

Residents' Annual Report 2023-2024



DARTFORD
BOROUGH COUNCIL

Foreword

As we enter a new year, it is crucial for us to reflect on our achievements and areas where we can make improvements. It gives us great pleasure to present to you the Council's Residents' Annual Report for 2023-2024. We trust that you will find it not only informative but also a valuable resource, and we would like to express our gratitude for taking the time to review it.



The development of this report has been guided by the feedback received from our tenants and leaseholders. By evaluating our performance across a spectrum of housing services and benchmarking it against local standards, we believe that the report offers a transparent overview of our accomplishments and outlines our plans for the upcoming year.

Our collaboration with the Dartford Tenants' and Leaseholders' Forum (DT&LF) remains pivotal as we strive to ensure that our housing services are not only efficient but also effective and inclusive.

Our dedication to maintaining a customer-centric approach has led to the successful recruitment of two new Officers: the 'Communications and Engagement Lead' and 'Customer Engagement Officer'. By actively reviewing our interactions and engagement with these newly filled roles, we aim to fortify our commitment to consistently enhance the quality of service you receive.

Our focus on engaging with tenants and leaseholders across a spectrum of services underscores our firm commitment to driving ongoing improvements.

For insights on ways you can actively participate, please refer to the back page of the report.

Thank you once again for your continued support and collaboration.

Councillor David Mote
Cabinet Portfolio Holder for Housing

Introduction

We continue to work towards meeting the current regulatory standards, overseen by the Regulator of Social Housing.

This report explains how we have been performing over the past year under the below consumer standards and sets out our aims for 2024/2025.

Consumer Standard	Required Outcomes
Safety and Quality	Stock quality Decency Health and safety Repairs, maintenance and planned improvements Adaptations
Transparency, Influence and Accountability	Fairness and respect Diverse needs Engagement with tenants Information about landlord services Performance information Complaints
Neighborhoods and Community	Safety of shared spaces Local cooperation Anti-social behavior and hate incidents Domestic abuse
Tenancy	Allocations and lettings Tenancy sustainment and evictions Tenure Mutual exchange

