

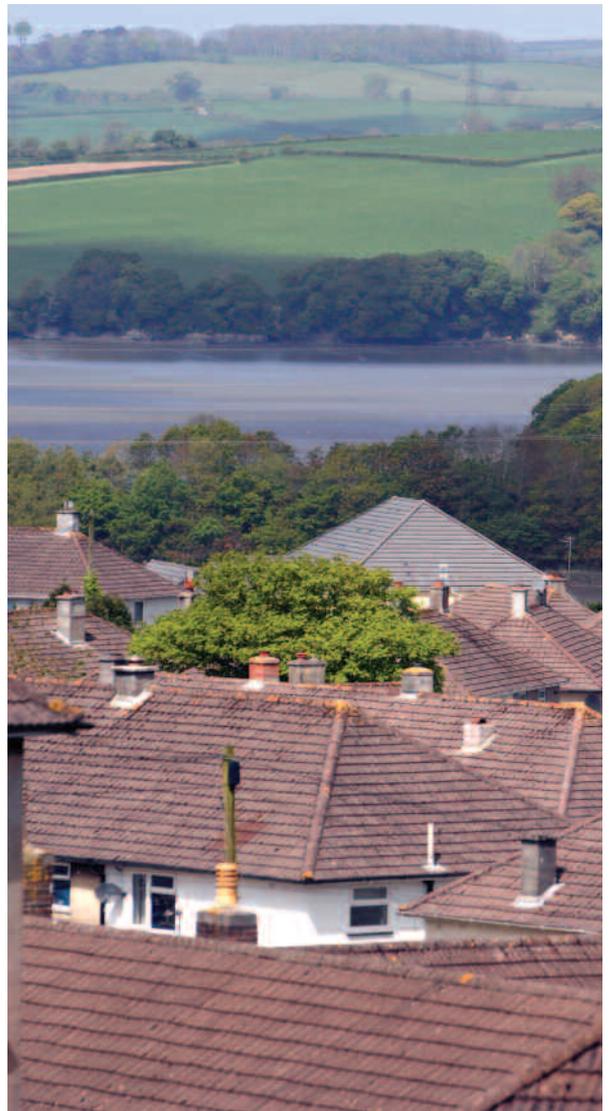
Plymouth Community Homes





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Introduction

We are pleased to introduce the first annual report of Plymouth Community Homes.

Since we were set up in November 2009, to receive the transfer of 15,000 homes from Plymouth City Council, we have been busy delivering on the promises that we made to you as part of the agreement to transfer.

In many areas, these plans are already making a difference, and we hope you are starting to see an improvement in your homes, the environment around you and the services you receive from us.

For example, we have installed over 830 new kitchens and bathrooms in our homes, windows in over 280 properties and around 1420 properties have had new high security PVC doors. We have also painted and refurbished many communal

areas, as well as installing CCTV in a number of our sheltered housing schemes.

However, we know that we still need to make more improvements to our services, and we are determined to make the necessary changes.

The Tenant Services Authority (TSA), the organisation that regulates social housing, has produced a set of national standards that all social landlords have to meet.

This report explains some of the things that we need to do to meet those standards. However, it also reflects what we think needs to be done. Over the coming months, we will be talking to our tenants across the city to get your views on what needs to happen to ensure services are delivered in a way that you want.



We are also keen to ensure that tenants are more involved in measuring our performance and helping us understand where improvements can be made. We plan to set up a 'Customer Assurance' panel, made of up tenants, who will scrutinise the delivery of our improvement plans, our promises and our services.

We have included a feedback sheet within this report, which we would like you to complete and return to us, so that we can find out more about what changes you would like to see.

We feel we have made many improvements for our tenants over the last year and are proud of our achievements as a new organisation. Now, we are looking forward to achieving much more with your involvement and support.



A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Clive Turner".

Clive Turner
Chief Executive



A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Peter Ebsworth".

Peter Ebsworth
Chair of the Board



What have we done since transfer?

