



PULL OUT



# WELCOME TO OUR ANNUAL REPORT TO TENANTS

# Warwick District Council has a housing stock of 5637 homes and 2041 garages

**The Head of Housing and Property Services is Jameel Malik. He joined Warwick District Council in March 2010.**

Jameel and his Housing and Property Management Team, consist of six managers, Dave Ward Housing Manager, Jacky Oughton Rents and Finance Manager, Tony White Property Manager, Joan Hicks Supporting People Services Manager, Satnam Kaur Housing Strategy Manager, Phil I'Anson Business Manager.

We have started a new programme of service transformation which places tenants at the heart of designing and improving services. This new vision to drive service improvement based on lean-system principles is agreed and led by the Portfolio Holder for Housing and Property Services, Councillor Moira-Ann Grainger.



## What is this report about?

The regulator for housing, the Tenant Services Authority (TSA) requires us to issue an annual report to tenants every year.

This annual report must give tenants an honest and helpful view about how Warwick District Council is doing against the TSA standards for:

**Tenant involvement and customer care**

**Maintaining your home**

**Allocating homes and setting rents**

**Looking after the neighbourhood and communal areas**

**Value for money**

We report on how we are consulting and working with tenants to ensure services are tailored to tenants.

This report details our performance against the TSA standards. How well we do on meeting these standards is checked by the TSA.





## Tenant involvement and customer care in decision making about housing

There are a number of ways that tenants can get involved. There are 6 Tenant and Resident Groups – Tannery Court, Clarendon Square, Fallow Hill, St Pauls Square and Kennedy Square, Brunswick and Marsham Close. There are resident groups at Shuckburgh Grove, Saltsford Gardens, Stamford Gardens and Pickard Street. We hold regular coffee mornings at The Gap, the Packmores Centre, Cubbington, Fetherstone Court and Beauchamp Court. There is also a monthly drop-in at Lillington Children's Centre. Financial support is provided to constituted groups. We actively promote tenant training and we provide financial assistance and travel costs for those tenants attending training courses.

Tenants are part of the editorial panel for the quarterly tenants' newsletter Home News.

We are also working to set up a Tenant Panel whose role will be to scrutinise how we are performing against the TSA standards.

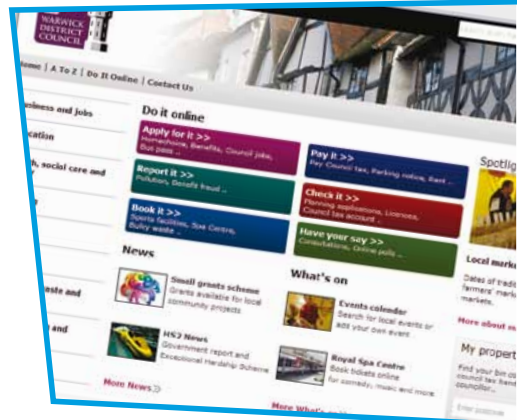
We received 64 complaints last year, this is 9 more than the previous year. The majority of the complaints were about our repairs service.

**Customers can access a range of housing services and advice via our website [www.warwickdc.gov.uk](http://www.warwickdc.gov.uk) You can report a repair and pay your rent via our website.**

Face to face visits can be made at Riverside House, or at the One Stop Shops at Lillington, Warwick, Kenilworth and Whitnash. A list of contact telephone numbers and e-mail addresses is given at the back of this report and each edition of Home News.

Customers can also access a range of services via our Digital TV service.

All leaflets and requests for information are available in other languages and formats.



# Maintaining your home

We receive around 24,000 repair calls each year. We carried a fundamental review of how we deliver repairs to our tenants. As a result we now make appointments for all repairs at a time which is suitable for you. We respond to all emergency calls within four hours. Reminder calls or texts are sent to you a day before the appointment. As at July 2010, contractors were keeping 100% of appointments.

We know this is important as 81% tenants rated 'being told when workers would call' as a positive (Tenants' Satisfaction Survey 2008).

The Council has a legal requirement to keep our tenants safe in their homes. In February 2010 92.65% of our properties with gas appliances had a valid gas safety certificate, by September this figure was 99.62%.

It is a government requirement that all our homes meet the Decent Homes standard. This means that homes must be warm, weatherproof and have reasonably modern facilities. The majority of our homes currently meet this standard, and we plan to have all our homes meeting the standard by December 2010.

We currently spend over £5 million a year on our major works programme. This includes kitchen and bathroom replacements, window and door replacements, the replacement of heating systems, and insulation improvements. Tenants have a choice of colour and design when we replace kitchens, bathrooms and doors and windows.

We have been working for several years to upgrade communal TV systems and this work will be completed ready for the Digital Switchover in 2011. We have a programme of energy saving initiatives and initiatives using green energy. These include the upgrading of existing gas central heating systems, double glazing and upgrading the loft and cavity wall insulation in all our properties.



We have a programme of installing photovoltaic panels to sheltered bungalows to produce electricity and solar hot water to our houses in rural areas. We also have mini wind turbines on the roofs of two high rise blocks of flats which are run during daylight hours and help to provide electricity for the communal areas.

