Housing and Community Services
Annual Report to Tenants 2014/2015
This year’s Annual Report to Tenants tells you how well Southwark Council’s Housing and Community Services performed in the 2014/15 financial year.

Our vision ‘to make Southwark’s homes and neighbourhoods great places to live where good quality services are delivered right first time’ is ambitious but we did just that on a daily basis in many areas. We are forward thinking and are always looking for ways to improve the services that we provide to you.
Contents

Introduction from Cllr Livingstone and Gerri Scott 4
Task and finish group 8
Housing and Community Services at a glance 9
STAR Survey 10
Key improvements in 2014/15 12
Major works 14
How wisely do we spend your money? 15
Repairs and maintenance 17
Making the best use of homes 18
Tenant rents 19
Tenant Management Organisations (TMOs) 21
How do we ensure your neighbourhood is clean and safe? 22
How well do we deal with antisocial behaviour? 23
Welfare reform 24
How to get involved 25
How well do we manage our complaints? 27
Comments, compliments and contact 27
Introduction

Innovation

In 2013 we set ourselves an ambitious target to build 11,000 new council homes over the next 30 years – a decision that still bucks the trend of the vast majority of local authorities. This programme is one of the most significant decisions the council has made in decades and is being developed with resident input. We said we would do it and work is well and truly underway to deliver the first stage of the plan: 1,500 homes by 2018. A number of areas are in development such as Willow Walk, Masterman House, Long Lane and Cator Street. The first phase has been successfully completed and will be ready to move into this summer. This is an exciting development for Southwark. We want you to continue to have your say in how it is delivered by telling us where you think the new homes should be built. Visit the website to view the interactive map and find out more about the locations of the first phases.

We haven’t just concentrated on new builds; we have also been extremely active in refurbishing more of our existing stock. Last year we spent over £100m on our ongoing programme to make every home in Southwark warm, dry and safe. Our plans are largely on track despite some delays but this year we really have been able to work much more closely with you to provide what you want and satisfaction has improved significantly to around 90% overall.

In addition, over recent years you told us that many of the kitchens and bathrooms in our stock are very old and tired and difficult to repair. We have listened and have developed a specific programme that aims to replace every kitchen and bathroom, where needed, by 2021. We have already started this replacement programme ahead of schedule and residents have been delighted with the results.

Kitchen before and after:
We have installed over 1,500 new door entry systems and refurbished 423 more over the last two years. We are now consulting residents on the new programme; let us know what you want and we will make every effort to deliver.

Our day to day repairs service is also improving. We are getting more repairs completed right first time and making sure you are satisfied with the quality of the work. Monthly telephone surveys show overall satisfaction with repairs is up to 85% from 80% last year but we are not complacent and we have set a very stretching target to increase satisfaction to 90% by the end of this year.

To make looking after your homes easier for you, we launched a set of DIY videos. Look at our website and click ‘Fix it at home’ for top tips on unblocking a sink or toilet, how to manage mould and condensation, how to check your smoke alarm and much more.

Last year we started a special initiative to recruit resident housing inspectors. We have 30 signed up so far who are in the process of being trained and we will begin another recruitment campaign to find 70 more. If you are interested in helping to improve our housing services please look out for application forms which will be released in the next few months.

Innovation means modernising our services. More of our services are now available online to make it quicker and easier for you to request the full range of housing services. Here are just a few of the options available when you look at our website:

- **Report it** – Repairs, noisy neighbour, fraud, recycling and waste
- **Pay for it** – Council rents and housing charges, council tax
- **Say it** – Complaints, consultations, parking, events
- **Apply for it** – Rent refunds, garages, arbitration, parking permits.

In addition, if you sign up to a MySouthwark account you will be able to track your repair or view your rent statement: over 100,000 have signed up already.
Satisfaction

Satisfaction with the repairs service has improved significantly but we know we need to improve even further. In our annual resident survey last year you were much more satisfied with the way we kept you informed about what is going on, a key aim from the previous year, and overall satisfaction with the landlord services improved marginally to 65% so we know we have to keep trying.