Safety and Quality Standard

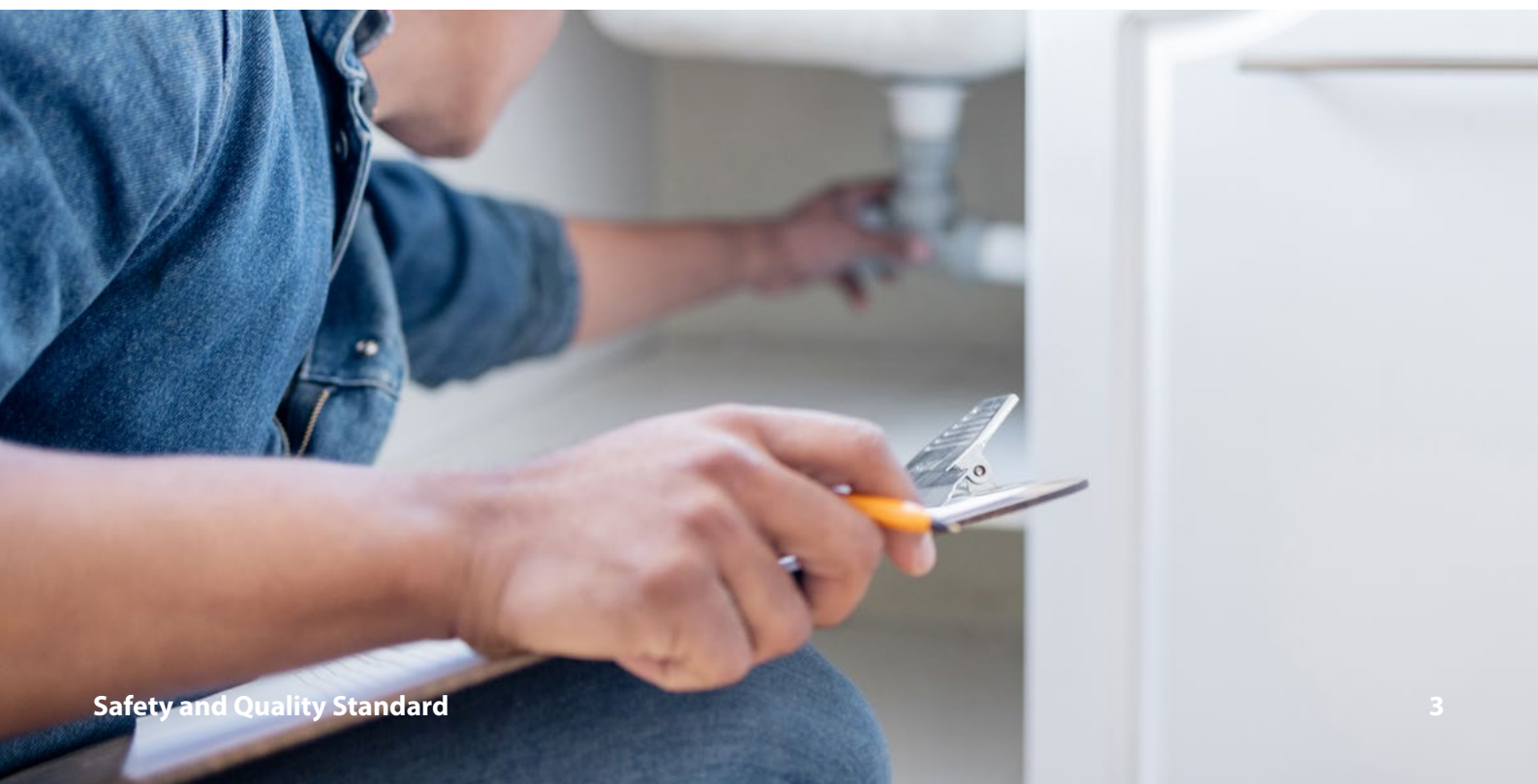
What we achieved in 2023/2024

Stock quality

- Implemented new ways to keep information on our homes up to date including visiting homes that haven't reported any repairs in two years, collected information at annual gas servicing visits and external wall insulation visits. Each of these initiatives helps us to keep up to date on the condition of our homes and plan service improvements.
- Took appropriate action when items were identified for example: highlighting failures for Housing, Health and Safety Rating System (HHSRS) legislation, anniversary dates for gas servicing and electrical testing, and monitoring installation and replacement of smoke and carbon monoxide alarms. In line with best practice we adopted the category LD2 standard and as part of our 5 year programme completed upgrade works to more than 500 homes.
- Tenants can expect a full electrical test to their home every 5 years and in 2023/24 we completed more than 1000 electrical tests.
- We achieved a 100% compliancy rate for gas safety, meaning a qualified engineer attended each tenanted home during the year and completed essential safety checks.
- As part of our ongoing strategy to reduce tenants' energy costs, we were successfully awarded match funding of £1.8 million in 2023 to undertake a programme of external wall insulation upgrades. The £3.6 million programme will conclude in 2025 but 2023/24 saw the completion of total retrofit upgrades to 56 homes. Each homes energy performance will have reached a minimum grade of EPC C.
- Successfully decanted tenants from two blocks of flats due structural issues that were beyond economic repair and obtained approval for demolition works to be carried out.

Decency

- Achieved 98.93% homes meeting the Decent Homes Standard.



