Annual Report
for tenants and leaseholders 2009/10
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Introduction

Oxford City Council provides landlord services for all our Council tenants and leaseholders, consulting you on service delivery and any improvements required.

There are 7,841 Council homes, 615 leaseholders and 2,040 garages managed by Oxford City Council. We employ operational staff - ranging from electricians, plumbers and carpenters to gas fitters – to maintain the Council’s housing stock, as well as staff to run all the housing management issues related to tenant and leaseholder services.

This is your first Annual Report produced for – and by – tenants and leaseholders. This report covers the financial year ending 31st March 2010. In it you will find information on how Oxford City Council tenants and leaseholders have been involved in shaping housing services and what they think of the results. Your volunteers and Council officers continue to work side-by-side to bring about improvements in key areas such as neighbourhood management, repairs and maintenance and customer services.

This report has been sent to the national housing regulator the Tenant Services Authority (TSA) and all current and future tenants and leaseholders until the next report is published in October 2011. We will also share this publication with other key agencies to build on good practice. Copies of this report, and all publications referred to, are available by calling us on 0800 227676, or can be downloaded from our website at www.oxford.gov.uk/tenantsannualreport or www.oxford.gov.uk/localoffers or found in Oxford City Council reception areas.

Please read this document with other key documents and, in particular, the Annual Report sent to you in July 2010.

There are four sections to this report:

1. Working with you
How tenants have been involved in improving services and producing this report. Page 4

2. Looking back
A review of how Oxford City Council did in delivering housing services in 2009/10. This part of the report has been validated by HouseMark, an organisation which helps the social housing sector improve its performance and achieve value for money. The financial accounts have been validated by the Audit Commission, an independent body responsible for checking Council accounts and performance. Page 7

3. The Tenant Services Authority standards
An explanation of the standards and how we are preparing to meet them. Page 9

4. ‘Local Offers’ and the consultation process
What ‘Local Offers’ are and how you can get involved. Page 15
1 Working with YOU

A message from the Involvement Monitoring Panel Chair and Vice-Chair

Welcome to your first Annual Report produced by tenant and leaseholder representatives.

Getting involved with Oxford City Council is worthwhile. Our opinions have been heard and our suggested changes for improvements made. Council officers attended tenant and leaseholder consultation panels and formed joint working groups which set new and better service standards.

- We have contributed to the Decent Homes Standard and chosen fixtures and fittings for bathrooms and kitchens.
- We have tested service areas such as the Contact Centre with positive results.
- Together with officers, we have chosen the contractor for furnished homes, as well as being taken on a tour to view new builds at Lambourn Road and Cardinal House and to see void properties (homes awaiting tenants to move in).
- We have taken part in free workshops covering subjects such as money management, life skills and computer training, all of which are advertised in the Tenants’ Issue newsletter.

Getting involved helps shape services in favour of YOU, the Council’s customers. We know – we have done it this past year and will keep doing it, with your help.

As YOU will read later in this report, there are lots of ways to get involved – by joining the Environmental Panel, being trained as a ‘mystery shopper’ to test Council services, being part of the editorial team for Council publications or sitting on a group which decides how your rent and Council Tax is spent.
We have given our opinions to Oxford City Council, so why not give yours on the survey form.

Your help is also needed in developing the ‘Local Offers’ that have to be agreed between the Council and our tenants and leaseholders.

We have given our opinions, so why not give yours on the survey form which we will be sending to YOU. Be part of next year’s Tenants’ and Leaseholders’ Annual Report by joining us now – YOU will be warmly welcomed.

Please see the new web page specifically for our tenants’ Involvement Monitoring Panel (IMP) at www.oxford.gov.uk

The IMP is very influential. YOU can join this panel and represent the 8,500 tenants and leaseholders of Oxford on some of the key decisions the Council is making on your behalf.

Come and join us on this exciting journey into the future and make a difference.

Anita Fisher, Chair

Lilian Sherwood, Vice Chair
Tenant involvement in this report

In July 2010 Oxford City Council issued to all current and future tenants and leaseholders its Annual Report, validated by an Editorial Team consisting of tenant and leaseholder representatives and the Chair of the IMP.

An IMP working group met throughout the summer to consider tenders for the design of this, the Tenants’ and Leaseholders’ Annual Report.

Officers and tenant representatives attended events run by HouseMark (an organisation which helps the social housing sector improve performance and achieve value for money).

These offered guidance on TSA requirements for the production of an Annual Report specifically for tenants and leaseholders.