Another area we wanted to improve was how we deal with antisocial behaviour however satisfaction reduced. We know we can do better and are determined to put this right over the coming year.

Last year we visited every one of our properties at least once to verify the occupants. In 2013/14 we recovered 379 properties that were illegally sublet and in 2014/15 recovered a further 249. We will continue to tackle fraud and take legal action when we need to, making sure our properties are let to the rightful tenants and freeing up vacated properties for those in need.

We are really pleased with a number of successes achieved this year, please take some time to read the report to find out more. We will keep working hard until we are proud of everything we deliver.

Cllr Richard Livingstone
Cabinet Member for Housing
Your views matter

We are always looking to involve our tenants in everything we do so much so we have developed a Charter of Principles so that you know what we should be doing every step of the way. And of course, we always appreciate your feedback on every aspect of the service.

There are a number of ways you can get involved in shaping services – tenant and resident association (TRA) meetings, forums, task and finish groups and working parties, and a performance review group meets every quarter to review performance. There will be many more opportunities for involvement in the year ahead as we know that joint working is the best way to deliver services that you want.

If you would like to get involved see page 25. Our annual survey is a valuable way of hearing what you think so if you are randomly chosen to take part in the survey please take the time to give us your opinion; your views are really important.

And finally, we would like to thank everyone who has taken the time to contribute to the success of the department this year.

Gerri Scott
Strategic Director of Housing and Community Services
Task and finish group

What you told us about last year’s annual report

The style and format of the last report was very well received by the majority of readers so we have produced a report this time with few changes to the format. The focus is on key bite size bits of information to give you an at a glance picture of what and how we are doing and provide an opportunity for you to give feedback.

Annual Report to Tenants’ working party, May 2015

“We like the style and content of the last report so didn’t want to fix what wasn’t broken. We think we have found the best way of sharing the key information about the housing and community services department that will suit a wide range of people. We have added more comparisons and a few more pictures to show how the department is improving.

We do hope we’ve succeeded and that you enjoy reading this year’s report; we’ve enjoyed creating it! If you want something else next time please let us know or come and join the Annual Report to Tenants task and finish group next year.”
Housing and Community Services at a glance

- We carried out 186,258 repairs in 2014/15
- We received 503 graffiti notifications
- We have 14 TMOs
- We dealt with 1,255 cases of antisocial behaviour

- Registered tenant and resident associations in the borough: 93
- New homeless applications were made last year: 1,822
- Our handypeople carried out 1,732 jobs last year, with a 100% satisfaction rate
- We received 3,912 fly tipping notifications
- We have 4,272 garages are let with a waiting list of over 2,000.
- We carry out repairs in 2014/15
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- 3 YEARS
- 5 YEARS

- Our community conversation collected the views of over 2,000 Southwark residents
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- Population of Southwark is over 290,000
- and 49% live in council housing

- We let empty homes in an average of 23.5 days
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- Total number of tenanted properties: 33,703
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2014 Survey of Tenants and Residents (STAR)

This is the third year of the STAR survey; previous surveys were completed in 2012 and 2013. This style of survey is commonly used in the housing sector and enables us to compare our previous performance as well as other social housing providers.

Over 9,500 randomly selected residents were invited to complete a questionnaire during July and August 2014. This is one of the most important surveys undertaken by the department as it engages with a large number of resident, gathering opinions on the services that have the most impact. We take the results seriously and use them to plan the services we provide so if you are randomly selected please take the time to give us your views for the next survey.

Key findings

Overall satisfaction with landlord services

We saw a slight improvement with overall satisfaction increasing to 65%. We know we can improve this further and will work hard to do so.

Tenants feel better informed

Almost three out of four tenants think the council is good at keeping them informed. Satisfaction up by 9% to 72%

Neighbourhoods are improving

Three out of every four tenants are satisfied with their neighbourhood as a place to live. This is a sustained improvement increasing from 69% in 2012 to 71% in 2013 and to 75% in 2014.

All aspects of estate services have increased since 2013 except maintenance of shared grounds which saw a drop of 3%.