We carry out periodic fire risk assessments on all our multi-occupancy blocks. We are now implementing a more robust system in partnership with the Fire Service. All multi-occupancy blocks will be issued with a fire log book which includes information on gas and electric servicing along with fire detection and fighting systems.

For tenants who need help in getting in and out of the bath or upstairs we have an aids and adaptation service. An assessment is carried out by Warwickshire County Council Occupational Therapy Service. Where tenants fall into the higher or critical need category the adaptation is carried out within 12 months of the referral. For those tenants assessed as substantial there is a considerable waiting time. In 2009/10 we received 73 High Need applications and 98 Substantial Need applications. We installed 40 level access showers and 10 other larger adaptations.



# Allocating homes

Last year we let 417 homes.

During the same period we encouraged 17 households to move from 3 bedroom accommodation to smaller homes. To encourage tenants with spare bedrooms to move to smaller properties, we offer an incentive of £5000. This means that the larger property is then available for people with families.

For certain properties we also offer assistance with removal costs.

We let our properties through 'Homechoice' our choice-based lettings system. Details of this scheme can be found at [www.warwickdc.gov.uk](http://www.warwickdc.gov.uk). There are currently 3800 people registered on the HomeChoice register.

Tenant representatives have helped to design the standards for our ready to let properties. These will be supported by customer satisfaction data collected from new tenants.

We have reduced the amount of time properties are empty. In 2009/10 the average number of days between a property becoming empty and a new tenant moving in was 44 days, this has now reduced to 35 days. New empty properties since April 2010 have taken an average of 23 days. On average we spend £1,146 making each property ready to let for new tenants.

# Supporting People Service

We have around 1200 properties that we let specifically to older and vulnerable people. These properties are supported by our Community Alarm Service, 24 hours a day. We have five schemes with Resident Scheme Managers, and for the other properties we have specialist team of Supported Housing Officers who work with our tenants, providing housing support services.

We have been successful in securing government funding from the Get Digital project that aims to help older people in Sheltered Accommodation acquire digital literacy skills and improve their ability to use digital technology. We have equipment in place in Chandos Court and Yeomanry Close and tenants will receive up to 12 weekly tuition sessions.



# Tenancy

New tenants are granted an Introductory Tenancy. On the 12 month anniversary (as long as we have not commenced legal proceedings due to a breach of tenancy conditions) the tenancy becomes a secure tenancy. Tenants' rights and responsibilities are set out in the Tenancy Agreement and the Tenant's Handbook. All new tenants receive a settling-in visit in the first few weeks of their tenancy, and a further visit takes place around the 12 month anniversary. Officers are always available to visit tenants or to arrange interviews to discuss matters and issues including rent arrears. Where tenants require additional help we work with agencies such as Fry Housing, Bromford Housing and the Swanswell Trust to support tenants and their tenancies.

In 2009/10 there has been an emphasis on the prevention and detection of tenancy fraud. This work continues. We are participating in the government funded Tenancy Fraud Initiative, which makes sure that our homes continue to be occupied by the tenants that we let them to.

# Neighbourhood & communal areas

We have an emphasis on the early prevention of addressing Anti-Social Behaviour. We work closely with partners to resolve tenancy issues and will utilise a range of enforcement techniques when necessary.

Last year we evicted 5 tenants from their homes because of anti-social behaviour.

We are working with the Probation Service. Offenders under the Community Payback Scheme carry out supervised work on communal gardens and environmental work such as graffiti removal.

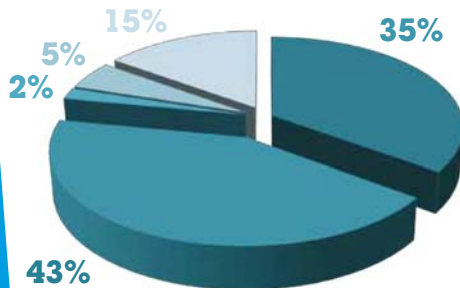
Following consultation with residents, Service Standards have been introduced on housing sites where we employ site-based Estate Supervisors. There is a regular programme of inspections which are carried out by a Senior Estates Supervisor and a Tenant Inspector.



# Rents

The average weekly rent for our homes is £69.16. Our rents are set according to government rules and guidelines. Information about our performance in collecting rent and dealing with rent arrears is included in the Tenure and Value for Money Sections of this report.

The average weekly rent for 2009/10 was £69.16. This chart shows how your rent is spent.



- 43%** Maintaining Homes
- 35%** Paid to Central Government
- 15%** Management & tenant services
- 5%** Put aside to meet future expenditure
- 2%** Interest on historic loans that were used to build homes

# Value for Money

We are working with tenants to come up with ideas for saving money and improving the service, including reviewing all the major contracts.

We appointed a new company for our affordable Tenants Contents Insurance Scheme which now provides tenants with additional cover for the same weekly premium.

