



# Housing News

## Annual Report to Tenants 2011 - Your Borough, Your Future, Your Say

Every year, we produce an Annual Report for tenants of Oadby and Wigston Borough Council. We are required to do this by the Regulator for social housing in England and Wales, the Tenant Services Authority (TSA).

The purpose of the report is to give tenants the opportunity to find out how well we are performing as a landlord. It also explains our plans to improve our services to tenants in the future. The TSA has laid down a clear set of standards that it expects all councils and housing associations to meet and a key part of the report is to explain how well we are doing at meeting these standards (for further information about these standards, go to

[www.tenantservicesauthority.org](http://www.tenantservicesauthority.org))

We have set out below a summary of the key details from the Annual Report. If you would like a copy of the full report, please see our website – [www.oadby-wigston.gov.uk](http://www.oadby-wigston.gov.uk) or telephone Leicester (0116) 257 2619.

### Putting the report together

We set up a small working group of two tenant representatives and two Council Officers. They looked at examples of good reports from elsewhere and agreed what our report should contain and look like. This included making sure that it was straightforward and easy to read.

### Get involved – having your say about the housing service

Tenant involvement is a vital part of Oadby & Wigstons' housing service. It is only by working in partnership with tenants that we can provide the best possible service.

We have included a lot of information in the report about the ways that residents can get involved, for example:

- details about the members of our Tenants' Panel. We always welcome new people who want to join. Why not come along to a meeting and find out more?
- the new Tenants' Scrutiny Group, which has been set up to look in more detail at different aspects of the services we provide as a landlord and suggest how they could be improved for the customer.
- taking part in one of our neighbourhood walkabouts, where housing officers are out on site looking at any problems or issues on our estates and the improvements that could be made.
- residents are invited to set up their own local residents association. Guidance and advice can be offered by the Residents Involvement Officer.

By encouraging our tenants to get involved, you can learn new skills, meet new people and have the chance to attend some great training sessions. We also pay 'out of pocket' expenses.

To find out more about our future plans for resident involvement, please see our website – [www.oadby-wigston.gov.uk/housing](http://www.oadby-wigston.gov.uk/housing) or telephone Leicester (0116) 257 2619.



# Meeting the standards set by the Tenant Services Authority

## Customer service

- We have four customer service centres, which are easy to access.
- We have a new web site, which is easier to use and has more information than the last.
- We have provided more training for staff about customer service.
- We are investing in a new phone system, so that we can deal with phone calls more effectively.
- We have introduced a new complaints policy and procedure.

In future, we will check with customers to see how we can make our service more accessible. This will include looking at our opening times and setting a standard for how quickly we answer the phone. If you would like to help with this, by letting us know your thoughts about our opening times, or how we can make our services more available, then please contact us with your details.

## Treating people fairly and with respect

One of our main priorities is that tenants should be treated fairly and with respect. We are working together with other councils in Leicestershire to make sure that we are doing all that we should in terms of equalities. This involves ensuring that we are working in line with the Equality Framework for Local Government. By working with other councils, we are able to not only learn from each other, but save time in working out what needs to be done.

We also:

- fit stairlifts, ramps and level access showers for people with disabilities, spending over £150,000 every year.
- comply with the Commission for Racial Equality's Code of Practice for Rented Housing.
- provide translation and interpreting facilities for people where this is needed.

have schemes in place to provide

- support and assistance to vulnerable tenants, both young and old.

In future, we will carry out a survey to help build up a better picture of our tenants' needs and requirements – we call this a tenant profile.



## Good quality homes

At the end of 2010, we carried out a survey of some of our properties. This has confirmed that generally our properties are in good condition. We can also use this information to plan out work in future years.

As at March 2011, 94% of our homes met the Decent Homes Standard; approximately 80 properties did not meet the standard. We have plans and funding in place to deal with the remaining properties before the end of December 2011.

In future, we will:

- Publish up to date information about the improvements that we plan to make to properties on the Council's website and in Letterbox.
- Do more to sort out problems such as condensation and mould in some flats.

## Letting our empty homes

In March this year, we introduced 'choice based lettings', which means that all empty properties are advertised and people 'bid' for the property for which they would like to be considered. In future, we will:

- Publish details of recent lettings every fortnight, so people can get feedback about how the property has been allocated.
- Introduce a home decorating pack for new tenants, to replace the old voucher system.

## Repairs and maintenance

We are able to respond to repairs promptly; 98.5% are completed within timescale. This puts us in the top 25% of all social housing landlords.

We have high satisfaction levels with repairs – with over 93% of repairs being sorted on the first visit.

The severe winter of 2010 caused some delays in repairs – particularly for boiler breakdowns and servicing. We have been looking at ways to avoid this happening again in the future.

We have yet to introduce an appointments system for all repairs.

## Rents

The rents we charge are set in line with Government guidance. This means that over the years, our rents are coming into line with those charged by housing associations.

99% of the rent due in the last financial year was collected. This is the highest level of collection for 10 years. This also meant that rent arrears reduced by more than £5,000. All of this means that we have more money to provide services to our tenants and offer better value for money.

We evicted 2 households due to rent arrears – we use this only as a last resort and when absolutely necessary, which means this figure is lower than other landlords.

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## Meeting the standards set by the Tenant Services Authority continued

### Tenancies

Every new tenant is offered an 'introductory tenancy' for up to 12 months. If the person is able to keep to their obligations during this time, they will then become a secure tenant.