Health and safety

- Developed a Damp, Mould and Condensation Policy. In our new Policy, all reports of damp and mould will be pre-inspected to determine the cause, and as a result, the number of inspections completed, increased during 2023/24. We have introduced monitoring equipment to homes. The devices monitor temperature and humidity and support officers when diagnosing the causes of mould.
- Developed and consulted residents on a Fire Safety Policy, which sets out how we manage fire safety risks in our buildings its communal areas.
- Developed and consulted residents on an Asbestos Management Policy and Plan, which sets out our approach to managing asbestos in our housing stock and sites which fall under the responsibility of the Housing Service.
- Offered the Older Person's Decoration Scheme, Handyperson Scheme and Sanctuary Scheme to support tenants in their homes.
- Used concern cards to identify tenants who may require extra support or to highlight a safeguarding concern.
- Our annual fire risk assessment programme was completed. 1745 of our homes are connected to common areas, meaning a fire risk assessment must be completed, which we complete annually and where remedial works are required, works are then scheduled and undertaken.
- In line with our duties under the Asbestos Regulations 2012, we completed an annual asbestos survey to common spaces where we know asbestos may be present. Each survey notes the condition of asbestos items, and where damaged, they will then be removed.
- Completed the smoke detection and fire alarm upgrade to all of our Housing Scheme accommodation. Supported by Sureserve Group, following appointment in 2021, each scheme now has a fully integrated smoke and heat detection system covering the communal areas and flats. The final design means that the system is integrated with our alarm receiving centre, who triage calls and where necessary alert Kent Fire and Rescue Service.

Repairs, maintenance and planned improvements

- Offered information on the various ways for reporting repairs including online, phone and email, by promoting them on our website, on noticeboards and within the Link newsletter and when requested in alternative formats.
- Completed a review and consultation with residents on the Housing Repairs and Maintenance Policy, which sets out our responsibility for housing repairs, maintenance and safety compliance, and areas of repair that are the responsibility of residents.
- Allocated approximately £800,000 for improvements works to our housing blocks including door entry installations and refurbishments, redecoration and replacement floor coverings.
- Invested over £1million in improvements to our garage blocks including solar lighting.
- Completed refurbishment of garage sites at Bramble Avenue, Fleetdale Parade, Castlefield and Leonard Avenue. Each refurbishment included the introduction of new solar lighting which has provided greater security at night for garage users.

Identified areas for improvements to repair timescales including making sure repairs are:

- Carried out properly, better quality and finished right first time.
- Carried out quicker; and that there is better communication including updates about repairs
- Checked after they have been carried out to ensure they have been done properly.



Adaptations

- Began a review of our Disabled Adaptations Policy for Council Tenants to consider applications from tenants who are elderly, frail or neurodivergent.
- Worked in partnership to deliver our adaptations service to tenants including working with Hi-Kent, KCC Fast Track, KCC Disabled Children's Team and KCC Assessment and Enablement Team.

Repairs & Maintenance Performance

Repairs to heating systems	4735
Replaced bathrooms	181
Replaced kitchens	56
Re-wires	63
Replaced roofs	35
Installed new boilers	121
Installed new central heating	65



Transparency, Influence & Accountability Standard

What we achieved in 2023/2024

Fairness and respect

- Completed a number of surveys to evaluate how tenants and prospective tenants feel they are treated.
- Ensured staff are working to our Employee Code of Conduct and complete a Corporate Induction process including equality and diversity training.
- Recognised and celebrated tenants in our communities under the Good Neighbour Thank You Scheme to show our appreciation of tenants who are good neighbours and contribute positively to the community. Since November 2022 there have been 21 successful nominations.
- Committed to tackle loneliness and isolation in our communities by raising staff and resident awareness of issues and resources available for support.

Diverse needs

- Collected data from tenants at sign up to understand their diverse needs and carried out Customer Access Reviews for our new and reviewed policies and strategies.
- Recruited to two new posts dedicated to increasing communication and engagement with residents.
- Set up a monitoring system to check completion and outcomes of actions contained in Customer Access Reviews.

