation plan’ and put up fire assembly points so schemes could be evacuated smoothly. All tenants who use oxygen cylinders have received a sticker for their front door so the fire brigade are aware in an emergency.

All sheltered residents have an annual fire safety talk, attended by East Sussex Fire & Rescue where possible, and an annual written reminder on fire safety practices. All scheme

managers had fire safety training and tenant representatives were offered a fire briefing.

We are developing a mobility scooter strategy as we have many older or less agile residents and need to find safe ways to store these scooters.

What did tenants and leaseholders say?

Most residents who gave us their views agreed that the council keeps their block/ estate and communal areas clean and safe or that it partly does so. Comments on cleaning ranged from **“Poor state of cleanliness.”** to **“Cleaning has greatly improved since we had our ‘dedicated’ cleaner”**. Tenants in the TSA focus groups thought the council is working well trying to keep communal areas clean: **“The council do their best.”**

Most residents who gave us their views agreed that the council works in partnership with residents and other organisations to maintain and improve their neighbourhood or that it partly does so. Comments ranged from **“Only when it suits the council”** to **“Excellent assistance offered.”**

How will we improve?

We aim to make all estates and blocks cleaner, greener and safer places to live to improve the quality of life for all residents. For example, we will:

- Develop and agree with residents service pledges on the estates service and tenancy management, including grounds maintenance, as part of ‘local offers’
- Carry out more resident satisfaction surveys for our cleaning and other estate services and their neighbourhood as a place to live
- Encourage more residents to get involved in estate inspections, particularly those who said they were interested in them in

the Tenant and Leaseholder Involvement Questionnaire

- Evaluate the Rate your Estate and Housing and Estates Forum initiatives in the 'Turning the Tide' pilot in Moulsecoomb and Bevendean and, if residents agree they are successful, introduce them across the other areas of the city
- Develop comprehensive emergency response procedures for in and out of office hours – response to gas leaks, electricity supply failure, lift breakdown, severe weather etc.
- Continue to make improvements to fire safety and introduce fire drills in sheltered schemes.

Local Area Co-operation

How are we doing?

We work closely with residents and partners to improve neighbourhoods, including:

- Working with residents and the Community Payback Team to develop a programme to benefit residents citywide
- Acting as lead partners in community clear up days
- Working with residents and partners to set up neighbourhood agreements, such as the Bristol Estate Neighbourhood Action Plan and Community Safety Project.



"Working with the payback team has greatly improved the appearance of the Bristol Estate. Serendipity community development organisation have also helped create a better atmosphere on the estate and brought people together."

Ray Freeman, Bristol Estate Community Association



"The Community Safety Forum allows residents to raise their concerns about vital safety issues, including hate crime."

John Stevens, Community Safety Forum

The Energy Efficiency Working Group of residents, staff and councillors set up in 2009 is getting training for tenants from the Energy Saving Trust, encouraging residents to grow food with their neighbours on local housing land and looking at possible funding for 'retro-fitting' our homes to make them more energy efficient and therefore cheaper to run and keep warm.

"We're working together with officers to cut down energy use and carbon emissions – this will save residents money and improve their health."

Beverley Weaver, Energy Efficiency Working Group



What did tenants and leaseholders say?

Most residents who responded thought the council could do more to co-operate with other organisations to promote social, environmental and economic well-being, though some were not clear what this standard really meant. One representative suggested we:

"Inform [resident or tenant association] who the other organisations [are] within the community to help support and also so local volunteers are able to work and communicate with these organisations."

How will we improve?

We will work together with residents and other organisations to help make your neighbourhood a better place to live and let you know how we do that.

Anti-social behaviour

How are we doing?

Our new tenancy agreement and handbook set clear behaviour standards. The residents' group made sure it included clauses on nuisance issues that tenants are concerned about,

including noisy laminate flooring and pets.

