

October 2011



Annual Report to Tenants

Produced by the Housing Service



TSA TENANT
SERVICES
AUTHORITY

This Annual Report contains **important information** about your Housing Service and some proposed new local standards

Your views are important to us. We want to take your views into account when making any changes to the Housing Service, so please complete the enclosed questionnaire and return in the enclosed pre-paid envelope or to:

Tenant Participation
East Devon District Council
Knowle
Sidmouth
EX10 8HL

If you don't have a questionnaire enclosed with this report, please call 01395 517453, email tenantparticipation@eastdevon.gov.uk, or write to the address above.

Front page photograph: our tenants' welfare is important to us – a Mobile Support Officer on a home visit



To request this information in an alternative format or language please call 01395 516551 or email csc@eastdevon.gov.uk

We consider requests on an individual basis

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ABBREVIATIONS AND ACRONYMS USED IN THIS REPORT

DHC	Devon Home Choice
EDDC	East Devon District Council
HCA	Homes and Communities Agency
HRA	Housing Revenue Account
HRB	Housing Review Board
SAP	Standard Assessment Procedure for energy efficiency
SRG	Service Review Group
STAR	Survey of Tenants and Residents
STATUS	Standardised tenant satisfaction survey
TALCP	Tenant and Leaseholder Customer Panel
TRG	Tenant Representative Group
VAT	Value Added Tax

WRITING THIS ANNUAL REPORT

We have tried to make this Annual Report interesting, informative, and easy to read. We have consulted with many tenants about the contents and have tried to take into account the comments you made about last year's report.

We are particularly grateful to the following people for their contribution towards the report:

- representatives from the various Service Review Groups who worked with us on the initial drafts
- tenants on the email consultation group who read and commented on the final draft report
- the Housing officers who have provided valuable information for the report.

If you have any questions about the content of this report please contact the Housing Projects Officer at East Devon District Council at our Sidmouth address, by phoning 01395 519982 or by emailing housingstrategy@eastdevon.gov.uk.

CONTACTING US

Full telephone and email contact details for all sections of the Housing Service can be found in your tenant handbook. This can also be viewed online at www.eastdevon.gov.uk/tenants_handbook.pdf.

Write to us or visit us at:

East Devon District Council
Knowle
Sidmouth
EX10 8HL

(Mon–Fri, 8.30 am–5 pm)

Phone: 01395 516551 (Mon–Fri, 8.30 am–5 pm)

You can also visit the Housing Office at:

Exmouth Town Hall
St Andrews Road
Exmouth
EX8 1AW

(Mon–Fri, 9 am–1 pm and 2 pm–4.30 pm)

Introduction

STATEMENT FROM	Sue Saunders <i>Member of the Tenant Representative Group</i>	John Golding <i>Head of Housing</i>
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WELCOME TO OUR ANNUAL REPORT TO TENANTS. WE HOPE THAT YOU WILL be interested to hear about our performance and the improvements and changes we have made during the past year. Last October we published our first Annual Report and included a questionnaire about the new local standards and the Annual Report. We used the responses to help draw up our finalised local standards.

One important change this year, which may not be very obvious to tenants generally, is that we have recently restructured the Housing Service into four teams. Further information about each team can be found in the Housing Service Directory at www.eastdevon.gov.uk/housing_service_directory_2011.pdf. A printed copy is also available on request. This restructuring will allow us to deliver a modern, efficient, and effective service to all our customers, including both tenants and residents in the private sector.

The past year has also seen the publication of the booklet *Our commitments to you – East Devon District Council’s Housing Service Standards*. This single document sets out all our housing customer service commitments, including the new local standards. It can be viewed at www.eastdevon.gov.uk/housing_service_standards.pdf. A printed copy is also available on request.

In last year’s report we explained about the new local standards which were introduced from October 2010. In this report we set out what we are doing to achieve these. We also give some information on setting local standards for two further areas: tenancy (allocating properties and tenure); and value for money (managing resources to provide cost effective, efficient and quality services).

This report covers the financial period from 1 April 2010 to 31 March 2011, unless we have indicated otherwise. We hope that you will find it both interesting and informative. We look forward to working with all our tenants in the future to achieve our shared aims and to keep improving our housing services.

Your responses to our 2010 Annual Report

We were very pleased to receive completed questionnaires from almost a thousand tenants.

Of those who responded:

- ninety-nine per cent found it interesting and informative
- ninety-eight per cent said that the report was attractive and easy to read, although a few people felt it was too long and needed to be simpler
- twelve per cent said that there was further information they would like to see included – we have tried to put this into this year's report.

The requested information

- ✓ A list of people involved in producing the Annual Report
– see *page 2*
- ✓ Information on the number of people on the housing register and the number of properties which are under-occupied
– see *page 5*
- ✓ More information on the reletting of council houses
– see *pages 5 and 6*
- ✓ Reports on work that has been done in community areas and to tackle antisocial behaviour
– see *page 12*

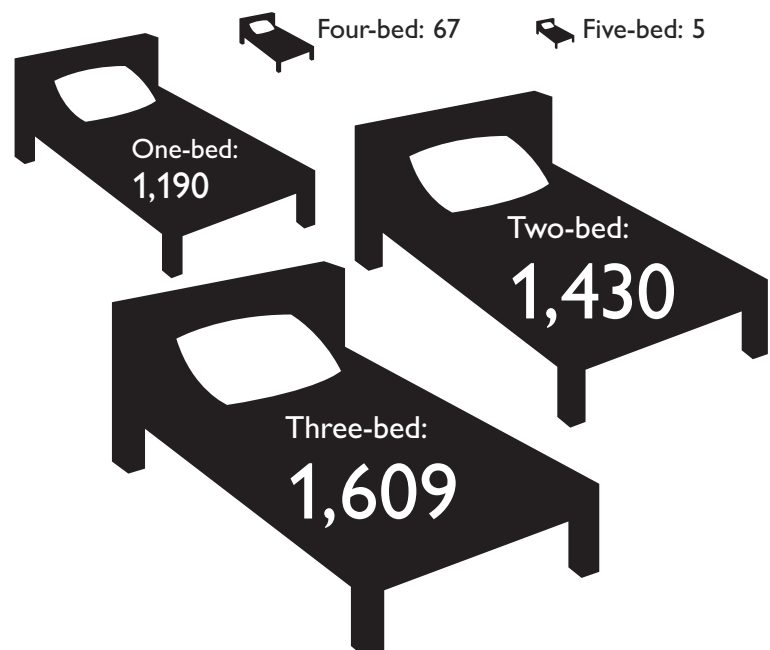
1 Letting our properties

About our properties

As at 1 April 2011, we have 4,301 properties of different types and sizes.

