

Back to Basics

Keep it simple. Get it right.



When we ask you what you think of us as your landlord and how we deliver services to you, you tell us that you expect us to get the basics right first time.

You also tell us that you want us to add something to the basics by:

- Keeping the service **P**ersonal
- Keeping the service **L**ocal
- Developing a good **U**nderstanding of what our residents want
- Keeping everything **S**imple

This document tells you how we will deliver a 'basics PLUS' service to you.

It is a new report that we will produce annually from now on that sets out: how we match up against a set of standards, how we intend to put right any shortcomings and how you can influence the services that we offer.

A FEW FACTS ABOUT US:

- We own and manage 1951 homes:
 - 1346 are general needs
 - 271 are especially for older people
 - 87 are in supported housing
 - 92 are Shared Ownership
 - 88 are Higher Rent
 - 67 are owned by leaseholders
- We plan to build approximately 70 new homes every year.
- We employ a total of 31 people
- We carry out between 150 and 170 lettings every year (including the new homes we build)
- We will spend over a third of the money you pay us in rent on repairing and maintaining your homes.
- Our Board is made up of 3 residents and 10 non-residents – all local people.

A FEW FACTS ABOUT YOU:

(from the survey carried out in 2009)

- 88% of you like where you live and 90% are happy with the quality of your home
- 54% of you have been a tenant of ours for more than 6 years and 51% of you have lived in your present home for more than 6 years
- 58% of you are under 45 years of age
- 38% of you have some form of disability or health problem that limits your daily activities





THE 'BASICS PLUS' SERVICE OFFER TO OUR TENANTS.

The standards we aim to work to can be broken down into 5 main areas and for each one we set out below the Basic Service and how we meet it (or not), the PLUS things that you have told us about or asked for and how we propose to combine these into a Basics PLUS offer to you. We've used a traffic light system to show at a glance whether or not we meet the standard at the moment:



Shows that we meet the standard.



Shows that we broadly meet the standard but have more work to do.



Shows that we don't meet the standard.

Tenant Involvement and Empowerment Standard

Customer service, Choice and Complaints

SERVICE REQUIREMENT: We must provide choices, information and communication that is appropriate to the diverse needs of our tenants in the delivery of all standards.

We offer direct contact via our Customer Service Team.



We use our website for tenants to report repairs and complaints, we could do more to use it to advertise issues for tenants.



We use our handbook, newsletters, direct contact with Housing Officers and our website to tell tenants about our services and what they can expect.



We use surveys regularly to gauge opinions. We also need to use more direct contact such as phone, e-mail or text messaging.



We are up-dating the personal information we hold about tenants to make sure we understand any specific needs that you have and will then make sure that we respect any requests.



We use the Tenants Voice to scrutinise our policies and procedures to make sure that they are relevant and appropriate.



SERVICE REQUIREMENT: We must have an approach to complaints that is clear, simple and accessible that ensures that complaints are resolved promptly, politely and fairly.

Our policy needs to be reviewed to make the process simpler for tenants to use.



We should differentiate between formal complaints and general grumbles so that we have a genuine understanding of concerns of residents.



We should make the system as simple and easy to use as possible.



We monitor formal complaints regularly at Board level to check for any trends and to make sure that they are dealt with according to our Policy. The performance could be published on our website?



We use our website for people to make formal complaints.



Involvement and Empowerment

SERVICE REQUIREMENT: We must give every tenant the chance to be involved in decisions about their homes, services and plans for the future.

We offer a wide range of ways for tenants to be involved and regularly ask their opinions about how we deliver services or how we could do things differently.



SERVICE REQUIREMENT: Offer tenants a choice of ways to check how we match up to our offers to them.

The Tenants Voice act as our initial scrutiny panel but this could be extended to other residents.



We will have introduced Mystery Shopping to test our services by the end of 2010.



We will continue to encourage tenants to become Tenant Inspectors.



We will continue to carry out informal surveys via Housing Officers at site visits or road-shows.



SERVICE REQUIREMENT: Help tenants learn more about housing matters to enable them to participate more and influence more.

Tenants Voice members are offered training in a range of subjects to help them to actively participate. This training could be extended to Tenants Friends.



Our newsletter – ‘Interlink’ carries a range of articles that help to inform our tenants about relevant issues – it is hoped that the Tenants Voice will have a greater editorial role in due course.



Understanding and responding to the diverse needs of tenants

SERVICE REQUIREMENT: We must treat all tenants with fairness and respect.

Our staff have a good relationship with tenants.



We support the Respect Agenda which is a government idea to help tackle anti social behaviour by building respect in communities.



This is a culture that runs throughout the organisation and is set out in our service standards.



SERVICE REQUIREMENT: Demonstrate that we understand the different needs of our tenants including the seven equality strands and tenants with additional support needs.