In 2009/10 the Anti-social Behaviour Team, which deals with the most serious cases of anti-social behaviour, got a 'premises closure order', working with Sussex Police to use new legal powers to shut a property down in an extreme case of all-night parties, verbal abuse and intimidation. We took injunctions against two people who were causing severe problems. When the injunctions were broken they were sent to prison. In four very serious cases the team got possession orders; one tenant stopped the anti-social behaviour and the other three were evicted.

Since October 2009, the Anti-social Behaviour Team operates city wide under the Turning the Tide project. We are managing anti-social behaviour more robustly, intervening earlier and working more closely with the police and other agencies. In January to March 2010, 69.5% of tenants affected by anti-social behaviour dealt with by the team were satisfied or very satisfied (48.5%) with how they handled the problem and the outcome.



"The Leaseholders Action Group made dealing with neighbourhood nuisance, which can also be caused by tenants of leaseholders, a priority and worked with the council to produce new information – keeping everyone better informed."

Linda Shaw,
Leaseholders Action Group

How will we improve?

Acts of nuisance, tenancy breach and anti-social behaviour will not be tolerated – they will be challenged and actions taken.

We will work with a new residents' Anti-social Behaviour Focus Group to improve the way we deal with anti-social behaviour.

We will implement the national standards for dealing with anti-social behaviour.

What did tenants and leaseholders say?

Residents who gave us their views generally agreed that it is easy to report anti-social behaviour (ASB) to the council. We had some positive feedback: **"Yes I am pleased with the way that we can report anti-social behaviour and the way officers can support tenant", "The help and support that I am receiving from my Anti Social Behaviour Housing Officer is improving my life."**

But several residents felt the council could do more to make tenants aware of their responsibilities and rights on ASB and to offer support to victims of ASB and witnesses.

Suggestions included: **"Listen and act. Do not just collect a paper trail", "Needs follow up once anti-social behaviour has initially been dealt with."**

Tenants in the TSA focus groups thought the council does not have a strong emphasis on preventative measures for ASB and it isn't always given the immediate attention it deserves. They felt the council are expecting tenants affected by ASB to police it themselves by having to fill in a diary, and many don't bother to complain. The perception is that the council takes a long time to sort out ASB. Many realised that this is often down to legal procedures of collecting evidence and not always the council's fault, but still it is frustrating: **"It's a long drawn out process if you are living in fear and despair."**

We will introduce improved service standards for victims and witnesses of anti-social behaviour as part of a 'local offer' service pledge for anti-social behaviour to be agreed with residents and in place by 1 April 2011. These will ensure that we will provide a more intensive level of service for residents who are most vulnerable and at risk.

Section 5

Value For Money

How are we doing?

We have made a lot of progress to help bring down our costs, while continuing to improve our performance and services to residents.

We have been redirecting resources to meet residents' priorities, particularly improvements to tenants' homes and our estates. We also work with residents to provide the services they want and pay for in their service charge.

Some of the ways we have improved value for money include:

- £2 million savings from the two year entrance door programme
- Offering cheaper contents insurance to tenants and leaseholders
- Recharging more tenants for deliberate damage or neglect and improving collection
- Freeing up Housing Officers to spend more time out visiting tenants and properties
- Cheaper alarms
- £100,000 annual savings from a new electricity contract to be passed onto residents in reduced service charges
- The new repairs partnership will bring cost savings plus a better service and wider community benefits such as apprenticeships
- Saving £25,000 a year through the resident led new laundry contract.



"The brand new laundry contract will definitely save money and we will no longer have to subsidise the service"

Faith Matyszak MBE, Laundry Facilities Group

We reduced the cost of managing tenants' homes from £18.58 per property per week in 2005/6 to £17.11 in 2008/9 and £17.03 in 2009/10. We aim to further reduce our costs so that we compare better with the best landlords. The Audit Commission recently reported that the council is improving value for money and our housing management costs have reduced to average when compared to other councils.

Residents are involved in setting our budgets. For example, residents' Area Panels decide how to spend the Estate Development Budget each year to meet their local priorities and helped to develop the £76 million three year capital programme.