What are our properties like?

Property type	Quantity
One-bed	1,190
Two-bed	1,430
Three-bed	1,609
Four-bed	67
Five-bed	5
Bungalows	989
Flats/bedsits	1,361
Houses	1,951
Sheltered	1,157
General needs	3,144



The number of people on our waiting list is rising We allocate most of our properties through Devon Home Choice (DHC). The number on DHC registered as seeking accommodation in East Devon varies from week to week. However numbers are steadily increasing. In June 2011 we had approximately 3,250 applicants, compared to about 2,500 in September 2010.

We let fewer properties this year than last year but properties were left empty for a shorter time Our purpose when we allocate properties is to match the right people to the right home. We made a total of 311 lettings during 2010/11, compared to 343 in the previous year. On average it took us twenty-two working days to re-let an empty home to a new tenant. This compares to twenty-eight days in 2009/10. Our target time to re-let empty properties is twenty-five working days.

Who did we let properties to this year?

43%

FROM THE DHC
WAITING LIST

24%

FROM THE DHC
TRANSFER LIST

17%

HOMELESS
APPLICANTS

16%

MUTUAL
EXCHANGES

Improving the time taken to re-let properties

DAYS TO RE-LET
A PROPERTY IN:

2009/10: **28**

TARGET FOR 2010/11: **25**

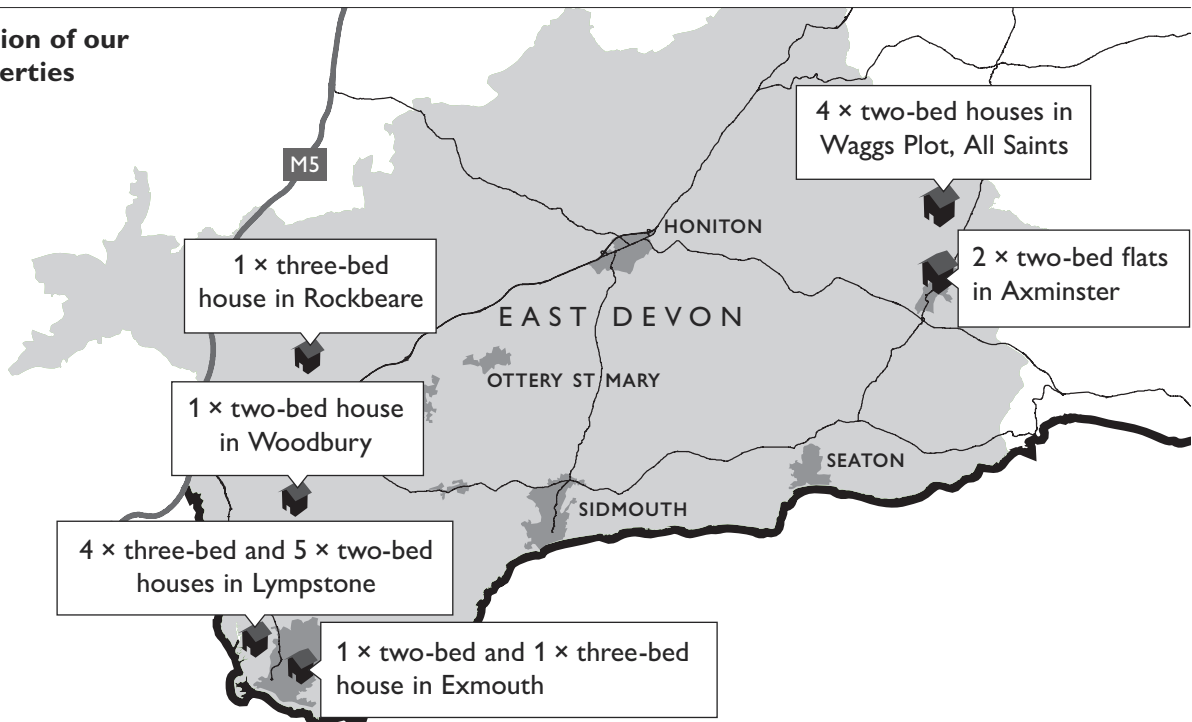
2010/11: **22**



Providing more family accommodation

We added nineteen new properties to our housing stock in 2010/11. Seventeen properties were built with joint funding from the Homes and Communities Agency (HCA). A new build two-bedroom property in

The location of our new properties



Woodbury was purchased using Section 106 money (money which arises from a planning application), and another new three-bedroom property was acquired from a developer in Rockbeare.

We added nineteen new properties to our housing stock

Seventy per cent of our three-bedroom properties have only one to two occupants From our 2009 tenant profiling information, we know that a small proportion of our general needs homes are over-occupied but a large number of three- and four-bedroom properties are under-occupied.

We've improved our downsizing scheme to help release more family housing

During 2010/11, eighteen tenants took advantage of our downsizing scheme and moved to a smaller home. This released sixteen three-bedroom properties, one four-bedroom property and one two-bedroom property.

We have now increased the amount of compensation paid if you downsize and there will shortly be more support available to help you with moving arrangements (such as arranging phone connection and carpet fitting).