We have consolidated our separate equality policies into a Single Equality Scheme that covers all seven types of diversity.



The Equality Scheme has an associated action plan which will be agreed and monitored by an Equality panel of staff, tenants and Board members.



Our Community Census will provide us with much more information about the make-up of our tenants allowing us to make sure that our services are in tune with what our tenants want.



PERFORMANCE FACT BOX

Annually we receive an average of 13 formal complaints.

Over the last 3 years 87.5% of complaints have been resolved at the first stage.

1 complaint has been considered by the Ombudsman over the last 3 years who found that the Society had acted correctly.

The Tenants Voice was formed in 2008 and currently has 15 members.

There are 24 Tenants Friends across our properties.

PLUS

You said...

You want us to keep it personal and not keep asking the same things by questionnaire, you want us to make it flexible and if you tell us how you want to be informed or give your opinion in a certain way, you want us to make sure that we do that.

You don't want us to force information on you and you would prefer us to make it available in a range of places so that you can access it if and when you want to.

You like the face to face contact that you have with our staff and want that to continue.

You like our local approach of having Tenants Voice members and Tenants Friends to put forward your ideas and concerns.

You want us to use plain English and keep our leaflets and handouts as simple as possible.

You want to be kept informed if you have reported a problem or a repair.

You want us to deliver our promises.

You want our complaints procedure to be much simpler than it is at the moment and that you want us to keep you better informed of the outcome.

You want us to accept complaints from third parties such as Tenants Friends or Tenants Voice members where this might be more appropriate.



OUR OFFER – THE 'BASICS PLUS' SERVICE

We will...

Introduce a 'grumbles book' to log concerns from tenants who do not wish to make a formal complaint.

Work with the Tenants Voice to make our Complaints Procedure much simpler and easier to use.


Make sure that Tenants have local contacts they can use if they wish to make a complaint or get involved on a less formal basis.


Make sure that our services are tailored to the needs of our tenants once we have obtained up to date information from our Community Census.


Neighbourhood and Community Standard


Neighbourhood Management and Local Area Co-operation

SERVICE REQUIREMENT: Keep the neighbourhood and communal areas clean and safe. We should work in partnership with our tenants and other providers in the area where it is effective to do so.


We do 6 weekly site inspections plus a 'walking the sites' programme with the grounds maintenance contractor and tenants. 

We aim to recruit at least one Tenants Friend per scheme and to have at least one Tenants Voice member representing the area. 

Staff, Board members and Tenants Voice members do a visit to all new developments 6 months after handover to ask the residents what they think of the property and the area – feedback is built into requirements for future developments. 


Our Resident Services Policy sets out how we will achieve this but it needs to be publicised more widely. Residents need to know what we can offer them as their landlord. 


SERVICE REQUIREMENT: Co-operate with relevant partners to help promote social, environmental and economic wellbeing in the areas where we own properties.


We have some contact with other landlords in the same areas and with other agencies but this could be improved. 


Anti Social Behaviour (ASB)


SERVICE REQUIREMENT: Work in partnership with other public agencies to prevent and tackle anti social behaviour in the neighbourhoods where we own homes.


We have an ASB policy that was recently scrutinised by the Tenants Voice but we need to do more to set out the roles and responsibilities of us as Landlord and our tenants. 


We need to have clear information for tenants about what is genuinely anti social behaviour and what is a lifestyle difference. 

We need to manage expectations better and involve our tenants more in tackling problems in their areas. 

We have introduced starter tenancies to allow us to help people manage their tenancies in the early days. 

Our site visit programme allows us to spot problems early and nip them in the bud. 

We encourage neighbourliness by getting tenants together and talking to one another. 

We need to work closer with the Police and other providers / agencies in the area for a more consistent approach. 

PERFORMANCE FACT BOX

In 2009 we received 33 new complaints about anti social behaviour.

20 of the 2009 complaints were about noise nuisance.

We evicted 2 tenants for anti social behaviour.

We referred 6 people to mediation to try to resolve their differences.

We closed 20 cases because they were resolved or needed no further action.



OUR OFFER – THE ‘BASICS PLUS’ SERVICE

We will...

In consultation with the Tenants Voice, we will amend our policies to reflect your suggestions and comments.

Encourage more residents to come forward as Tenants Friends or members of the Tenants Voice and give them the training that they need for the role.

Improve our literature about anti social behaviour making it clear and simple.

Consider local behaviour contracts in areas where there is a higher level of anti social behaviour.

Encourage residents to work with us to engage more with other providers and agencies working in the same areas.

PLUS

You said...

You want us to make it easier for you to report cases of anti social behaviour.

You want us to set out in simple terms what you can expect to happen if you report a case, how long it might take to sort out and what you will need to do.

You want a named contact who will keep you informed about what is happening.

Sometimes you would prefer that there was a local Tenants Friend or Tenants Voice member who could speak out for you.