The main issues affecting residents remain litter and noisy neighbours, with levels of dissatisfaction increasing since last year.

The number of people experiencing racial or other harassment has fallen for three consecutive years to 10% in 2014.
The repairs service is improving
There has been improvement in all aspects of the repairs service since 2013. The ability to make appointments and the contractor keeping appointments show the most improvement, rising from 74% to 79% and 71% to 76% respectively. 20% of tenants are very satisfied with the way repairs are dealt with: 65% are satisfied overall but we still have some work to do to make sure we start the work more quickly and complete it first time.

Ability to contact your resident officer has improved
However, you said that they were less helpful than the previous year. As a result of this concern we are reviewing how we can improve the information officers have at their fingertips so that they can give you a speedy answer to your query.

Managing antisocial behaviour
1 in 7 tenants reported antisocial behaviour last year, similar to 2013. You said you found it easier to contact the right person and felt more supported but you were less satisfied with being kept informed, the speed and final outcome of your report.

We are working hard to resolve any report of antisocial behaviour as soon as we can. We work with experts in the police, mediation and Southwark Antisocial Behaviour Unit (SASBU) to resolve issues.

Contact centre and service points
This was a challenging year for the contact centre. Not only did the number of enquiries dramatically increase over the year we also experienced a number of teething problems with our new IT systems. We are now seeing improvements. Aspects of most satisfaction were the helpfulness and knowledge of staff and least was being dealt with first time.

38% of tenants said they had visited one of our three service points in 2014/15. All aspects of the service showed higher satisfaction levels.

We want to hear your views
Keep an eye out for the 2015/2016 STAR survey which will appear in the summer. We really do want to hear your views, so if you are randomly chosen please spare some time to complete and return the survey. There were three lucky winners of our survey prize last year, each winning £1,000.
Key improvements in 2014/15

**Housing strategy**
We have written a housing strategy to guide us as we build 11,000 new homes in the next 30 years. Through it, we will:
- Demand high standards of quality, making Southwark a place where you will not know whether you are visiting homes in private, housing association or council ownership
- Encourage all residents to take pride in the local area
- Help vulnerable individuals live as independently as possible
- Encourage good landlords
- Ensure residents can get involved in services even if they don’t have time to attend meetings
- Be an age friendly borough – adapting properties to suit needs and providing extra-care sheltered housing.

**MySouthwark website**
In 2014/15 the number of MySouthwark account holders reached over 100,000. To sign up for your own personalised MySouthwark account [click here](#) or connect with what’s going on via social media using Twitter and Facebook.

**Hostels**
We have 17 hostels in Southwark, housing homeless individuals, couples and families in temporary accommodation. There are serious issues of supply and demand, so it’s great that a new hostel was completed in March 2015 providing an additional 53 homes in Willow Walk.
Improvements to our sheltered services

Improvement works at eight of our sheltered schemes were completed in 2014/15.

We are delivering a three year, £2.7m programme of works across our sheltered housing units to provide enhanced comfort and security through fire safety upgrades, redecoration, and other improvements. We have installed new front and communal doors, improved the lighting and external pathways, and are rolling out sprinkler systems within the units so that we can maintain the highest standards of fire safety. Upgrades to heating systems and a programme of boiler renewals and pipe work where needed is being coordinated with existing major works programmes on our estates, to ensure minimal disruption.
Major Works

Major works expenditure 2011 to 2015

- We are making excellent progress in the delivery of our five year Warm Dry Safe (WDS) programme with over £250m spent in total on improvements to council housing stock since April 2011. We brought forward over half of the 2015/16 schemes to start in 2014/15
- We spent 110% of our WDS budget in 2014/15, and satisfaction is improving. The whole WDS programme is expected to be fully on site by March 2016
- Over 5,000 residents across the borough have benefited from WDS major works since the programme began
- Our heating and lift programme continues to run ahead of schedule – in fact we brought forward the majority of the remaining 2015/16 district heating schemes into 2014/15. For specific schemes see the information on our website.
- Fire safety works have been completed on 208 of the highest risk high rise blocks, while works to 47 high risk low rise blocks are being progressed. In addition smoke and heat detection systems have been installed in 5,576 dwellings in blocks of ten storeys and above, whilst 1,890 smoke and heat detection systems have been installed in the dwellings in our converted street properties.
The Housing and Community Services department made £6m of savings in 2014/15, a similar amount to 2012 and 2013, money which was put straight back into the areas of housing services that are of most importance to residents.
Key priorities for 2015/16