We've improved our downsizing scheme to help release more family housing – you could get up to £3,000 for moving

Amounts payable under the Downsizing scheme

Bedrooms in current property	Bedrooms in new, smaller property	Standard compensation payment (£)	Payment for bedroom released (£)	Total payment (£)
5	1	1,500	1,500 **	3,000
5	2	1,500	1,500	3,000
4	1	1,500	1,500	3,000
4	2	1,500	1,000	2,500
3	1	1,500	1,000	2,500
3	2	1,500	500	2,000
2*	1	1,500	500	2,000

* Moves from two-bedroom to one-bedroom properties will only be eligible for the downsizing payment in certain circumstances and where a property suitable for a family is being released

** Maximum payment

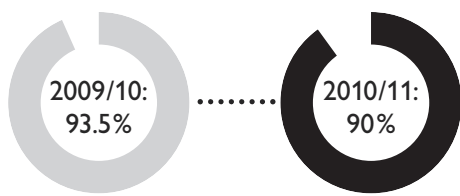
2 Looking after our properties

Repairing and maintaining your homes

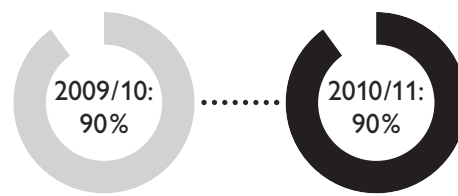
The percentage of repairs completed within the target time has increased. The following visual shows how we have responded to demands for repairs compared to the previous year.

Comparison of response to repairs

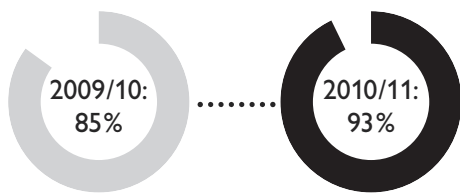
Immediate repairs
(one day response)



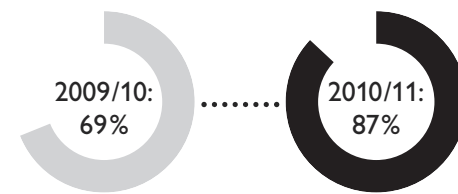
Emergency repairs
(three day response)



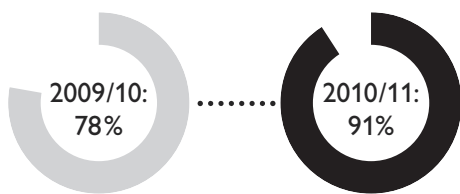
Urgent repairs
(seven day response)



Priority repairs
(one–three week response)



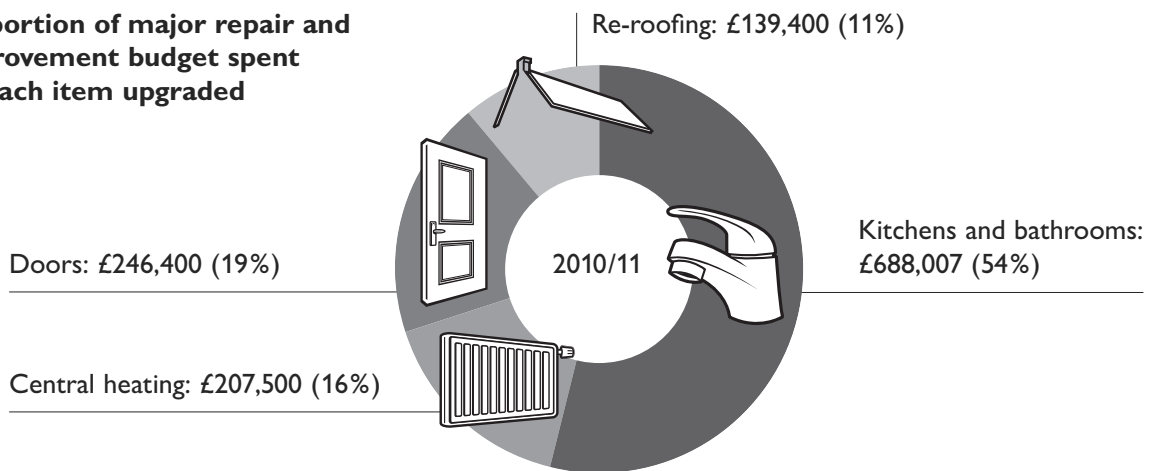
Non-urgent repairs
(three–six week response)



Our process for repairs We have adopted a simple process for repairs: to do the right repair at the right time. If we and our contractors achieve this, we will provide a repairs service that does what matters to tenants.

We've improved our response times to repairs and we do the right repair at the right time

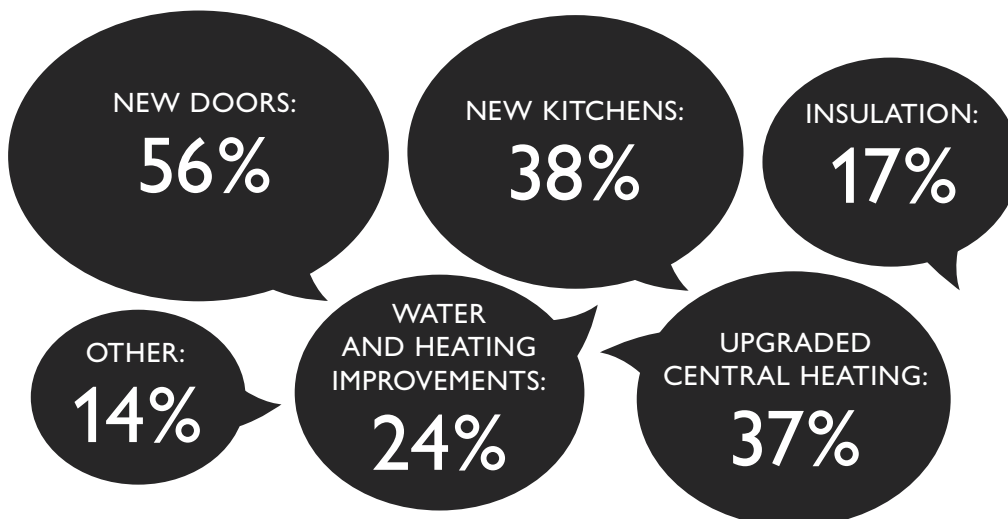
Proportion of major repair and improvement budget spent on each item upgraded



What you told us about your properties

In the questionnaire on local standards sent out with our last annual report we asked you to tell us the two most important items that you would like us to work on in your home – we received 888 responses.