You want us to set clear guidelines about what is considered anti social behaviour and set a code of conduct.


You want us to be able to advise you and point you towards local agencies who might be able to help you.





Home Standard

Quality of Accommodation

SERVICE REQUIREMENT: Ensure that all our homes meet the Decent Homes Standard (one that is warm, weatherproof and has modern facilities) and continue to maintain them to this standard.


Our Repairs and Maintenance policy sets out the details of our improvement programme and how frequently we will up-date components such as kitchens, bathrooms and windows. 


All our properties currently meet the Decent Homes Standard. 


When we carry out improvements we try to use sustainable (eco) technology where we can. 


Repairs and Maintenance


SERVICE REQUIREMENT: Provide a cost effective repairs and maintenance service to homes and communal areas that responds to the need of tenants, offers choices and has the objective of completing repairs and improvements right first time.


We work in partnership with our three main contractors following a tendering process involving tenants that looked at quality of service as well as cost. 


We work with other housing associations to get the best price for improvement works by joining contracts and involve tenants in the selection process. 

We always offer choices to tenants when we are fitting new kitchens, bathrooms and external doors. 


We offer a range of ways for tenants to contact us to report a repair and all direct telephone calls come through our local customer service team. 

We offer some choice in appointment times for carrying out works. 


We are working with the Tenants Voice to set out new standards for improvement works and what condition we let our homes in. 


We ask tenants for feedback after every repair to check that it was done on time and to their satisfaction – we could still do more. 

SERVICE REQUIREMENT: Meet all applicable statutory requirements that provide for the health and safety of the occupants of our properties.

We have a generous annual budget for aids and adaptations and works are assessed and recommended by Occupational Therapists. 

We carried out 98.7% of all gas safety inspections due in 2009 – the outstanding ones were due to tenants not allowing us access. 

We carry out Fire Risk assessments on the shared areas of all our properties. 

We have up-dated our Asbestos register to tell us which properties (and shared areas) might have asbestos and what condition it is in. 

PERFORMANCE FACT BOX

We carried out 4863 general repairs in 2009 and 98.7% of them were completed by the target date.

We will spend almost £2.1 million on repairing and improving your homes in 2010 – that works out at an average of £1162 per property.

95.6% of those of you who had a repair carried out in 2009 were satisfied with the service.

We spent almost £80,000 in 2009 on aids and adaptations to your homes to make it easier for you to live there.

PLUS

You said...

You like the personal contact that you have with our Customer Service team and you would like to be able to arrange appointments for repairs with them directly.

You would like us to contact you by phone or e-mail more to ask if you are happy with the repair rather than always sending out a survey.

You would like us to offer three time slots for repairs rather than just morning or afternoon.

You would find it helpful to know that our contractor was in your area on a certain day to arrange to let them in for the repair even if this meant that you might have to wait a bit longer for the repair to be carried out.

You would like us to speed up the time it takes to get adaptations carried out once the Occupational Therapist has recommended the work.

You would like us to offer a handyman service that you can use for small jobs that are your responsibility in your home.

OUR OFFER – THE 'BASICS PLUS' SERVICE

We will...

Work with the Tenants Voice to make sure that our contractors are still delivering a high level of service.

Do some research to monitor our repairs to see how many jobs are repeated – this will tell us something about the quality of the work and whether it was fixed first time or not.

Offer three time slots for repairs and arrange for our Customer Service team to make the appointment with you when you report the repair.

Work with the Tenants Voice to see how viable and practical it might be to offer a handyman service.

Produce a simple leaflet that sets the obligations of both the landlord and tenant with respect to safety checks on gas installations to encourage more tenants to give us access first time.

Improve the way we deal with adaptation requests and job orders to try to speed up the process and reduce the time that tenants have to wait for these jobs to be carried out.



Tenancy Standard

Allocations

SERVICE REQUIREMENT: We must let our homes in a fair and transparent way. We must take into account the housing needs and aspirations of tenants and potential tenants and demonstrate how we make best use of available housing, meet the aims set for our housing and contribute to the local strategic housing function and sustainable communities.

We participate in two choice based lettings schemes (CBL) across the region in which we operate and are working with the remaining local authority who plan to implement their scheme later in 2010. We let all of our properties through this route.



We work closely with Parish Councils when letting new properties in rural areas to make sure that local people can be housed in their village.



We work with the local authority to agree local lettings plans on large new developments but could do more to work with other landlords in the area.



We promote the CBL schemes to our tenants and on our website but could do more to help vulnerable residents who might struggle to understand how it works.



Our existing tenants who need to move home use the CBL scheme, we do not offer a separate transfer scheme.



The personal information we keep about our tenants is not fully up to date yet and we cannot accurately check the occupancy level of our properties to make sure that best use is being made of them. Our Community Census will help us to do this.