- Collect 100% of rent due and ensure this money goes straight back into resident services
- Complete more repairs right first time
- Reduce the number of people living in temporary accommodation
- Recover more illegally sublet properties
- Build strong relationships with residents through regular involvement
- Introduce more resident housing inspectors to shadow our officers
- Carry out more estate inspections with residents
- Provide a quality kitchen and bathroom to every tenant who needs one.
Repairs and maintenance

We carried out 186,258 repairs last year with 164,886 completed on time. Over 97.7% of appointments were kept.

195 disrepair cases have been settled in 2014/15, and we have less than 140 cases still to be settled.

We also completed:

- 1,732 handyperson jobs – such as minor electrical repairs, putting up shelves and changing light bulbs – with a satisfaction rate of 100% with those who completed surveys
- 471 housing adaptations jobs (265 majors and 206 minors) with 97% satisfaction for major adaptations
- 100% of homes had an up to date gas certificate in March 2015
- We have conducted 100% of our planned inspections to properties to make sure they are gas safe, fire safe, water safe and asbestos safe.

We are getting closer to where we want to be in terms of our repairs performance. More repairs are completed right first time, and satisfaction levels are improving too. If you’ve had a repair we’d like to hear your views about how well we dealt with it, so make sure you complete the satisfaction survey to have a chance of winning one of our quarterly prize draws.

“I’d like to say thank you for the floorboard repair today…you took good care in your work and even took care to clean up afterwards.”

DIY Videos
Making the best use of homes

We want to provide you with the best advice about your housing options and offer homes to the people most in need.

- 207 tenants chose to move through the SmartMove scheme in 2014/15, freeing up larger properties for larger families.
- 2,116 properties were let during the year with the majority advertised and let through the Homesearch service. Of the total properties let through Homesearch, 1,164 were council homes, 320 were housing association nominations and 59 were through TMOs. We also let 460 council homes, 92 housing association homes and 21 TMOs via direct offers.
- Nearly 32,000 customers visited the Homesearch centre during 2014/15. Applications for housing are always very high. There are far more people who want somewhere to live than there are places available. The average waiting time for a Band 3 priority is as high as three years for a two bedroom property.
- In the last year, 249 properties were recovered from illegal sublets. This is amongst the best performance in the country and an important step to ensure our homes go to those most in need. As of October 2014 it is a criminal offence to illegally sublet your home, punishable by a heavy fine or even prison.
- Letting our empty homes quickly and completing good value repairs first time saves the council money. In 2014/15 we let our empty homes in an average of 23.5 days. We are pleased with this and want to improve this further.
- Overall satisfaction with the quality of the property on letting was 92% in 2014/15 which is an improvement on last year.

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Tenant rents

33,703 tenants + 2,610 TMO tenants = TOTAL = 36,313 tenants

14,974 service charge payers + 1,374 TMO homeowners = TOTAL = 16,348 homeowners

In 2014/15 we collected 99% of the rent due. We’re working to make this 100%

- We served 8,800 notices of seeking possession for non payment of rent
- We evicted 136 tenants for non payment of rent which is nine less than last year, despite the economic conditions

- The Sustain Team, which helps vulnerable tenants maintain their tenancy, received a total of 844 referrals for 2014/15. The main reason for referrals was problems with arrears or financial hardship.
- The number of service charge payers is increasing owing to changes in Right to Buy discount offered. For more information about the Right to Buy or other homeowner related information please visit our website.
Customer service

Online
Over the last year more and more of you have accessed services quicker and easier online via My Southwark. Using our online services gives you access when you want and means we can answer essential calls much more quickly.