Percentage of respondents who said that the most important items were ...



Stock condition survey

To gain a better understanding of the general standard of our properties we carried out a stock condition survey. Between March and May 2010 Michael Dyson Associates Ltd undertook a stock condition survey covering about half of our properties. From this they have calculated what we need to do to improve the whole of our housing stock.

What has the stock condition survey told us about our properties?

- All our properties have been well maintained but some areas need future investment – over the next thirty years we will need to spend about £119 million on planned maintenance. This works out to about £27,800 per property.
- Kitchens and boilers are our area of highest priority and we will spend £6.5 million on these over the next five years.
- The SAP (standard assessment procedure for energy efficiency) rating for our properties overall is sixty-four (below the figure we previously reported).
- Seventy-three of our properties have a SAP rating below thirty-five and these require urgent work to provide warmer homes for their tenants.
- Seven hundred and forty of our properties need work on them to reach the decent home standard, which is the minimum standard for social housing required by the Government.
- There are nearly £600,000 worth of catch-up repairs needing immediate attention, equal to about £139 per property.

This information will enable us to refresh our thirty-year business plan and make sure that we continue to maintain and improve our properties. We have budgetted to spend £250,000 per year on doors, £650,000 per year on kitchens and bathrooms and £350,000 on boilers.

Living in flats

One of our new local standards commits us to improving the living environment for tenants in blocks of flats. We agreed to pay particular attention to enhancing grounds maintenance, insulation, and the level of cleaning of all communal areas within our blocks of flats.

We have reviewed communal cleaning arrangements and this year will be working towards introducing the recommendations. We carry out in-depth estate inspections each year, during which we pay particular attention to the condition of estates in general and identify areas where improvements to grounds maintenance work, such as grass cutting, are needed. Any areas for improvement are discussed and, when appropriate, changes or enhancements to the service are made.

The thermal insulation in our flats already meets the required standards, so we currently have no plans to carry out any further work in this area. It is extremely expensive to enhance the sound insulation of properties, with costs averaging between £10,000 and £15,000 per property. We therefore are not currently in a position to make further improvements to the majority of our properties, but will give consideration to individual flats where tenants are experiencing serious issues.

We are committed to improving the living environment for tenants in blocks of flats

✓ HOW WE ARE MEETING OUR LOCAL STANDARDS

STANDARD	HOW WE ARE MEETING THIS STANDARD
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ We will produce a rolling five-year plan to identify improvement works to our properties, prioritising areas highlighted by the stock condition survey and feedback from the local standards consultation. 	<p>We have carried out the stock condition survey and we will spend £6.5 million on improving kitchens and replacing boilers over the next five years.</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ We will ensure all our contractors treat you with respect and courtesy. We will monitor the standard of workmanship and aim for a 'right first time' service. 	<p>We monitor contractor performance including appointments, customer satisfaction and standard of workmanship. This is regularly reported to the Housing Review Board (HRB) and reviewed by the Repairs Review Group at their meetings with Skinners, the day-to-day contractor. Work is usually completed in a reasonable time and to a good standard and you tell us that you are happy with the service our repairs team provide.</p> <p>You have raised concerns about work not being completed in one visit and not being contacted before the contractor knocks on your door. We are working with Skinners and other contractors to improve these areas of concern.</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ We will introduce a question to ask when you report a repair to establish if there is a repeat repair issue occurring. 	<p>We are monitoring the number and type of 'repeat' repairs – these are repairs that you have previously reported that have not been done or the repair has been done but it has gone wrong again. We are working with the Repairs Review Group to develop and publish a 'repairs handbook' that will make it easier for you to report a repair and for us to fully understand what is wrong. We hope to give you a copy of the repair handbook this year.</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ We will work to improve the living environment for tenants who live in blocks of flats. 	<p>Recommendations for improving the cleaning service for communal areas have been made by the HRB and will now be implemented by our Estate Management team. We will carry out consultation with our customers to see if the changes to the service lead to in the improvements hoped for.</p>

3 Looking after our estates and tackling antisocial behaviour

Managing our tenancies

Most new tenants begin with an introductory tenancy, which automatically becomes a secure tenancy after twelve months, provided they have kept to the terms of their agreement. Using introductory tenancies allows us to identify tenants who may struggle to meet their tenancy conditions. We can then support the tenant and work with them to ensure that any problems and issues are addressed before a secure tenancy is put in place. Between April 2010 and March 2011 we granted 156 introductory tenancies.

Tackling antisocial behaviour

You have told us tackling antisocial behaviour is a high priority. Antisocial behaviour can be complex and our response to issues will vary depending on the circumstances of each case. Our Housing officers in Estate Management work closely with the Mid and East Devon antisocial behaviour coordinator and get involved at an early stage with each case reported to us.

We take each complaint seriously and carry out a risk assessment to judge the priority of the case. We try to keep the complainant informed of what is happening and what has been agreed. We have recently produced a new leaflet about dealing with antisocial behaviour which sets out what you can do and what action we can take.

We have produced a new leaflet about dealing with antisocial behaviour which discusses what you can do and what action we can take

What happened to reports of antisocial behaviour during last year?



During 2010/11 we received 229 reports of antisocial behaviour. We investigated every complaint and as a consequence of their behaviour one person had their tenancy demoted, one person had their introductory tenancy extended and five cases were referred to Devon Mediation Service.

Where an antisocial behaviour or neighbour nuisance issue has occurred and been fully investigated we send out a satisfaction survey to the person who raised the issue.