Your representatives and officers also attended joint meetings with other social landlords to share ideas and gain a better understanding of what exactly is meant by ‘Local Offers’.

The designer for the Annual Report was appointed from a list identified by your representatives and consideration was given to costs to ensure a tailored and value-for-money report.

The working tenant group thought the chosen designers were professional, experienced, understood what was needed and were able to produce a report which reflected tenants' wishes in terms of content and style.

Contributions for each standard were received and collated from officers and tenants. Leading up to the October deadline for the report set by the TSA, regular meetings were held and tenant representatives gave regular input to the designers through officers.

Officers and tenants were consulted on every aspect of the report and a consensus was reached on the text, graphics and overall layout and costs. The report was also overseen by your Editorial Team.

"Ideas were shared to gain a better understanding of what is meant by ‘Local Offers’"
2009/2010 was the fifth consecutive year of continued service improvements at Oxford City Council. Your tenant representatives have worked closely and effectively with officers in order to achieve key results, despite the economic recession.

We saw our best-ever performance in rent collection and reducing rent arrears, whilst at the same time witnessing a noticeable improvement in tenant satisfaction survey results.

More good news is that we are ahead of target to achieve 100% of homes meeting the Decent Homes Standard by 31st December 2010.

Our mystery shoppers have made a major contribution to our service and 21 improvements have been made as a direct result of their recommendations.

It is rewarding to meet with our tenants and leaseholders on a regular basis in order to get their input on how the service should be delivered.

Equally important has been the involvement of tenants and tenant representatives in the estate walkabouts, of which there were 55 in the last year.

So, finally, I would like to say a big thank you to all our involved tenants and leaseholders and our dedicated staff, who ensure that our services keep improving.

Graham Bourton, Head of Service

Value for Money summary

The Value for Money summary on the next page has been provided to help you understand the relationship between cost and performance benchmarking data across the main TSA national standards. Please note that the cost overview shown on the left-hand side of the table is based on direct cost of service delivery and does not include overheads. This data is validated by HouseMark and the data is correct as at 30th July 2010 and relates to 2009/10 data with a comparison to the previous year. The comparison group is the South East.
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<thead>
<tr>
<th>TSA standard</th>
<th>Cost indicator</th>
<th>Cost indicator position 2009/10</th>
<th>Cost indicator position 2008/09</th>
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<td>Percentage of respondents who felt staff were able to deal with their problem</td>
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<td>Percentage of tenants satisfied with complaints handling</td>
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<td>Home</td>
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<td>Percentage of residents satisfied with repairs service</td>
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<td>Percentage of tenants satisfied with overall quality of home</td>
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<td>Percentage of dwellings failing to meet the Decent Homes Standard *</td>
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<td>Percentage of tenants satisfied with overall services provided</td>
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<td>Current tenant rent arrears as % of rent due</td>
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<td>Neighbourhood &amp; community</td>
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<td><img src="emoji" alt="Sad" /> <img src="emoji" alt="Smiley" /></td>
<td>Percentage of tenants satisfied with their neighbourhood as a place to live</td>
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<td>Percentage of respondents satisfied with anti-social behaviour case handling</td>
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**Key – position against other organisations**

- Ranked in top 25%
- Ranked in 25–50% of organisations
- The mid point
- Ranked in 50–75% of organisations
- Ranked in bottom 25%
- No data available

*Plan in place to achieve by the Government deadline*
Since talking to residents across the country about what they want from their landlords, the TSA – which regulates Oxford City Council as a landlord and all other social landlords as housing providers – has launched a new regulatory framework.

This sets out national standards that all landlords must meet and some areas where landlords and residents must agree ‘Local Offers’.

The Housing and Regeneration Act of 2008 gave powers to the TSA to establish standards that it would be able to apply to registered social housing providers. It is the intention of the Act that tenants are at the heart of producing the standards, which should be created with the aim of offering protection to tenants.

Together with officers, tenants can tailor the standards into Local Offers that best suit their needs and produce outcomes of their choice. The setting of standards also needs to ensure and encourage tenants to have greater involvement in the management of their housing.
Tenant Involvement and Empowerment

Tenant and leaseholder involvement is the process through which Oxford City Council works with customers to shape the services it provides.

Our tenants and leaseholders receive a great deal of performance information in a variety of ways including the website, notice boards, the tenant and leaseholder report, performance posters and the quarterly Tenants’ Issue delivered through your door. The ‘You Said, We Did’ publication, mystery shopping reports and the Annual Report are further sources that our customers can refer to, to see how we are performing.