We have focused on improving services and starting to deliver the promises made as part of the transfer agreement. Our plans have concentrated on six key themes:

Customers and communities

- We have started to review our services to ensure that we are continuously improving. This has already led to identifying new customer service standards. A group of tenants and frontline staff have led the consultation on the development of these standards.
- We will continue to review our services, working with tenants to prioritise the areas that need to be reviewed.
- We have drawn up plans for involving our customers in a number of ways to help us improve services.
- We are training frontline staff to improve the way in which we deal with anti-social behaviour.

Homes

- By the end of August, we had installed over 400 kitchens and over 420 bathrooms in our properties.
- By the end of August, we had installed windows in over 280 properties and around 1420 properties have had new high security PVC doors.
- We have replaced nearly 300 cracked and leaking roofs.
- The main plans for North Prospect have been completed, and we have selected the developers who will work with us to help turn the plans into reality.
- We have installed over 850 full central heating systems.



Environment

- Working with tenants, we spent around £600,000 of the Money Tree Fund to make improvements to the areas around properties, such as improving signage, lighting, fencing and gates.
- We carried out external painting and refurbishment to communal areas with a programme of further works agreed.
- We installed CCTV in a number of our sheltered housing schemes, making tenants feel more secure in their homes.

Our people

- A number of our repairs staff have been trained in multiple trades to enable them to complete more repairs, more quickly in your homes.
- We provided work experience for a number of young people in the main trades, including painting and plumbing, in partnership with City College Plymouth.
- We employed an additional 64 staff, mainly to work on contract supervision and window replacement.
- We have undertaken performance appraisals with staff to ensure they are supported to carry out their work effectively.

Governance

- We have developed plans to involve tenants in scrutinising our performance.
- We have started gathering information on the specific needs of our tenants.
- A code of conduct for our staff and Board members has been developed.
- We have developed our first equality and diversity plan, which will improve the way that our services meet the individual needs of our customers.

Money and resources

- As a new organisation, we have concentrated on ensuring that our financial systems are working correctly.
- We have built our own IT infrastructure to best support the services that we provide to you.
- We have started to review the charges for services that we make to our customers.
- We made a number of savings when contracting out work to our properties.

Case study: New kitchen is bonus for Mrs Edge

Mrs Edge had her new kitchen fitted and has found the extra space to be a real bonus. She says: “When you get your new kitchen, it’s like having a re-design as well. They work it so that you get more space. I have more than enough now!”

Keeping the kitchen clean really matters to Mrs Edge. “Its so easy now,” she says. “I can keep the kitchen floors really clean – in just one go!”

“It’s made a big difference to me and I’m very happy,” she adds.

The standards: Customers and communities

The Tenant Services Authority (TSA) has produced a set of national standards that all social landlords have to meet. Here, we set out what those standards say and how we have met or intend to meet them.

Customers and communities

Customer service, choice and complaints

The standard says that we need to:

- provide choices, information and communications that are appropriate to the diverse needs of our tenants in the delivery of all standards
- have an approach to complaints that is clear, simple and accessible, to ensure that complaints are resolved promptly, politely and fairly.

We think....

...that in order to meet the standard we need to:

- ensure there is a simple system for reporting complaints, and for publishing information about complaints and how we learn from them
- agree customer service standards and stick to them
- ensure that when we say people have a choice, they really do
- develop a comprehensive approach to monitoring customer satisfaction and making changes as a result of your feedback.

Involvement and empowerment

The standard says that we need to:

- support co-regulation with our tenants by:
 - offering all tenants a wide range of opportunities to be involved in the management of their housing including the ability to influence strategic priorities, the formulation of housing-related policies and the delivery of housing-related services
- consulting with our tenants and providing them with opportunities to agree local offers for service delivery

- providing tenants with a range of opportunities to influence how we meet the TSA's standards, to scrutinise performance against the standards and to develop the annual report
- providing support to tenants to help them be more effectively involved.

We think....