Results from returned satisfaction surveys

Customer felt that they:	Result (%)
Found it easy to report an incident	94
Found staff member:	
helpful	94
courteous	94
sensitive	90
responsive	90
knowledgeable	84
Were satisfied with:	
support provided during the case	79
the overall way the issue was dealt with	78
the overall outcome of the issue	74
Were kept up-to-date with what was happening	77
Were willing to report further incidents in the future	78

Our new in-depth estate inspections

As one of our new local standards, we have introduced in-depth estate inspections and so far this year we have carried out inspections in Seaton and Honiton, with a further one planned for Axminster later in the year.

We visited more than 350 homes and spoke to over 150 tenants. We inspected footpaths, gardens, parking areas, abandoned vehicles and we spoke to tenants about their property. For people living in accommodation that is now too large for their requirements we suggested moving to smaller accommodation under the downsizing scheme (see page 7). We also took reports of repairs and other issues such as antisocial behaviour.

*We visited more than
350 homes and spoke
to over 150 tenants
in our estate inspections*

✓ HOW WE ARE MEETING OUR LOCAL STANDARDS

STANDARD

■ As well as our current local estate walkabouts we will introduce regular in-depth estate inspections. In 2011 we will pilot this in Honiton and Axminster.

■ We will work with other local agencies to tackle antisocial behaviour issues. Incidents reported by EDDC tenants will be monitored by Housing officers who will feedback regularly to the person reporting the problem.

HOW WE ARE MEETING THIS STANDARD

We have carried out inspections in Seaton and Honiton, and have one planned for Axminster later in the year.

We regularly meet and work with the police, social services, probation service, schools, youth service, Primary Care Trust, and other local agencies to tackle and resolve antisocial behaviour.

Housing officers review complaints received on a regular basis as agreed appropriate with the tenant for each case. We keep in touch with the person raising the complaint and make sure they are aware of the action being taken.

4 Involving tenants

We've reviewed and updated our 'menu' of opportunities for you to be involved in and influence the Housing Service. We have a new 'getting involved' leaflet which sets these all out and our new Tenant and Council Partnership Agreement will be published shortly. For copies of these please visit www.eastdevon.gov.uk or contact Tenant Participation on 01395 517453. We've listened to what you said and have set up some new groups and projects.

We've listened to what you said and set up some new groups and projects

The Tenant Representative Group

The Government has recently introduced a great many changes to the laws concerning social housing. This has led the Tenant and Leaseholder Customer Panel (TALCP) to review their effectiveness and position within

East Devon's Housing Service. After a lot of discussion and consultation, it was agreed to disband the TALCP and form the Tenant Representative Group (TRG). The TRG is made up of representatives from each of the Service Review Groups and other tenant committees, such as the Mystery Shopping and Community Research Groups.

It is anticipated that the new group will be more effective, with a wider understanding of the work of the Housing Service. Its main purpose will be to encourage the exchange of information and co-operation between the various housing sections, individual staff, tenants and councillors.

Tenants envisage the new group becoming the hub of an information network which will be available to everyone concerned with housing. Sue Saunders, Chair of the disbanded TALCP, said 'We intend that this will be the start of a communication revolution within the Housing Service.'



The logo of the TRG, which replaced the TALCP in October

The Tenant Scrutiny Panel

This is a newly-formed and completely independent group. Its role is to undertake in-depth examinations of various areas of the Housing Service. It has complete freedom to choose the areas to look at and authority to ask for the cooperation of the housing staff.

Having highlighted either good or poor practices, it will then report the findings to Housing officers and the HRB, along with any recommendations it may wish to make. In order to gain confidence in their new role, panel members have decided to start by looking at the housing community centres which they hope will be a fairly straightforward project.

The work of the Housing Review Board

The HRB includes five tenant members. It met six times between April 2010 and March 2011. The HRB looks at all aspects of the landlord function of the Housing Service. Work during the year included considering the proposed forthcoming changes to government legislation regarding social housing, reviewing the sheltered housing support services, agreeing the proposed local standards, and reviewing the Housing Revenue Account (HRA) budget.

It received a number of update reports including ones on the Council Own Build programme, complaints, and the individual garden maintenance scheme. It also adopted some new housing policies including the landlord disabled adaptations policy and the asbestos management plan and procedure.

Some of the ways to get involved with the Housing Service

- Join a Service Review Group (SRG)
- Become a 'mystery shopper'
- Join the Tenant Scrutiny Panel
- Join us at the Annual Residents' Conference

✓ HOW WE ARE MEETING OUR LOCAL STANDARDS

STANDARD

■ We will hold meetings at small local venues throughout the district and ensure the right staff attend.

■ As well as meetings we will use a range of involvement methods which will be widely published. We will listen to what you tell us and make service improvements as a result.

HOW WE ARE MEETING THIS STANDARD

We have held tenants meetings in local housing community centres across the district, with staff representatives from different housing sections attending. A positive response to this has been received from tenants attending the different meetings.

We have reviewed our methods of involvement and now, in addition to traditional meetings, tenants can be involved and consulted by email and by using the social network website Facebook. By the end of 2012 we hope to be able to communicate with all of our tenants and leaseholders in this way.

5 Supporting elderly and vulnerable tenants and working with the community

To make sure we offer the correct level of support to residents in our sheltered housing, we have introduced a new model of support known as 'cluster working'. This model offers residents a team of Mobile Support Officers rather than residents relying on just one officer. The tenant's level of need is identified through a single assessment process, and this sets the basis for the level of day-to-day support they receive.

Support may come in the form of face to face visits, an agreed number of telephone calls each week, or a combination of both, and we work hard to ensure the right level of support is delivered to the residents that require it. The cluster working model has been operating very successfully in Exmouth for over a year and we are now ready to implement the model across the rest of the district.

Tackling social isolation with Get Digital

The Housing Service is keen to tackle social isolation among all its tenants. We encourage residents to be socially active in order to increase their independence, as well as promoting the need to keep active in order to keep healthy. Over the past twelve months we have introduced the Get Digital programme to help with this work.

Get Digital is about supporting tenants to be ‘digitally educated’ and use this as another way of retaining their independence to stay at home for longer. We run training sessions for residents to learn how to access the internet and show how this can help them in many aspects of their day-to-day life.