We have policies and procedures for dealing with tenants that do not keep their conditions of tenancy, although we know we have to improve on these in the future.

### Looking after our communities

Our neighbourhoods are generally well kept. Graffiti and rubbish is kept to a minimum and open spaces are kept tidy. We have a programme of regular neighbourhood walkabouts (also known as estate inspections). In future, we need to make sure that the standard of cleaning we offer is consistent across the board – and reflects what tenants expect to see.

### Tackling Anti-Social Behaviour

Around 25% of tenants have faced problems of anti-social behaviour (ASB). We know from feedback from residents that when and where it does occur, we need to deal with it promptly and effectively.

We have a range of ways that we can deal with ASB. We work very closely with the Police. We are monitoring cases more closely, to make sure that we are responding in the best way we can. We also now have systems in place to help identify people who might be more vulnerable than others when faced with problems of anti-social behaviour.

### Value for Money

Offering value for money is one of the priorities for the Housing Section. The money that we have available is often needed to meet essential costs and we cannot therefore always do what we – or you – would like to.

All income and expenditure for Council is accounted for separately to other expenses of the Council. Council Tax cannot be used to fund council housing – and neither can rents be used to pay for other council services.

We have a good understanding of how much our services cost and we monitor these closely. We also compare our costs with other landlords - most of our costs compare favourably to other social landlords.

We have secured savings and brought in more money by reorganising the way we work in some areas, for example, gas servicing and repairs.

For a full copy of the Annual Report, please see our website – [www.oadby-wigston.gov.uk/housing](http://www.oadby-wigston.gov.uk/housing) or telephone Leicester (0116) 257 2619.



## Housing Benefit Changes for single people aged under 35

The Government is changing Housing Benefit payments to single people under the age of 35 from 1 January 2012.

At present single people who rent privately and are aged between 25 to 35 can claim a type of Housing Benefit known as Local Housing Allowance for rented self contained accommodation such as a one bed flat or one bed house. From January 2012 this rate will be reduced to a shared accommodation rate (the amount we pay for people living in a bed sit). If you are single and aged under 25 you are already limited to getting Local Housing Allowance paid at the bed sit rate.

The rules governing this change are a little complex and some people will be protected from the changes so contact us for more information. We will also be writing to our existing customers who are likely to be affected to offer advice.

As an example of the change, a single person aged between 25 and 35 living in a one bed flat could currently get Local Housing Allowance worth £86.54 per week (£375 per month) but from January this will be reduced to around £57.00 per week (£246 per month). Please note that these Local Housing Allowance rates can change from time to time, so check our website for the latest information.

# Applying for Council housing and housing association properties

## We are here to help

Earlier this year, we brought in a new way of letting Council housing, called Choice Based Lettings. Most housing association properties are now also advertised through this system.

To find out more about how Choice Based Lettings works, and how you can apply for a Council or housing association property, please look at the website:

**[www.leicestershire-homes.org.uk](http://www.leicestershire-homes.org.uk)**

If you have a difficulty using a computer, need help with filling out the forms or require further advice, then we are here to help.

Call in at one of our customer service centres. You can collect an application pack, or talk to one of our advisers with any query you might have.

We have an information guide about Choice Based Lettings, which is available on the website **[www.leicestershire-homes.org.uk](http://www.leicestershire-homes.org.uk)**, as well as our website – **[www.oadby-wigston.gov.uk](http://www.oadby-wigston.gov.uk)**. You can also get a copy from any of our customer service centres.

You can use computers at any of the libraries to see the website for Choice Based Lettings. We also have a computer point in the customer service centre at the Council Offices – an adviser will be happy to help you.

You can telephone our offices - Leicester **(0116) 288 8961**

We can provide a printed newsletter for people who do not have access to a computer – please ask for further details. If you have a support worker or a social worker, please ask them to talk

to us about your application. We can then make sure you get all the help you need.

We can provide forms in different formats, such as large print. We can also arrange for interpreters and translators, if this is required.

If you have difficulty getting out of your home (because of age or disability), we can arrange for a home visit.

Do you have a friend or relative who could help you? If you want a friend or relative to talk to us about your situation, please write to us to let us know.

Remember – for more information about Choice Based Lettings, look at the website **[www.leicestershire-homes.org.uk](http://www.leicestershire-homes.org.uk)** or contact us in any of the ways mentioned above.



## We've given up smoking – and feel great!

With the help of the NHS Stop Smoking Service, six people from the Council's Depot have managed to kick the habit. "I feel so good about it – people say that I'm a changed person", said Jim Starkey, who thinks it is the best thing he ever did. Another colleague – Dave Wathen – had been smoking for over 50 years, proving it is never too late to give up. To mark their success, two of the group did a sponsored walk in aid of the British Heart Foundation, raising £373.

Stop Smoking sessions were held for Council Depot staff with Glenis Schroff who provided attendees with different options to help assist with smoking cessation. The sessions helped to highlight the short and long term health implications as well as cost and quality of life. Follow up care is also available to those who need it.

If you have ever thought about giving up smoking and would like help to do it, then please contact the NHS County

Stop Smoking Service on **0845 045 2828**, or visit **[www.smokefree.nhs.uk](http://www.smokefree.nhs.uk)**