...that in order to meet this standard we need to:

- make sure that we have a consistent approach to residents' involvement across the organisation
- make sure that when you provide us with feedback, we use it to make improvements to services
- provide support for tenants to ensure that they can participate effectively in events and meetings
- develop an effective way of gathering information about the levels of service that tenants want
- develop an effective mechanism to allow tenants to scrutinise our performance.

Understanding and responding to the diverse needs of tenants

The standard says that we need to:

- treat all tenants with fairness and respect
- demonstrate that we understand the different needs of our tenants, in relation to age, disability, gender, transgender, sexual orientation, race and religion, as well as tenants with additional support needs.

We think....

...that in order to meet the standard we need to:

- get a better understanding of who our tenants are, and any specific needs they may have
- assess how our services are tailored (in practice) to match the specific needs of individual tenants.



Allocations

The standard says that we must:

- let our homes in a fair and transparent way
- take into account the housing needs and aspirations of tenants and potential tenants, demonstrating how we:
 - make the best use of available housing
 - are compatible with the purpose of the housing
 - contribute to Plymouth City Council's strategic housing function and sustainable communities
- have a clear application, decision-making and appeals process.

We think....

...that through our membership of Devon Home Choice, which allocates housing association homes in Devon, that we almost meet this standard.

However, we still need to:

- improve the ability of our tenants to move to different properties either within Plymouth or elsewhere in the country when they need or want to.

Neighbourhoods

The standard says that we need to:

- keep the neighbourhood and communal areas associated with the homes that we own clean and safe
- work in partnership with our tenants, and other providers and public bodies where it is effective.

We think....

- ...that in order to meet the standard we need to:
- develop our programme of estate inspections to ensure that tenants can easily get involved in them, and that they regularly get feedback on work that has been done
 - work with the City Council to improve access to recycling facilities
 - review our policy on keeping animals in our properties
 - review grounds maintenance services
 - work with tenants to develop a policy for maintaining and improving neighbourhoods.

The standards: Customers and communities

Anti-social behaviour

The standard says that we need to:

- work in partnership with other public agencies to prevent and tackle anti-social behaviour in the neighbourhoods where we own homes.

We think...

...that while we don't solve all the anti-social behaviour problems that people experience, our general approach to tackling anti-social behaviour is good. This is an area that will improve over time, as some of the preventative work takes effect. Examples of this would include improving security, such as CCTV and new door entry systems and referrals to the Family Intervention Project. We have also purchased noise monitoring equipment, to assist in dealing with complaints about noise nuisance.

Tenure

The standard says that we need to:

- offer and issue the most secure form of tenure compatible with the purpose of the housing and the sustainability of the community
- meet applicable statutory and legal requirements for the form and use of tenancy agreements.

We think...

...that we meet this standard as we issue assured tenancies to new tenants after a probationary period of 12 months. Tenants who transferred from Plymouth City Council generally have a protected assured tenancy.

However, we want to review our policies and introduce annual visits to tenants, to obtain feedback on our services, and ensure that we have up-to-date details about any particular needs they may have.



Case study: Claire gets help with her move

Claire Davey, her partner Adrian and their two-year-old son Jake moved from Woodhey Road to Fountains Crescent in Pennycross, Plymouth in early July. Claire, who was pregnant with her second child at the time, was keen to move closer to the rest of her family. She describes her experience:

“We wanted to be quite close to my parents and Adrian’s parents and we’re delighted as we’ve ended up within walking distance of them all.

“We got a disturbance allowance to help with the costs of moving home which we used to buy paint. We hired a van and moved ourselves – well, I went to a friend’s house while my partner did it!

“We had enough time as we got the keys then had two weeks to move in so I booked workmen to come and do the gas and electricity pay-as-you-go meters. The two-week period is great as you can get a couple of rooms done before you move in.

“Whenever I had any concerns, I talked to the Regeneration Team. At one point there were rumours flying around that the regeneration scheme was not going ahead. I phoned the team and they set my mind at rest. They are very good at explaining things.”

What do you think?