A success story An example of training through Get Digital is the support given to residents to help them order groceries online. This is particularly useful for residents as access to shops can be a problem for individuals with poor mobility or who live in rural areas.

Some tenants have also been introduced to Skype, an Internet-based application that allows people to talk to and see friends and relatives around the world. By using a webcam, one tenant was able to talk with a grandchild in Australia that she has never seen before. Promoting such ways of communicating has opened up a whole new world to many of our residents and forming stronger links with family and friends abroad has improved the quality of life for many residents.

The Get Digital Programme has also seen the Council form strong links with the wider community, including an excellent partnership with the local primary school next to a scheme in Exmouth, where the children have been tutoring residents. This work that spans age groups is of great benefit and creates a community bond between young and old that is often lost in today’s society. Get Digital is so popular that we have a waiting list of well over fifty residents.

‘Active workshops’ As well as Internet-based workshops, we have been running ‘active workshops’ with equipment such as the Xbox Kinect, an interactive digital game which provides the opportunity for some gentle exercise and the chance to have some fun and to interact with people. Through a successful grant application to

Get Digital is about supporting tenants to be ‘digitally educated’, which can help tenants retain their independence and keep fit



This is great fun – I never realised this equipment was so easy to use. I could definitely do this regularly.



–Resident, on the ‘active workshops’

Digital Unite (the government body promoting the Digital Inclusion Agenda), we were able to purchase our own equipment. At a recent interactive bowling competition event in Sidmouth, one resident said: 'This is just great fun – I never realised this equipment was so easy to use. My doctor keeps telling me to do some gentle exercise but I hate the thought of it! However I could definitely do this regularly.'

Through programmes such as Get Digital we are changing the way in which we offer support to our residents. We have found more and more that residents do not necessarily want a 'door knocking' service (which was how the historic 'warden service' was described). Through participation in initiatives such as Get Digital we are delivering a new, innovative form of support that allows residents to stay independent for longer by giving them the tools to do so.

Through programmes such as Get Digital we are changing the way in which we offer support to our residents

More for our younger tenants as SWITCH goes to Axminster

The SWITCH project has been such a success at Littleham in Exmouth that we're now doing similar work in Axminster. During July we ran a film project at the Millwey Community Centre. Young people worked with an award-winning film producer to make a 3D film.

We've also run one off community fun days and festivals in Exmouth, Honiton, Axminster and Seaton, and supported other events and activities including the Sidmouth Arches Project, Budleigh Salterton festival, Exmouth festival and Newton Poppleford youth club re-opening celebrations.

The aim of these projects The aim of our work with young people is to involve them in positive activities, so taking them off the local streets and away from potential antisocial behaviour, and encouraging them to learn skills that will equip them for work.



This has been fun and a good experience – it's kept me out of trouble and given me something to look forward to.



– Young resident, on the SWITCH project

✓ HOW WE ARE MEETING OUR LOCAL STANDARDS

STANDARD

■ We will engage young people in positive free time activities that help them create positive outcomes for their lives.

HOW WE ARE MEETING THIS STANDARD

We have used a variety of activities to engage with communities and residents of all ages. These activities help to bring the community together and are a foundation on which to build relationships with younger tenants.

The informality of the activities encourages the tenants to communicate their concerns and to tell staff what they need from the Housing Service. We recruit community volunteers and provide participants with skills, free training and references, which should improve their employment opportunities.

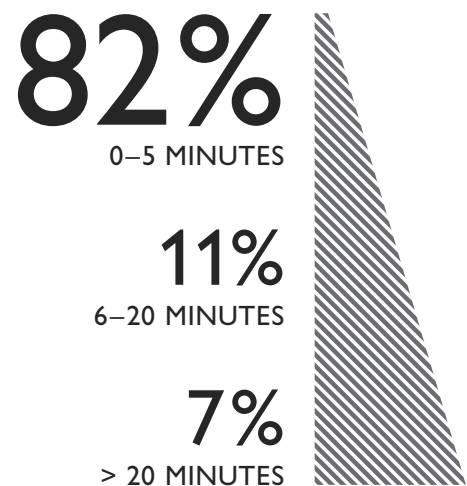
6 Customer care and dealing with complaints

Monitoring waiting times

Between 9 June and 29 July 2011, the reception staff at the Council's offices in Sidmouth recorded the waiting times of visitors to Housing Service staff. In total 268 people came to visit a Housing officer and the reception staff recorded the waiting time for 203 (76 per cent) of these visits.

Of the 203 visitors, 82 per cent had a waiting time of between zero and five minutes, a further 11 per cent had a waiting time of between six and twenty minutes, and only 7 per cent waited more than twenty minutes. The average waiting time was five minutes. We will repeat this monitoring periodically to make sure that our visitors are not having to wait for an unacceptable length of time to see an officer.

Visitors' waiting times at the Council's offices at Sidmouth



What we're doing to improve our customer care

We are making sure that all our new leaflets are customer friendly and easy to understand. We ask tenants to comment on them before printing and give them a tenant 'tick' to show approval. We are also putting the production date on all our literature, which was a recommendation by the Customer Care Commitments Service Review Group.

A STAR (Survey of Tenants and Residents) survey is being carried out, which will give us up-to-date information on tenant satisfaction and enable us to compare the service given by East Devon with that of other housing providers. We will publish what we find out in our next Annual Report.