- In 2009/2010, we received 1,660 compliments and 707 tenants and leaseholders were involved in activities.
- 110 tenant and leaseholder involvement activities have been held during the year which included topic panels, focus groups, the ‘housing tour’, training in money management, life skills and information technology, the Editorial Team and mystery shopping.

- There are seven topic panels in place – the Involvement Monitoring Panel (IMP), Repairs & Improvements Panel, Community Safety & Anti-Social Behaviour Panel, Customer Care & Information Panel, Environmental Panel, Equality & Diversity Panel, and the Leaseholder Panel.
- The Environmental Improvements Budget of £65,000 is set aside for tenants and leaseholders to nominate projects to help improve the local environment and quality of life. This budget was used for 12 projects within the financial year, with two being rolled over to 2010/11.
- The Council is currently funding, and gives officer support to, 10 Tenants’ and Residents’ Associations (TRAs) across the city.
- Under the mystery shopping scheme, tenants and leaseholders have tested services via telephone calls, visits, letters and emails, flagging up areas that need improvement. Each year our involved tenants and leaseholders produce an action plan outlining what they want to achieve, published as updates to the Council’s Tenant and Leaseholder Compact.
- We work to meet the needs of our culturally diverse communities. For example, a meeting about the Tenants’ and Leaseholders’ Annual Report was held earlier than usual to allow tenants who were observing Ramadan to join their families to eat after fasting all day, and we made a prayer room available.

Comments from tenants who are helping us work on Local Offers:

“Oxford City Council has a good record of adapting homes for the disabled. There are areas in need of improvement and we will be working with the Voids Team to remedy this.”

“There are areas in Oxford where it is difficult to manoeuvre safely with a mobility scooter. We aim to liaise with Oxfordshire County Council and Streetscene to make travel safer for the disabled.”

The percentage of tenants satisfied their views are taken into account 64%
Tenant satisfaction with the repairs service during 2009/10

96%

This standard concerns a number of areas which include Decent Homes and repairs and maintenance.

Oxford City Homes is committed to achieving its target of making 100% of the housing stock decent by the 31st December 2010 and maintaining that standard in future years.

The Decent Homes Standard is a standard of fitness set by the Government for all Council and Housing Association homes to meet. It covers four main areas – a ‘Decent Home’ must meet the current minimum standard for housing, be in a reasonable state of repair, have reasonably modern facilities and services and should provide a reasonable degree of warmth.

In addition to meeting the Decent Homes Standard, the Council has a programme of replacing windows, installing controlled entry to flats and carrying out other maintenance and modernisation work which improves the lives of residents and keeps properties in a good state of repair.

The Council produces an annual Homes Improvement Works Plan booklet which is issued to tenants and leaseholders and covers projects over the following three-year period.
All new tenants receive an introductory tenancy that will become a secure tenancy after 12 months, providing the tenancy has been conducted in a satisfactory manner with rent paid on time and no complaints about the tenant.

Secure tenancies are protected by law, giving certain rights and responsibilities to the tenant and landlord. These are explained in the Tenants’ Handbook we provide. We visit all new tenants within 42 days to make sure they understand all aspects of the tenancy, the service we provide, what is expected of them and what they can expect from us.

We visit all our tenants on a one to three-year rolling programme. The frequency of the visit is subject to various criteria. We check contact details, note any changes to the household, answer questions and offer advice. At the end of the tenancy, we visit within 10 working days to inspect the property and to advise the tenant of their responsibilities including those regarding the condition of the property.

We provide a tenants’ newsletter four times a year, which includes information about surgeries, our contact details, seasonal information and performance data. Our service standards are published in the newsletter and on our website.

We will visit YOU within one working day in cases of domestic abuse, harassment and other emergency situations. We will provide support and advice and help YOU liaise with other Oxford City Council teams and external agencies such as Social Services, Women’s Aid and the emergency services.

We visit properties that are reported abandoned within one working day. Any reports of suspected squatters, unauthorised occupants or sub-letting are thoroughly investigated within five working days.

All policies are reviewed regularly by a team of officers and tenants. They are published on our website and can be sent to tenants upon request.

We will respond to all applications to transfer or exchange within 10 working days. We decide whether a mutual exchange can go ahead within 25 working days.

We provide advice, support and information within 10 working days for all tenancy-related enquiries.

We will respond to all reports of nuisance and anti-social behaviour within the timescales noted in our policy, depending on the severity and frequency of such behaviour.

We provide regular opportunities for tenants to meet with councillors and council officers in their neighbourhood.