This year we expect to save approximately £30,000 by introducing revised arrangements for the removal of waste and fly-tips from housing sites. We expect to save an additional £20,000 by introducing new ways to complete Energy Performance Certificates.

During the financial year 2009/10 we collected 94.92% of the rent that was due, and the arrears of rent was 3.37%. We need to reduce the arrears of rent owed by both our current and former tenants. We have set up new procedures with an emphasis on early intervention. We fund a Money Advice Worker at the Citizens Advice Bureau and we are strengthening our links with the local Credit Union and other Money Advice Agencies. We run weekly local rent surgeries in Lillington, Brunswick and Warwick however where a tenant continues not to pay their rent we will take appropriate action and this can lead to tenants losing their home. Last year we evicted 20 households from their homes because of rent arrears.

**5621**  
Rented properties  
**524**  
Leasehold properties  
**2041**  
Garages

## Local Offers

We agree with the TSA that landlords should tailor their services around what our tenants actually want. Our first local offers will be;

## Tenant Involvement & Empowerment

### Home

### Neighbourhood

These will be ready by March 2011.

We are putting together robust plans over the next 5 years to improve performance and services to tenants that ultimately pay our salaries. We will be consulting with you all on how we can improve our service to you. In the meantime if you have any suggestions we would be delighted to receive them. Please contact Jameel Malik at the address below or contact us at [housingsuggestions@warwickdc.gov.uk](mailto:housingsuggestions@warwickdc.gov.uk)

A copy of this report will be sent to the Tenant Services Authority and has been approved by our Tenant Panel.

**Contact details**  
**Housing and Property Services,**  
**Riverside House,**  
**Milverton Hill,**  
**Leamington Spa CV32 5QE**

**Telephone 01926 410 410**  
**Housing Repairs/Home Choice and Housing Officer enquiries 01926 412 828**  
**(please see copy of 'Home News' for direct dial contact numbers and e-mail addresses)**

**Housing Repairs - [contactus@warwickdc.gov.uk](mailto:contactus@warwickdc.gov.uk)**

**Send us your suggestions -**  
**[housingsuggestions@warwickdc.gov.uk](mailto:housingsuggestions@warwickdc.gov.uk)**

# Our Improvement Journey

The Audit Commission (an independent watchdog for local public services) carried out an inspection of our housing landlord service in June 2010 and rated us as 'poor'. The Audit Commission recognised that since the appointment of the new Head of Service, leadership capacity had increased and key performance areas strengthened. However as these achievements could not have been demonstrated over a longer and sustained period of time the services' prospects for improvement were therefore rated as 'uncertain'.

The areas for improvement included:

- **Limited track record of delivering improvements**
- **Limited engagement of residents to inform design of services and a weak approach to measuring satisfaction**
- **Underdeveloped performance management arrangements**
- **Weak performance on collecting rent, recovering rent arrears and recovering former tenant arrears**
- **Weak performance on completing gas servicing**
- **Higher than average re-let times for empty homes**

The Audit Commission also recognised the following strengths:

- ✓ **Consistent investment in the housing stock over a number of years and strong aspects of customer care in carrying out these works**
- ✓ **Relatively strong financial capacity and resources to maintain and improve services**
- ✓ **Improving leadership capacity and consistent political support for the service**

Our journey to improve services commenced in March 2010. Although this is a very challenging score the findings from the inspection have further informed the development of our Action Plan to improve services for our tenants and leaseholders. The Audit Commission recognised that these plans together with an increased focus on managing performance would bring the improvements that tenants deserve.

Our Improvement Journey has already shown evidence of progress:

**In February 2010 92.6% of homes had a valid gas safety certificate and during inspection week (in June) it was 98.88%. By September 2010, our performance had improved to 99.62% of homes having a valid certificate.**

**In 2009/10 the average number of days between properties becoming empty and a new tenant moving in was 44 days. The Audit Commission recognised that as a result of our new processes and effective performance management, new empty properties since April 2010 have taken an average of 23 days. An improvement of almost 48%.**

**Our void rent loss performance - the rent we have lost from properties being empty - which had reduced from 1.08% at the end of March 2010 to 0.84% during inspection week. Since the inspection our performance has further improved to 0.73%. As a result we are currently predicting an additional income above our budget projections for year to date of £40,300.**

To strengthen our engagement with customers we have recently set up a District-wide Tenant Panel which met for the first time in September 2010. This Tenant Panel will work with us to agree our improvement plans, scrutinise performance and design and deliver excellent services that our tenants deserve.

All future editions of Home News will contain the latest information on our performance, the progress we are making and the challenges we are facing on our Improvement Journey.

Councillor Moira-Ann Grainger, Portfolio Holder for Housing and Property Services said:

**"Whilst we have received a challenging assessment, we see the report as a positive tool that will help us deliver further improvements to our housing services. Already we have seen significant improvements with more homes now having a gas service and significantly reducing the time houses are left empty. We appreciate that this is a challenging journey of continuous improvement but with positive results like this I am confident that we can continue to provide the value for money services that our tenants and leaseholders deserve."**

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