We re-let our homes quickly. We have agreed the standard that our homes will be when we let them with the Tenants Voice and agree works with the new tenant at the start of their tenancy.



We encourage our tenants to consider mutual exchanges as their needs change but could do more to promote this option.



Rents

SERVICE REQUIREMENT: We must charge rents in accordance with the objectives and frameworks set out in the Government's direction to the Tenant Services Authority.

We set our rents according to the guidelines set for achieving target rents by 2011.



Our Board review rents annually to make sure that we are complying with the guidelines.



Our Rent Policy is reviewed every three years and may be scrutinised by the Tenants Voice if required.



We send out clear information about changes in rent to our tenants but no longer include details about the way rents are calculated as tenants told us that they found this information confusing.



Tenure

SERVICE REQUIREMENT: We must offer the most secure form of tenancy for the purpose of the housing and the sustainability of the community. We must meet all applicable statutory and legal requirements in relation to the form and use of tenancy agreements.

Our Housing Officers develop a good relationship with our residents allowing them to build up a good local knowledge.



Our network of Tenants Friends will help us to ensure that our properties are being occupied by the right person.



We introduced Starter Tenancies to all new tenants which allows us to make regular checks to make sure the tenant is managing their tenancy and work with them to help them to do this if there are any problems.



Our Housing Officers are responsible for all aspects of management on their patch and make sure that tenants are aware of and comply with their obligations from the start of their tenancy.



PERFORMANCE FACT BOX

Between April 2009 and March 2010 we carried out 179 lettings –
39 of these were to brand new properties.

We let 17 homes on new Starter Tenancies.

15 tenants mutually exchanged their homes.

We have received up-to-date census information on 35% of our tenants.

During 2009/10, we were selected by 8 Parish Councils to provide
new affordable homes in their village.

The percentage of rent lost due to empty properties is 0.53%.

The average re-let time between tenants is 15 days (this includes the time
it takes to get repairs done to the property).

PLUS

You said...

You like the personal contact that you have with your Housing Officer and with the Society as a whole.

You wish that we were able to manage our own local Transfer list as you would prefer to remain a tenant of ours.

You like our 'How To..' and 'About...' information sheets about your tenancy, your home and our Letting Standard but wish that we could offer some sort of incentive to reward tenants who leave the property in good condition.

You wish we could do more to help people move to more suitable accommodation if their needs change.

OUR OFFER – THE 'BASICS PLUS' SERVICE

We will...

Investigate options within the CBL scheme for direct transfers.

Improve the information we provide about the way that CBL works and either help directly or be able to advise tenants how to get more information about how the schemes work.

Make more use of our 'How to..' and 'About...' information sheets.

Continue to chase and up-date our Census information so that we can make sure that we are tailoring our services to the needs of our tenants.

Promote the network of Tenants Friends and aim to have at least one per scheme.

Look at the viability and cost effectiveness of offering an incentive scheme.





Value for Money Standard

SERVICE REQUIREMENT: In meeting all the standards set out in this report, we must have a comprehensive approach to managing resources to provide cost effective, efficient quality services and homes to meet current and potential tenant's needs.

We involve our residents in the selection of contractors and offer them training to carry out the tender and evaluation process.



We have robust Finance Policies that are checked by auditors.



We belong to several purchasing groups to make sure that we are getting best value.



We carry out regular reviews of performance and aim to be in the top quartile of Housing Associations in the country based on our performance. In 2009 we achieved this for 5 out of the 8 criteria measured, for the remaining 3 we were above the national average.



We believe in getting value for money and have to check that any new activity or service gives us good value.



We compare our costs and services against other similar organisations but could do more to check this.



The Tenants Voice checks our policies and procedures for us from a tenant's point of view and as they are a committee of our Board they are able to influence these.



We regularly review our policies such as Asset Management and Repairs and Maintenance to make sure that we are making best use of our resources.



PERFORMANCE FACT BOX

As a result of competitive tendering through the Procurement group in 2009 we were able to fit:

49 new kitchens at an average cost of £4000 per kitchen
81 new bathrooms at an average cost of £2755 per bathroom
52 new windows and doors at an average cost of £1600 per property.

PLUS

You said...

You want to have a say in which contractors we choose and make sure that the quality of service that they offer is considered to be as important as the cost.

You want the option to change the services that we provide and you pay for in your immediate area if it doesn't work for you or you want an enhanced service.

You like being asked for your opinion but would prefer us not to ask too often.

You like to know how we are performing compared to other landlords in the area.

OUR OFFER – THE 'BASICS PLUS' SERVICE

We will...

Involve the Tenants Voice in the regular review of our policies to make sure that our tenants views and needs are taken into account.

Continue to ask your opinion but find other simple ways to do this so that you do not get too many surveys to complete.

Make sure that you know exactly what services you are paying for and make this information as local as possible.







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September 2010