We would like to know what you think about what we need to do – have we included your priority, or are there other things that we need to do to meet the needs of our customers and communities?

The standards: Homes

Homes

Quality of accommodation

The standard says that we need to:

- ensure that tenants' homes meet the standard set out in the Government's Decent Homes guidance by 31 December 2010 and their homes continue to be maintained to at least this standard after this date
- meet the standards of design and quality that applied when the home was built, and where required as a condition of publicly funded financial assistance, if these standards are higher than the decent homes standard
- ensure that, when agreeing a local offer, it is set at a level not less than these standards and complies with section 6 of the Decent Homes guidance.

The standard also says that the Tenants Services Authority (TSA) may agree an extension to the 31 December 2010 date with a registered provider, where that is reasonable. Providers shall ensure that their tenants are fully aware of the reasons for any extension given.

For Plymouth Community Homes, this means....

...we have agreed an extension with the TSA to December 2014. This is because of the amount of work that was required across the city to meet the Decent Homes guidance at the point of transfer to Plymouth Community Homes.

Tenants were balloted on the transfer in October 2008, and a key part of that decision was to enable homes to be brought up to the Plymouth Community Homes standard, which is higher than the Decent Homes standard.

What do you think?

We would like to know what you think about what we need to do – have we included your priority, or are there other things that we need to do to ensure a good quality of accommodation?

The standards: Environment

Environment

Repairs and maintenance

The standard says that we need to:

- provide a cost-effective repairs and maintenance service to homes and communal areas that responds to the needs of, and offers choices to, tenants and has the objective of getting repairs and improvements right first time
- meet all applicable statutory requirements that provide for the health and safety of the occupants of our homes.

We think....

...that in order to meet this standard we need to:

- review our repairs service to see how it can better meet the needs of tenants
- improve the process of making adaptations
- ensure that tenants are offered choices about the way in which their repairs are done
- compare our costs with others to ensure that we provide value for money.

Local area co-operation

The standard says that we need to:

- co-operate with relevant partners to help promote social, environmental and economic well-being in the areas where we own properties.

We think....

...that through our work with Plymouth City Council and the Local Strategic Partnership, we meet this part of the standard. This work will continue to develop over time, and we would expect you to hear more about how the different agencies are working together in the course of the next year.

What do you think?

We would like to know what you think about what we need to do – have we included your priority, or are there other things that we need to do to meet the environment standard?

The standards: Money and resources

Money and resources

Rents

The standard says that we need to:

- ensure rents and any rent rises must be within limits set by the Government.

We think...

...that we comply with this standard, and aim to maintain rent at an affordable level that provides value for money.

In comparing our average rents with other housing associations, they are the second lowest in the country.

Value for money

The standard says that:

- we need to have a comprehensive approach to managing our resources, to provide cost-effective, efficient, quality services and homes to meet tenants' and potential tenants' needs.

We think....

...that in order to meet the standard we need to:

- develop plans to ensure that we provide value for money
- compare our costs and performance with others to ensure that we are making best use of our resources
- check the quality and cost of the services that are provided on our behalf by contractors
- ensure that where we make charges for services, they provide value for money.

Financial viability

The standard says that we need to:

- manage our resources effectively to ensure they remain financially viable.

We are confident that we meet this standard, however, we need to ensure that this continues, particularly given the current economic climate.

We have a business plan that we have costed, and there is funding in place to pay for the work that we need to do. We are expecting to receive funding from the Government to support our major programmes of work and the regeneration of North Prospect.

However, there are efficiency improvements that we can make across the organisation, and we will be implementing them to help ensure value for money and the long-term viability of the organisation.

What do you think?

We would like to know what you think about what we need to do – have we included your priority, or are there other things that we need to do to meet the money and resources standard?

The standards: Governance

Governance

The standard says that we need to:

- ensure effective governance arrangements that deliver their aims, objectives and outcomes for tenants and potential tenants in an effective, transparent and accountable manner.
Governance arrangements must ensure that we:
 - adhere to all relevant legislation
 - comply with our governing documents and regulatory requirements
 - are accountable to tenants, the Tenants Services Authority (TSA) and relevant stakeholders
 - safeguard taxpayers' interests and the reputation of the social housing sector
 - have an effective risk management framework.