Contact centre
The contact centre takes calls for the whole council, including freephone calls to the repairs service on 0800 952 4444.

• During the year we took an average of 24,600 repair calls a month with 84% of them being resolved at the first contact.
• Customer satisfaction was 95% on average.
• We experienced a lot more calls than in the previous year, which impacted on our ability to respond as quickly as we wanted to. We have developed a new timeframe for non-urgent calls and have introduced new online facilities so that you can access the services when you want to. We are working hard to get performance to where you want it to be.

MySouthwark Service Points
We have three MySouthwark Service Points in the borough:
11 Market Place, The Blue, Bermondsey
122 Peckham Hill Street, Peckham
376 Walworth Road, Walworth.

• The Peckham My Southwark Service Point has the highest number of visitors
• MySouthwark Service Points offer a range of facilities including a free phone line to any council service, a wide range of leaflets, free access to the council’s website and immediate telephone interpretation.

• Nine out of ten customers were seen within ten minutes, and satisfaction with the service stands at 93%.
• The total number of customers seen across the service points in the last year is 155,916, which is an average of 13,000 customers per month.

“Thanks for the kind offer of assistance to guide me through the online process to activate my service charges online. I may take you up on it, as IT isn’t really my forte.”
Tenant Management Organisations (TMOs)

There are 14 TMOs in Southwark that supply housing management services to over 3000 tenants and leaseholders.

The largest TMO is Leathermarket Joint Management Board which covers 1,478 homes. The smallest TMO is Kennington Park House covering 40 homes.

Our newest TMO is Gloucester Grove which opened its doors for the first time in October 2014.

Gloucester Grove TMO opening

Leathermarket JMB open day
How do we ensure your neighbourhood is clean and safe?

We provide a range of services to keep your neighbourhood clean and safe.

In the year 2014/15:

- We received 503 graffiti notifications and carried out all removals within 24 hours
- We received 3,912 fly tipping notifications and carried out 99% of removals within 24 hours
- We received 519 dog fouling notifications and carried out all removals within 48 hours
- We carried out 2,793 estate inspections to ensure services are being provided to a good standard
- 98% of estates were rated good or excellent, improving again on last year
- We have now let 5,200 garages and billed over £4.5m in the last year.

We know that not all of our estates are spotless, but we are working hard to get them there; with your help recycling and disposing of rubbish in a proper manner we will be able to concentrate more on deep cleans.
How well do we deal with antisocial behaviour?

We know that antisocial behaviour is a very important issue for tenants. The council dealt with 1,255 cases of antisocial behaviour in 2014/15, covering a range of complex issues. Many cases were resolved by early intervention and in some cases by offering support to households.

- 23 closure orders were obtained against homes being misused for drug activity or where there was rowdy behaviour
- Nine injunctions were obtained for antisocial behaviour against residents for a range of behaviours including noise nuisance, harassment and intimidation. Two tenants were sent to prison for breaching their injunction, another received a suspended prison sentence
- 28 ASBOs and criminal behaviour orders were issued to deal with some of the more serious forms of antisocial behaviour in the borough. This included dealing in drugs and gathering in intimidating groups on estates
- 80 Acceptable Behaviour Contracts were secured dealing with a wide range of antisocial and nuisance behaviour
- 38 notices of seeking possession were served for antisocial behaviour in tenancies
- 18 possession orders were secured, including two against households who deliberately harassed their neighbours by creating excessive noise
- Seven evictions were carried out for antisocial behaviour. A number of these were linked to drug activity in and around council tenancies.
Welfare reform

Welfare reform refers to government changes to benefits entitlement, as part of their aim to help more people into work while supporting the most vulnerable.

**Discretionary Housing Payments (DHP)**

This is a short term payment from the council which can help to cover some housing costs, for instance if you are struggling and cannot afford a rent instalment. It doesn’t have to be repaid. If you have been affected by welfare reform in any way then you could consider asking for a claim form for DHP.