Engagement with tenants

- Continued to work with the Dartford Tenants and Leaseholders Forum to ensure services are diverse to all.
- Developed and consulted residents on a new Tenants and Leaseholders Engagement Strategy, which sets the standards for partnership working with residents in monitoring our housing services and our continuing commitment to encourage residents to be involved.
- Offered resources to support individuals and groups who want to make improvements in their area.
- Offered information in alternative formats and practical assistance to residents who have additional needs.



Information about landlord services

- Issued the Link newsletter to tenants and leaseholders.
- Set up a website and communications group to make improvements to our website in order to enhance the customer journey, experience and accessibility.
- Increased access to information including fire safety, gas safety and damp and mould.
- Given information about rent to customers via the website and in writing each year.
- Are developing a new Tenancy Support pack to provide tenants with clear and relevant information to support them in their tenancies.
- Included information on legal obligations and regulatory requirements within our policies and on our website.
- Used various methods of communication to update tenants on progress, next steps and outcomes when delivering our services.
- Utilised Dartford Tenants and Leaseholders Forum Public Meetings and the Link newsletter to promote services, policies, consultations, engagement opportunities and other information useful for our tenants.
- Published information about the Leadership Team, Statutory Officers and services on the Council website.
- Developed and consulted residents on a Pets Policy, which sets out our approach to allowing residents to keep pets in their homes.

Performance information

- Provided performance information including the results of the annual tenant satisfaction measures in the Link newsletter, on our website and within this report.

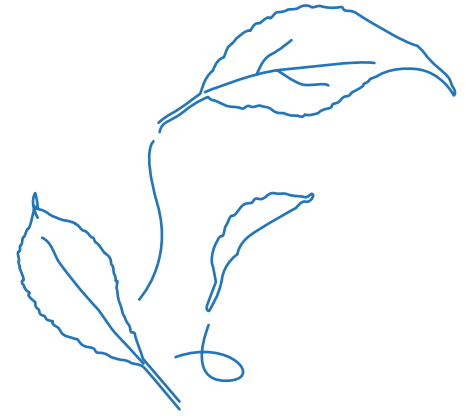
Complaints

- Publicised information on how tenants can make a complaint on our website, in a booklet, on noticeboards and within our Link newsletter.
- Published complaint handling performance and learning from complaints within the Link newsletter, on our website and this is also reported to the Housing Advisory Board.
- Published our Annual Complaints Performance and Service Improvement Report and self-assessment against, the Housing Ombudsman's Complaint Handling Code.

Self-referral

- Developed a procedure for making self-referrals to the Regulator of Social Housing where a breach or potential breach of any of the consumer standards has been identified.

Neighbourhood & Community Standard



What we achieved in 2023/2024

Safety of shared spaces

- Worked in partnership with the Council's Community Safety Unit and Environmental Health Service to improve the safety of shared spaces.
- Offered grants for improving shared spaces.
- Carried out estate inspections to report safety issues in shared spaces.

Local cooperation

- Continued to promote our Good Neighbour Thank You Scheme to residents who contribute positively to their local community.
- Promoted information to help tackle loneliness and isolation.

Anti-social behaviour and hate incidents

- Continued to work with relevant partners to prevent and tackle anti-social behaviour including daily briefings with the Community Safety Unit and Environmental Health, Dartford Town Against Crime Partnership, and contributed to multi-agency risk assessment conferences.





Domestic abuse

- Adopted a new Domestic Abuse Housing Strategy to set out how we will assist and support victims and survivors of domestic abuse.
- Reviewed and consulted tenants on our Housing Management Transfer Policy which sets out how urgent moves may be agreed where a tenant is not safe to remain in their current accommodation.
- Continued to provide information on domestic abuse support and promote awareness campaigns on our corporate social media pages.
- Promoted and hosted the multi-agency Dartford Domestic Abuse One Stop Shop, offering free advice, information and support under one roof.
- Worked with partners at multi-agency risk assessment conferences to develop safety plans for victims and their children.
- Implemented a new Kent Sanctuary Access for Eligible Residents (SAFER) Scheme providing additional security to victim's property.
- Created Domestic Abuse Champions within the housing service to lead awareness and support to staff on domestic abuse.
- Achieved White Ribbon accreditation and carrying out a three year plan of White Ribbon activities.
- Worked towards domestic abuse housing alliance (DAHA) accreditation.
- Worked with the Kent Domestic Abuse Partnership Board and the North Kent Domestic Abuse Forum partners to improve partnership working arrangements and ensure support is available for victims of domestic abuse.