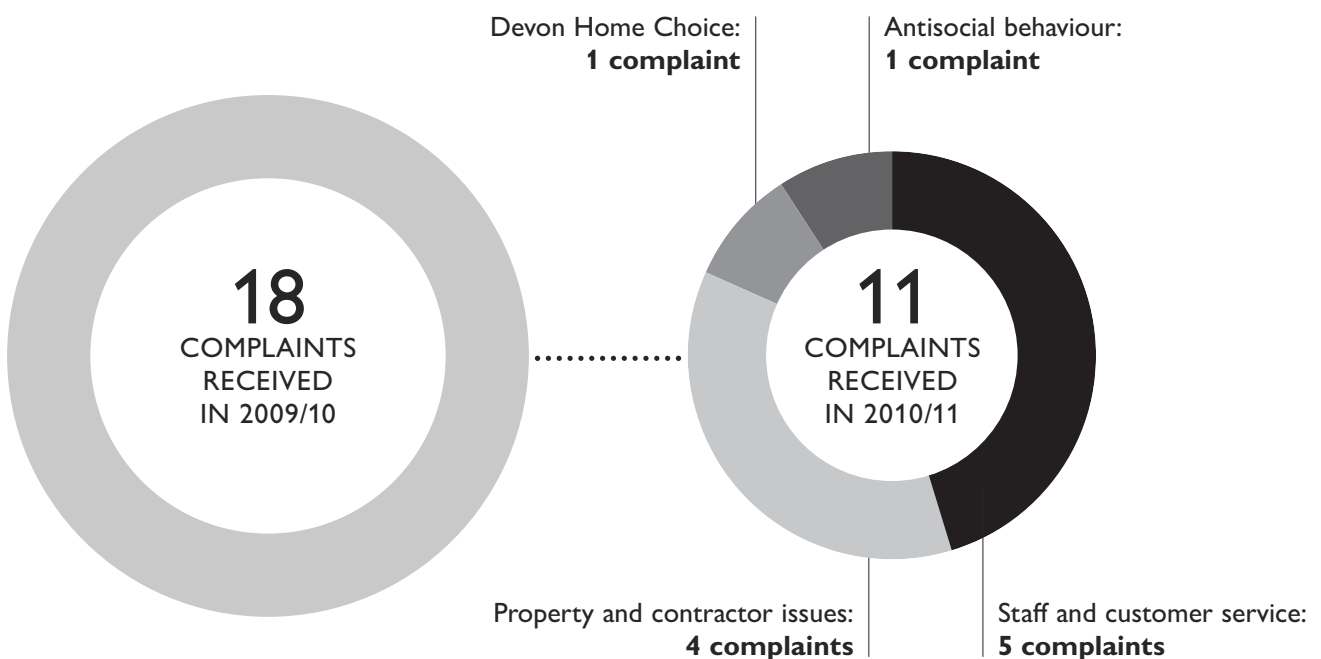


Our tenants' 'tick' that you can see on our new literature

What we're doing about complaints

Within the Housing Service we use the EDDC complaints system which has recently been made easier. This now has two stages rather than three. During 2010/11 we received eleven formal complaints about the Housing Service compared to eighteen last year. These took an average of seven days to investigate (at Stage One).

Complaints received by service



We've started to monitor informal complaints more carefully

At the request of the Customer Care Commitments Service Review Group, we have begun to monitor informal complaints. These are issues which are not registered as formal complaints but which point to areas where we have fallen short of giving a good service. As the repairs service has most contact with tenants it is not surprising that this is the area where most of these issues arise.

We are learning lessons from the complaints we get and trying to make service improvements

We need to make sure that all processes regarding allocations are clearly explained and understood by applicants. The quality of the allocations process needs to be monitored to ensure that we work effectively with our customers. We need to implement follow up visits where issues have occurred involving vulnerable tenants. For example, where a forced entry is necessary to a property that has a key safe, officers should contact Home Safeguard before proceeding.

We need to apologise when a mistake has been made or bad advice given, and this should be done by the member of staff involved rather than another officer. Staff need to be encouraged to resolve disputes as quickly as possible and not spend time defending what has been done in the past. We will ensure that complaints and compliments are regularly considered at each team meeting and appropriate action taken.

✓ HOW WE ARE MEETING OUR LOCAL STANDARDS

STANDARD

■ When you contact us we will answer you promptly, listen carefully, and treat you with respect.

HOW WE ARE MEETING THIS STANDARD

A survey of visitors to our Sidmouth offices has shown that 82 per cent of visitors were seen by a Housing officer within five minutes and only 7 per cent had to wait more than twenty minutes. We will continue to monitor visitor times periodically and aim to improve on these figures.

This year we plan to take part in the STAR (Survey of Tenants and Residents) survey, which replaces the STATUS survey. This is a tenant satisfaction survey and we will use the results (which will be reported in the next Annual Report) to see how we compare with other housing providers. With this report to all tenants there is a questionnaire about our customer service and our new local standards. This will tell us how we are performing and help us make improvements where necessary.

STANDARD

HOW WE ARE MEETING THIS STANDARD

■ When you contact us about issues which are not repairs related we will put you in touch with the right person to answer your query straight away. They will keep you informed of the progress of your case.

The enclosed questionnaire asks you to tell us if this is happening or not. We will use the information to improve our service and report the results of the questionnaire in next year's Annual Report.

■ We will have an easily accessible complaints process for housing. Officers will be able to help you with this on request.

For all formal complaints we follow the EDDC corporate complaints process which has recently been simplified to a two stage process. All officers know about this and can give you help and advice.

■ Repeat service requests (excluding repairs) will be logged as complaints by the receiving officer.

We have run a trial two week period to see how best to do this and will be continuing to do so over two week periods every three months. We will monitor the issues and report back to the Customer Care Commitments Service Review Group.

7 Housing finance and value for money

How much do we spend on your homes?

This year we had an annual budget of almost £14.8 million. We spent £5.7 million on repairs and maintenance to our properties and £3.3 million on staff costs. Staffing costs include not only salaries but also costs for transport, premises, support services, supplies, and other services. We also had to pay the Government a subsidy of £5.5 million. The balance of about £0.2 million includes payments to the pension fund and a contribution to capital expenditure.

Our budget was almost £14.8 million – from that we paid the Government £5.5 million in subsidy

Our total income and expenditure

Income (where money came from during 2010/11)



TOTAL INCOME/EXPENDITURE DURING 2010/11:

£14,757,000

Expenditure (where money was spent during 2010/11)



What does it cost to live in our properties?

Keeping your rents affordable is one of our priorities. The table below sets out the average weekly rent levels for 2010/11 and 2011/12 (excluding any service charges).