Our aim is to ensure our estate services are of a high quality, meet residents’ needs and represent value for money in relation to the service charges that pay for them.
Neighbourhood and Community

248 Total anti-social behaviour cases reported during 2009/10

The Council’s Communities and Neighbourhoods Team aims to:

- Develop social regeneration initiatives through the Regeneration Framework, ‘Breaking the Cycle of Deprivation’ programme and other corporate and partnership priorities.
- Engage residents in designing, planning, developing and managing social and physical improvements in their local areas.
- Increase opportunities for people to engage effectively with local services and build sustainable communities.
- Create opportunities for people from different backgrounds and communities to come together to develop areas of interest.

Between October 2010 and April 2011, we will be consulting with tenants and leaseholders so that they can share their priorities for the communities and neighbourhoods where they live.

“We will be consulting with tenants and leaseholders so that they can share their priorities for their communities and neighbourhoods”
**Value for Money**

The percentage of tenants satisfied with overall services provided is 82%.

Oxford City Council is committed to delivering Value for Money through meeting and exceeding challenging performance targets. Our aim is to deliver a high quality, efficient service whilst maximising resources and achieving the very best from your rent.

Examples of increased efficiency are:

- Setting targets such as all emergency work to be completed within 24 hours and routine work within 28 days.
- Day to day repair and maintenance work is achieved through Optitime, a planning system using PDAs (hand held computers). This allows jobs to be allocated to operational areas and having a vehicle management system means we know where the closest available member of staff is at all times.
- Buying as opposed to leasing vehicles means we do not pay interest charges. Oxford City Council vehicles run on bio diesel bought in bulk and the resulting inflated fuel economy means more savings. In April 2009, our drivers attended Government sponsored training (Safe and Fuel Efficient Driving). In one year alone this yielded a saving of nearly 35,000 litres of diesel.
- Our vans carry a core stock and repair works are generally completed on the first visit, avoiding the need for follow up appointments. This logical approach means that we are able to deliver a service that is right first time and is an effective use of our resources and, more importantly, our tenant’s time. Parts used are logged via the PDA and replacement stock is ready for collection upon the driver’s return. We have two key suppliers and negotiate prices that are held for a 12 month period under contract. We have an agreement with suppliers to hold stock at their premises, which reduces our overheads. For all other supplies purchased outside of a contract we seek three competitive price lists and renegotiate every three months.
- In 2009/10 we completed £7.5million of capital/major works on our properties (excluding new build). We completed much of the work in-house and spent approximately £4.2million on new kitchens, bathrooms and heating systems. We have a competitive tendering process for external companies which include consultation with tenants. We then invite suitable companies to submit a fully costed tender and seek to offer the work for the lowest price.
4 Local Offers

Local Offers are similar to service standards but they are agreed with tenants because it is important to YOU. Local Offers need to be developed consulted on and in place by April 2011.

A Local Offer is something that is local to us, such as our Tenants choice scheme which applies to new tenancies. It means not taking a one size fits all approach to what we do. We might have different Local Offers for people who live in a particular area, or for people who have disabilities, or for families, because they need and want different things.

Our Service Standards, published in 2008, were shaped by your tenant representatives. A working group of tenant and officers began a review of these standards and matched them against those of the TSA. Their work will be included in the development of Local Offers. The tenant representatives in the group were, Hashim Ahmed, Audrey Baughan, Barry Crossman, Anita Fisher, Barrie Finch, Lloyd Mike, Stu Haddock, Lilian Sherwood, Mohammad Tariq and James Smith.

In July Oxford City Council formalised its Local Offers action plan. Other representatives from the Involvement Monitoring Panel joined the group to review and implement the plan.

A consultation plan was developed, identifying actions to individuals. A briefing paper was sent to senior and middle management to highlight progress.

Adverts in the staff newsletter requested volunteers for focus groups to discuss existing standards and information on the consultation process were sent to key Council staff.

Our tenants went to a Tenant Participation Advisory Service (TPAS) seminar on Local Offers and Annual Reports.

Additional Service Standards have also been published in tenant newsletters. If YOU want to get involved, contact us (details on back cover) and remember to look out for future events and consultations.

In July Oxford City Council formalised its Local Offers action plan. Other representatives from the Involvement Monitoring Panel joined the group to review and implement the plan.
Contact us

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www.oxford.gov.uk/tenantsannualreport
www.oxford.gov.uk/localoffers

If you need a translation, a larger print version or a copy of this publication in another format, please contact us.

October 2010