Tenancy Standard

What we achieved in 2023/2024

Allocations and lettings

- Improved the Council's Housing Allocations Policy following a customer access review to mitigate any negative impacts on protected characteristic groups.
- Allocated homes based on the individual circumstances of each application including property size, areas identified as unsafe for the occupant/s, and any medical or relevant advisor recommendation.
- Reviewed and consulted tenants on our Tenancy Fraud Policy for Council Housing, which sets out how we prevent and tackle tenancy fraud.
- Checked who is applying and living in our homes by requesting proof from applicants and prospective tenants to assist in identity checks as detailed within our Tenancy Fraud Policy for Council Housing.
- Continued to publicise how to report tenancy fraud via our Link newsletter and website and investigated reports made by the public.
- Reviewed the Downsize for Cash Scheme and developed an Under-Occupation Policy, which contains increased levels of payments offered to under-occupying tenants who wish to downsize their property.
- Continued to promote and assist tenants to move via the Downsize for Cash scheme.

Tenancy sustainment and evictions

- Worked in partnership across the Housing Service and with external organisations to help support vulnerable tenants to access services and maintain their tenancy. The Housing Inclusion Service has supported tenants with housing options, managing money, claiming benefits and debt, registering with a doctor, and accessing education, training and work.
- Worked in partnership under the Complex Case Panel. In 2023/24 of the 31 tenants at risk of eviction, 11 were evicted and 17 were able to sustain their tenancy with support from the service.

Tenure

- Reviewed and consulted tenants on our Housing Assignment Policy which sets out the circumstances where a tenancy may be transferred to another person.

Mutual exchange

- Continued to offer HomeSwapper as a way for tenants wishing to mutual exchange with 36 taking place in 2023/24.



Our actions for **2024-2025**

Transparency, Influence & Accountability Standard

We will:

Fairness and respect

- Review the loneliness guidance to ensure it is up to date with the services available to support residents, including face to face befriending services.

Diverse needs

- Review and update the information collected on the equalities monitoring form that is completed at allocation to ensure it captures relevant information.
- Review and update the tenancy verification form completed during visits to the property for fraud prevention purposes or to update occupancy details on One Housing.
- Review how tenants' communication and support needs are recorded on One Housing to ensure such needs are easily identified.
- Review the information exchanged from the Allocations and Accommodation Services Teams to the Tenancy Services Team about new tenants communication and support needs.

Engagement with tenants

- Explore alternative ways to deliver transactional satisfaction surveys to increase responses.
- Set up mechanisms to feedback to tenants the outcome of consultations and satisfaction survey work.

Information about landlord services

- Complete the development of the Local Standards and consult tenants in the process.
- Improve the housing webpage structure and content and create a new digital version of the Link newsletter and encourages sign-up to this service.

Performance information

- Collect and publish the Tenants Satisfaction Measures (TSM) for 2024-25.
- Benchmark the TSMs with other providers to see how our performance compares.
- Collate and publish financial measures on director remuneration and management costs annually on the website to ensure openness and transparency on how income is being spent.

Complaints

- Ensure an informative on how to make a complaint and the role of the Housing Ombudsman is included in standard letters and satisfaction surveys.
- Complete and publish the annual complaints performance and service improvement report on the Complaint Handling Code for 2024-25, including a self-assessment against the Code.
- Improve the methods whereby the Council learns from complaints in order to prevent repetition.