Property type		2010/11	2011/12
Bedrooms:	1	£57.13	£60.76
	2	£62.48	£66.64
	3	£66.74	£71.79
	4	£69.68	£75.10
	5	£73.00	£78.62
	6	£88.68	£95.20

Keeping your rents affordable is one of our priorities

We are also the landlord for about 750 garages. The weekly rent for these is £10.68. (Anyone who is not a council tenant and rents one of our garages will also have to pay VAT). If you wish to apply to rent a garage please contact our Housing Needs team on 01395 517469.

8 Get involved in setting our new local standards

By April 2012 the Tenant Services Authority has said that we need to have in place local standards around 'value for money' and 'tenancy issues'. Our proposed draft local standards for these areas are explained on the following pages. These have been drafted in consultation with the tenant members of our email group, the Tenant Representative Group and the Housing Review Board.

Enclosed with this Annual Report is a questionnaire about these local standards which we would encourage you to complete and return to us. We will use your comments to finalise our local standards in these two areas. The new standards will come into effect from 1 April 2012.

We will use your comments from the enclosed questionnaire to finalise our new local standards

THE FIRST NEW STANDARD: 'VALUE FOR MONEY'

STANDARD SET BY THE TENANT SERVICES AUTHORITY

This ensures that we manage our resources to provide cost-effective, efficient, quality services and homes to meet tenants' and prospective tenants' needs.

OUR DRAFT LOCAL STANDARDS

WHAT THIS STANDARD MEANS

■ We will ensure the Housing Review Board approves the annual Housing Revenue Account budget and monitors expenditure.

We will take a report to the HRB each year called *The Housing Revenue Account Outturn*. This explains in detail how money has been spent and what the position is regarding the budget.

The HRB will be asked to approve the report. In addition to this we will keep the HRB briefed on expenditure throughout the year.

■ We will publish each year what we have spent your rent on, in the Annual Report to tenants.

In this document (the Annual Report which is sent to all tenants every October) we will explain how we spend the rent you pay. (Please see page 23 for expenditure in 2010/11.)

■ We will work with the Tenant Representative Group (TRG) to monitor our services to make sure that they are being carried out to your satisfaction and to identify opportunities for improvement.

The TRG will receive regular reports from Housing officers about the services provided. The reports will show how we think we are performing against the local standards. These regular reports will enable the TRG to question and monitor the services we provide.

■ We will inform tenants of our value for money savings through the Annual Report and the newsletters and set out future plans for savings.

Every year in this document (the Annual Report) and in tenants' newsletters, we will explain how we are performing against identified value for money savings. We will explain this in detail and ask for your views on our plans for future savings.

THE SECOND NEW STANDARD: 'TENANCY'

STANDARD SET BY THE TENANT SERVICES AUTHORITY

This covers how we allocate our properties and how we set our rents. We must allocate our properties in a fair, transparent and efficient way and take into account the housing needs and aspirations of tenants and potential tenants. There should be clear application, decision-making, and appeals processes. Rents must be set in accordance with government frameworks.

OUR DRAFT LOCAL STANDARDS

WHAT THIS STANDARD MEANS

■ We will aim to register your fully-completed Devon Home Choice application form within ten working days of receipt.

An application can be made on line or on a paper form and we will aim to register it on to our system within ten working days of receiving the fully completed application.

■ We will review housing applications on Devon Home Choice for bands A, B, C, and D every two years.

We will have a rolling programme of reviewing applications in bands A, B, C, and D. You will not need to complete a new application form, but you must complete the short review form we send you to confirm that the details we have are correct and that you wish to remain on the list. Alternatively, you can complete the review online. If you do not complete the review within the time specified, your application will be cancelled.

■ We will let our properties within twenty-five working days to ensure we maximise our rental income.

When a property becomes vacant we nearly always have to carry out some repair work. We want to be able to carry out the work and get a new tenant in the property within an average of twenty-five working days.

■ We will offer an accompanied viewing to all new tenants when we let an empty property.

When an offer of a property is made to someone on the waiting list we will always offer that person the opportunity to view the property with officers from the Council and our contractors. At this stage the prospective tenant will be told what repairs are going to be carried out and an estimate of how long this will take.

OUR DRAFT LOCAL STANDARDS

WHAT THIS STANDARD MEANS

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ When possible, you will be given the opportunity to take on responsibility for fixtures and fittings left by the previous tenant. 	<p>When a property becomes empty it is inspected by a Housing officer, who will assess and make a judgement about the condition of any fixtures and fittings left in the property by the outgoing tenant. When possible the new tenant will be given the opportunity to take on the responsibility for any fixtures and fittings left in a good and safe condition and will be asked to sign a disclaimer form accepting responsibility for these.</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ We will let you know how much the rent and other charges of running the home will be. 	<p>We will make sure that all new tenants are told in advance exactly how much the full rent will be plus any additional service charges on their tenancy.</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ We will provide you with a number of ways to pay your rent. 	<p>Before starting their tenancy, we will explain to all new tenants the different methods that are available for paying their rent.</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ We will provide you with a rent statement every six months. 	<p>Every six months we will send all our tenants a detailed statement showing, for each week, the full rent due and the payments received, plus any entitlement to Housing Benefit. This will give you the opportunity to check that your rent account is up-to-date, and identify and remedy any problems.</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ We will take swift action against tenants who do not pay their rent. 	<p>You will be told quickly if your rent is not paid and when necessary recovery action such as court proceedings will be taken. This will give you and us the opportunity to identify any problems you may be having with paying your rent and also help us to manage rent accounts in an efficient and effective way.</p>

The next step: we need your thoughts

Please let us know what you think about these local standards. Please complete and return the enclosed questionnaire by **25 November**. If you don't have a questionnaire, please call 01395 517453 or email tenantparticipation@eastdevon.gov.uk.



Residents in the garden during the East Devon tenants' garden competition



Young people at the Millwey Community Centre enjoying making a 3D film as part of the SWITCH project

Opening of new council homes in Lympstone



www.eastdevon.gov.uk



PRODUCED OCTOBER 2011
ALL INFORMATION CORRECT AT TIME OF PRODUCTION