We report our performance to resident representatives at Housing Management Consultative Committee every three months, including comparisons with the top performing landlords. We are developing our 'benchmarking' to include information on costs, as well as tenant satisfaction and performance, as recommended by the Audit Commission.

In 2009/10 the average rent was £65.72 per week. We collected 98.29% of rent due from tenants and improved our performance on collecting former tenancy arrears. We have cut current tenant arrears significantly in the last 5 years.

"Rent collection is still going up so there's more to spend on services."

Tina Urquhart, Housing Income Management Monitoring Group



In 2009 we consulted with the Leaseholders Action Group Committee on a new major works leaflet with comprehensive payment

advice and information for leaseholders when consulted or billed for works of £250 or more. This was agreed and is now being used to inform leaseholders of all aspects of major works, the costs and the help with payment that may be available. In 2009/10 we achieved our highest ever collection rate of leaseholder service charges.



"The LDV aims to give the council best value for money for properties in need of refurbishment."

Roy Crowhurst, Tenant Board Member, Brighton & Hove Seaside Community Homes

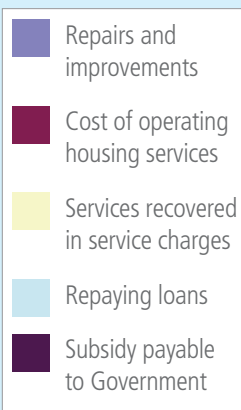
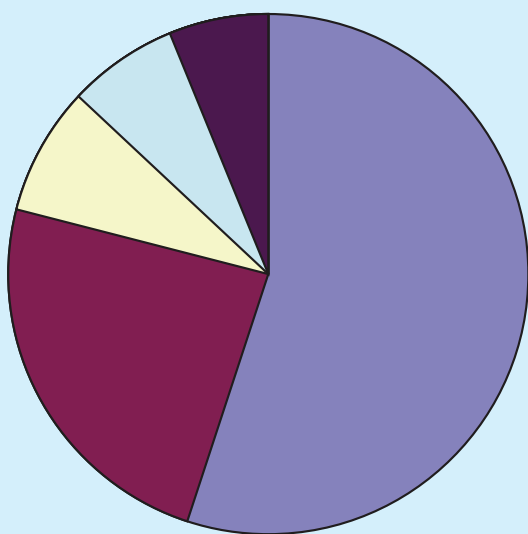
What did tenants and leaseholders say?

Most residents who gave us their views said the council partly meets the standard of providing cost effective, efficient, quality services and homes to meet tenants' needs. They were divided on whether the council provides value for money for their rent and service charge. Comments included: **"Cost effective – yes, efficient – yes, quality services – no"**, **"The rent is value for money. Limited services are offered."**

"They should not just tell us about things they have done but also what they are going to do. Let us know how much things are going to cost."

All tenants in the TSA focus groups were happy with the rent they pay but none felt involved in the spending on services. Some thought this would be a huge task to try to involve tenants. When they were asked whether they would be willing to pay extra for better quality services there was a strong reaction against the idea.

How we spent tenants' rents and service charges in 2009/10



How will we improve?

We will continue to involve residents in working to ensure that the services we provide meet your priorities, are high quality and at the right cost.

We will review with residents how we report to you so you can see how well we provide value for money and compare our performance and costs to other landlords.

If you'd like to know more about our performance and plans, you can get a more detailed version of this annual report from our website at www.brighton-hove.gov.uk/council-housing or from your housing office. You can also e-mail us on council.housing@brighton-hove.gov.uk or phone 01273 290591 and we'll send you a copy.

If you'd like to find out about your local tenant and resident association, or would like to get involved in other ways, please contact your local housing office.

Please let us know what you think of this annual report and what you would like in a future year's report. Send your comments to Carol Jenkins, Housing Stock Review Manager, Room 235, Kings House, Grand Avenue, Hove BN3 2SR or email carol.jenkins@brighton-hove.gov.uk. Thank you.

Translation? Tick this box and take to any council office.

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This can also be made available in large print, Braille, or on CD or audio tape

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