Neighbourhood & Community Standard

We will:

Local cooperation

- Develop a new Housing Strategy for 2025.
- Develop a new Tree Policy

Anti-social behaviour and hate incidents

- Review the Anti-social Behaviour Policy to include setting out the approach to tackling and deterring hate incidents in the neighbourhoods where the Council provides social housing
- Consider developing a landlord service specific webpage on anti-social behaviour and hate crime.
- Review the Anti-social Behaviour leaflet.

Domestic abuse

- Consider developing a landlord service specific webpage on domestic abuse.
- Review how domestic abuse cases are flagged on our internal management system
- Undertake a review of the Sanctuary Scheme Referral Procedure.

Tenancy Standard

We will:

- Undertake tenancy fraud training for staff.
- Continue to publish the numbers of tenancy fraud and types and the actions taken and outcomes in our Annual Report to tenants and leaseholders.
- Complete a review on a revised Tenancy Agreement and Tenancy Support Pack and carry out tenant consultation.
- Carry out a review of the Allocations Policy to ensure it remains up to date and relevant.
- Develop a revised Aids and Adaptations Policy for council tenants

Competence & Conduct Standard

We will:

- Prepare for a new consumer standard expected to come into force in April 2025 called the Competence and Conduct Standard. This standard aims to ensure that staff have up-to-date skills, knowledge and experience, and that they exhibit the right behaviours to deliver a high quality, professional service and treat residents with respect.

Policy on competence and conduct

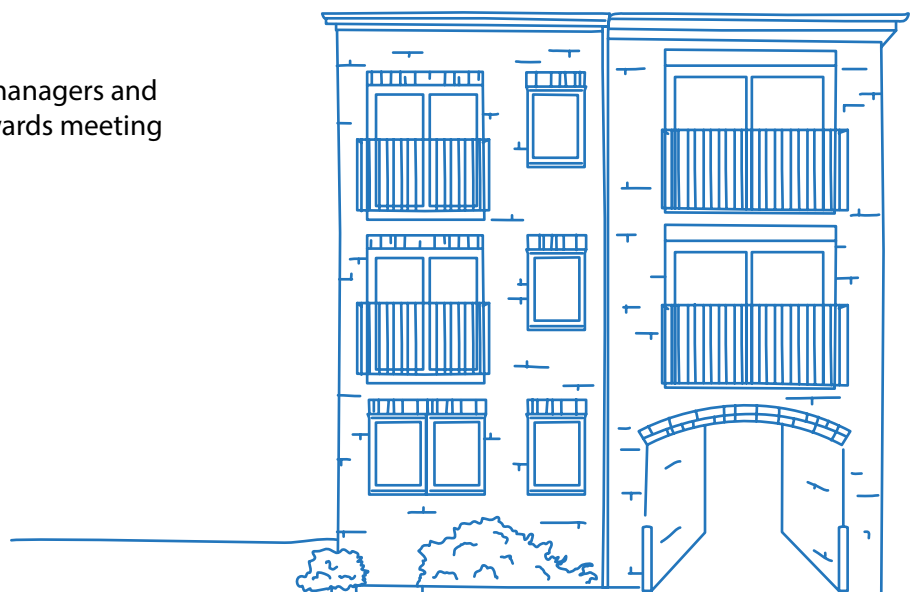
- Develop a policy on competence and conduct.

Code of conduct

- Adopt or develop a code of conduct for relevant individuals.

Qualifications

- Ensure all relevant senior housing managers and executives meet or are working towards meeting the qualification requirements



Tenant Satisfaction Measures

The Regulator of Social Housing has introduced a set of annual tenant satisfaction measures that let you see how well we are performing in providing good quality homes and services. Some of these measures come from satisfaction surveys and some come from management information we hold about our services. These measures help understand in which areas we are doing well at and which areas need improving.