The vast majority of tenants in Southwark pay their rent on time. If you would like any budgeting assistance or help calculating your income and expenditure please contact your income officer.

**Universal credit**

If you are of working age and have received income support, income based job seekers’ allowance or income related employment and support allowance, housing benefit, child tax credit, and working tax credit, then you will be affected by the changes that will be phased in over the next year.

For the first time, rather than receiving small amounts of different types of benefit, claimants will receive one payment that will be paid directly to their bank account once a month – this means you need to have a bank account. Your priorities will still be to pay your rent, council tax and other household bills from the lump sum you receive each month. Help and advice on budgeting is available here.
How to get involved

We have a strong history of tenant involvement in Southwark. You can choose how involved you want to be and in what way – from attending estate inspections, estate action days or responding to our surveys, to joining a tenant and resident association (TRA). Last year we had 93 TRAs in Southwark. Turn up to your local TRA meeting to see what’s going on, or join the committee to get free training. From the TRA you may be elected to area forums or become a delegate to the Tenant Council, where you can contribute to decisions about a whole range of issues, including rent levels or investment plans – or you can even decide to manage your own estate.

If you have time to get involved please contact your resident services officer. Your continued involvement is a part of our success. For example 2,793 estate inspections were carried out where residents helped us make decisions on standards of cleanliness or highlighted improvements to communal repairs.

A contribution of 27.25p from each tenant’s weekly rent went towards the running of the tenant fund in 2014/15, an increase of 0.72p on 2013/14. This funding is for running TRAs and for grants to assist the Southwark Group of Tenants’ Organisation (SGTO) in supporting TRAs.

Southwark Group of Tenants’ Organisation (SGTO) is an independent voluntary organisation representing and promoting the rights of TRAs in a range of ways. They provide training, a channel for tenants to speak to elected politicians, regular newsletters on housing issues and independent housing advice.

Tenant and leasehold representatives do a huge amount of joint work with the council and help monitor our performance. Independent scrutiny of our performance is essential to ensure continuous improvement in the areas that matter most to tenants.

Do you want to have your say? To get involved in shaping services contact the Resident Involvement team on 020 7525 3326 or email resident.involvement@southwark.gov.uk
Housing Heroes

The Housing Heroes Awards returned for their second year in 2014/15 to celebrate those who dedicate themselves to helping in the community. The awards were held in January.

Pat Hickson was the winner of the Lifetime Achievement Award. For years she has been chair of her local TRA and has been involved in a whole range of clubs and projects, too many to mention here. Pat said the award meant just as much to her as her MBE.

Michael Hulme picked up two awards on the night, for Neighbour of the Year and the award for Outstanding Achievement. Michael has devoted his time to helping others, whether gardening, carrying out repairs or decorating. He is always ready with a joke and a helping hand.

Other winners were drawn from categories such as Best Community Initiative, Customer Service of the Year and Outstanding TRA. To see the other winners and nominees click here.
The number of enquiries and complaints received across the whole council increased in 2014/15. Housing and Community Services received 5,255 complaints in total. The vast majority were resolved at Stage 1 (the earliest possible stage), with only 4.6% progressing to Stage 2. This is a big improvement on last year. Most complaints were about repairs.

We are getting better at the way we handle complaints, with 74% satisfaction compared to 71% satisfaction last year.

“I want to pass on my gratitude for the way that D managed my complaint. D was very polite and helpful, and all the issues have been resolved.”

**Housing Ombudsman**
80 complaints (including leaseholder matters) were escalated to the Housing Ombudsman in 2014/15. These were complaints that could not be resolved between the customer and the council.

**Arbitration Panel**
166 cases were referred to the Arbitration Panel and the average compensation paid was just under £500 per case. The panel considers disputes that arise from the conditions of tenancy. It is made up of a councillor representative, a tenant representative and an independent representative and both parties are bound by the decisions made.

**Compliments, comments and contact**
If you would like to comment on the content of this report or offer suggestions to improve, please contact Antoinette Stasaitis, Business Improvement Manager, Housing and Community Services via email at antoinette.stasaitis@southwark.gov.uk

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