We think.....

...that we have all the basics in place but, as a relatively new organisation, there is much we can do to improve the way we work in this area.

Our priorities are to:

- fully implement our governance framework
- fully implement our risk management strategy
- further develop our performance management framework
- develop and implement tenant scrutiny processes.



What do you think?

We would like to know what you think about what we need to do – have we included your priority, or are there other things that we need to do to meet the governance standard?

Our people

There is no standard from the Tenants Services Authority (TSA) in relation to our staff.

However, we recognise that in order to meet all the national standards set by the TSA, and to provide effective services to our customers, we need to have a highly skilled and motivated workforce.

As part of the agreement to transfer, we also made a number of promises to staff, which we intend to honour.

In order to meet our promises, we need to:

- ensure that all new staff receive training and information that will enable them to do their jobs effectively
- implement a training programme for all staff, focused on:
 - customer service
 - equality and diversity
 - management skills
 - dealing with anti-social behaviour
- improve the way in which the under performance of staff is managed
- improve communications internally, which will help improve services externally.

Case study: James learns new trades

James Tasker from Pennycross was one of the first members of staff to be trained in multi-skilling at Plymouth Community Homes. A carpenter by trade, James has extended his skills to include basic painting, plumbing and tiling.

James explains: “It means that I can get several jobs done in one go, which is better for the tenant. For example, if you’re fitting a sink, you can plumb it in and do the tiling yourself without calling in three different tradesmen. This saves time for the customer.”

James thinks his way of working brings real value. “I enjoy working with tenants and this speeds up the process for them. It’s very useful for specific customers and specific services,” he says.

What do you think?

We would like to know what you think about what we need to do – have we included your priority, or are there other things that we need to do to meet our promises to staff?

Local offers

While there are six national standards that all Housing Associations need to achieve, we also need to tailor services to suit local circumstances. This is known as a local offer. The Tenants Services Authority (TSA) requires us to have our first local offers in place by 31 March 2011.

We plan to start by looking at a local offer in the following areas:

- Customer and community
- Environment

We have selected these areas based on feedback from tenants. To develop the local offers, we will need to talk to tenants about the services we deliver and how improvements can be made.

We would then like to develop more local offers based on feedback we collect from you. In the next few months, we will be holding a number of consultation events where we hope to gather your views and ideas.



Scrutiny

An important part of meeting the Tenants Services Authority (TSA) standards will be developing the role of tenants in scrutinising our performance and helping us make improvements.

Scrutiny is a way in which tenants can get involved in developing and improving services.

For this to be effective, it is important that the tenants doing the scrutinising have the right training and support to carry out their role effectively. But they must also have a level of independence and influence, to ensure that what they learn from the scrutiny process is used to make improvements in the areas that matter to tenants.

We plan to set up a panel of tenants – a Customer Assurance Panel – who will report through our customer focus committee straight to the Board that governs Plymouth Community Homes.

This panel will work with us to develop plans to improve services, and then scrutinise their delivery to make sure they are effective. They will also check on the delivery of local offers and of our initial promises.

We will be looking for tenants to join the Customer Assurance Panel during the winter months so that they can work with us on developing our plans for the next financial year.

How have we involved tenants in developing this report?

We know that we need to have a lot more involvement from tenants in future in the development of the annual report.

This year, we have spent time talking to tenants about how it feels to be a tenant of Plymouth Community Homes, and also spoken with Plymfed, the Plymouth Federation of Tenants and Residents Associations.

This input has been invaluable but, in future, we want to reach more people to find out what you think of our services. The role of the Customer Assurance Panel will be critical in ensuring that we do this.

ANNUAL REPORT TRANSLATIONS

English

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الرجاء الإتصال—هذه المعلومات متوفرة بلغات و أشكال أخرى : 0800 694 3101

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