Overall satisfaction

Code	Tenant satisfaction measure	2023-24
TP01	Proportion of respondents who report that they are satisfied with the overall service from their landlord	72.3%

Keeping properties in good repair

Code	Tenant satisfaction measure	2023-24
RP01	Proportion of homes that do not meet the Decent Homes Standard	1.07%
RP02 (1)	Proportion of non-emergency responsive repairs completed within the landlord's target timescale	81.1%
RP02 (2)	Proportion of emergency responsive repairs completed within the landlord's target timescale	91.2%
TP02	Proportion of respondents who have received a repair in the last 12 months who report that they are satisfied with the overall repairs service	77.8%
TP03	Proportion of respondents who have received a repair in the last 12 months who report that they are satisfied with the time taken to complete their most recent repair	81.3%
TP04	Proportion of respondents who report that they are satisfied that their home is well maintained	75.1%

Maintaining building safety

Code	Tenant satisfaction measure	2023-24
BS01	Proportion of homes for which all required gas safety checks have been carried out	100%
BS02	Proportion of homes for which all required fire risk assessments have been carried out	93.9%
BS03	Proportion of homes for which all required asbestos management surveys or re-inspections have been carried out	100%
BS04	Proportion of homes for which all required legionella risk assessments have been carried out	83.9%
BS05	Proportion of homes for which all required communal passenger lift safety checks have been carried out	100%
TP05	Proportion of respondents who report that they are satisfied that their home is safe	78.0%

Respectful and helpful engagement

Code	Tenant satisfaction measure	2023-24
TP06	Proportion of respondents who report that they are satisfied that their landlord listens to tenant views and acts upon them	62.8%
TP07	Proportion of respondents who report that they are satisfied that their landlord keeps them informed about things that matter to them	68.5%
TP08	Proportion of respondents who report that they agree their landlord treats them fairly and with respect	76.2%

Effective handling of complaints

Code	Tenant satisfaction measure	2023-24
CH01 (1)	Number of stage one complaints received per 1,000 homes	4.7
CH01 (2)	Number of stage two complaints received per 1,000 homes	0.5
CH02 (1)	Proportion of stage one complaints responded to within the Housing Ombudsman's Complaint Handling Code timescales	65.0%
CH02 (2)	Proportion of stage two complaints responded to within the Housing Ombudsman's Complaint Handling Code timescales	100%
TP09	Proportion of respondents who report making a complaint in the last 12 months who are satisfied with their landlord's approach to complaints handling	30.9%

Responsible neighbourhood management

Code	Tenant satisfaction measure	2023-24
NM01 (1)	Number of anti-social behaviour cases opened per 1,000 homes	35.1
NM01 (2)	Number of anti-social behaviour cases that involve hate incidents opened per 1,000 homes	0
TP10	Proportion of respondents with communal areas who report that they are satisfied that their landlord keeps communal areas clean and well maintained	52.5%
TP11	Proportion of respondents who report that they are satisfied that their landlord makes a positive contribution to the neighbourhood	58.3%
TP12	Proportion of respondents who report that they are satisfied with their landlord's approach to handling anti-social behaviour	51.1%

Since we carried out a pilot satisfaction survey in 2022, satisfaction has gone up in all areas apart from complaint handling where it has gone down. We're looking at ideas to improve how we handle complaints and other areas such as tackling anti-social behaviour and keeping communal areas clean and well maintained.

For more information on the tenant satisfaction measures and our approach to carrying out the satisfaction survey, visit dartford.gov.uk/tsms

Complaints

If we get things wrong, we want to make them right and learn from our mistakes.

Complaint Handling Code

The Housing Ombudsman has a Complaint Handling Code that all social housing landlords must follow to ensure they are responding to complaints effectively and fairly. To view our self-assessment against the Code to see how we're performing as a landlord visit <https://www.dartford.gov.uk/other-services/housing-complaints>.

How we performed on handling your complaints in 2023-2024

We have two stages to our complaints process. Stage one is where you can first express dissatisfaction. If you remain dissatisfied after stage one, you can request a stage two review. If you remain dissatisfied after the stage two review, you can ask the Housing Ombudsman to investigate your complaint.

Number of stage one complaints opened	26
Number of stage two complaints opened	3
Number of Housing Ombudsman investigations	1
Total	30

Reason for complaints

Complaints can be about different areas of our landlord and leasehold services.

Repairs and maintenance	15
Tenancy management	4
Communal areas	4
Anti-social behaviour	3
Housing allocations	2
Rents	1
Leasehold service	1
Total	30

Stage one and stage two response timescales

We aim to provide a full response to stage one complaints within 10 working days and 20 working days for stage two complaints following our acknowledgment of your complaint.

Complaints responded to within timescales	21
Complaints not responded to within timescales	8
Total	29

Complaint outcomes

Once a complaint is looked into a decision is made on the outcome. You should be given the reasons for the decision. When we get things wrong we apologise and put things right. This may include looking at changing our policies or procedures to make sure the same thing doesn't happen again, or we may provide training to staff to increase their awareness or skills in a particular area if needed. If it is a complaint about something we haven't done, for example a repair, we'll make sure it gets done right away.

Complaint upheld	5
Complaint partially upheld	7
Complaint not upheld	16
Complaint withdrawn	1
Complaint determined by the Housing Ombudsman – no maladministration but service failure in complaint handling	1
Total	30

How we have learned from complaints and made improvements

Improvements as a result of learning from complaints is an important part of a positive and effective complaint handling culture. This year we've made improvements to how we do things. For example:

- We received a pattern of complaints about the standard of cleaning of communal areas. We discussed how improvements should be made with our cleaning contractor. Since then, performance of the cleaning contract has improved and there have to date been no further formal complaints received about the issue.
- In relation to a complaint about how we handled a report of anti-social behaviour, this found we needed to improve how we support vulnerable residents affected by anti-social behaviour. We've since put together a procedure to make sure we're providing better support to residents.

General Performance Information

	Target	Performance 2023-2024	Target 2024-25
Allocations			
Number of households on the housing register		1261	
% of lettings made to households already residing within the Borough	97%	94.72%	
Homelessness			
No of households where homelessness prevented		191	
No of households living in temporary accommodation		369	
Rents			
Rent Collection and Arrears Recovery - % rents collected as a proportion of rents owed	97.5%	97.24%	
Amount of rent arrears as a percentage of debit	2.5%	2.31%	2.5%
Relets			
% rent lost through local authority dwellings becoming vacant (voids)	0.5%	0.66%	0.5%
Average time taken to re-let local authority housing voids (in calendar days)	30	36.11	
Number of Voids re-serviced and re-let		227	
Repairs and Maintenance			
% repairs completed on time	98%	81.71%	98%
No of non-decent homes		45	
Energy Efficiency of Housing Stock (SAP energy rating)	73	71.97	73.0
Affordable Housing			
Number of affordable homes delivered	90	106	90



Income spend, management costs	
Housing Stock	£ per stock
4,127	4,403.71

Spend per £ 1

	2022/2023	2023/2024
General Management	£0.20	£0.21
Special Management	£0.03	£0.03
Housing Services for the Elderly	£0.04	£0.04
Repairs and Maintenance	£0.19	£0.19
Interest on Loans	£0.04	£0.04
Debt Repayment	£0.16	£0.16
New Homes	£0.03	£0.05
Capital Works to Existing Properties	£0.31	£0.28
	£1.00	£1.00

If you would like more information on documents mentioned in this report or about the housing service, or regulatory framework, please look on our website or contact us using one of the methods below.

You can also find more information on the Regulator of Social Housing at [gov.uk/government/organisations/regulator-of-social-housing](https://www.gov.uk/government/organisations/regulator-of-social-housing)

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