

**Norwich City Council**  
**SCRUTINY COMMITTEE**

## **Item No 5**

REPORT for meeting to be held on 28 November 2013

### **Annual housing report**

**Summary:**

At the scrutiny committee meeting held on 16 September 2012, members received a report that they had requested which enabled them to gain an understanding of, and to comment on the new social housing regulation for tenant engagement and scrutiny. Through this, members were also able to gain an overview of how the council was working with tenants and how the tenant role was evolving within the council's tenant engagement structure.

**Conclusions:**

In concluding the scrutiny session, the committee agreed that it would continue to carryout its overview role regarding the housing service and tenant engagement by ongoing performance monitoring, receiving the annual report and that it be presented by the tenant reps.

So, with regard to the purpose of the scrutiny topic as outlined on the scrutiny committee work programme, which was further agreed by members when setting the work programme for 2013/2014 it is recommended;

**Recommendation:**

That the committee receive the 'annual report to tenants 2012 – 13' that will be presented by the tenant representatives. Officers and tenants will be available for member questions so that the committee is able to be updated on the progress made in the past 12 months.

Also that in gaining an overview, members comment on the 'annual report to tenants 2012 – 13' and the effectiveness of the tenant involvement process.

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## 1. Background

- 1.1 At the 16 September 2012 meeting of the scrutiny committee, Terry Adkins, Chair of the Norwich Tenants Citywide Board, and the head of housing gave a presentation to the committee on the new social housing regulation for tenant engagement and scrutiny. As such, this was an opportunity for the scrutiny committee to gain an understanding of the Norwich city council tenant's involvement structure.
- 1.2 The presentation outlined the new approach that was focused on the tenants being more enabled to influence the service they received. It was reported that there were changes to the Ombudsman service and the way in which tenants had a role in scrutinising the housing provider's performance. A major change for social housing providers is that now, the landlords are accountable to tenants and not a regulatory body.
- 1.3 This means that there are various options and different ways in which tenants of Norwich city council housing can scrutinise the housing service. This is done mainly via the engagement route. For example by; focus groups, local events, patch panels, service area pit stops, tenant tick, the **annual report to tenants**, complaints and performance score cards.
- 1.4 Norwich city council's tenant involvement framework enables three levels of tenant participation; strategic which involves members and the executive, citywide which involves tenant panels, and local which involves individuals and groups. Along with this there is also resident leaseholder involvement.
- 1.5 By considering the 'annual report to tenants' the scrutiny committee is given the opportunity to gain overview of the engagement work and listen to tenant representatives who can explain how the residents are involved in shaping the services they receive. Service improvement is a corner stone aim of any good scrutiny process.

# Norwich City Council

## Annual report to tenants 2012-13



# Introduction

## Annual report to tenants 2012-13



**Welcome to our fourth edition of the Annual report to tenants which shows you what your housing service at Norwich City Council has delivered over 2012-13.**

A new tenant involvement structure started from 1 April 2013 replacing the Citywide board with two new panels. With the Citywide board finishing and a new structure starting, this report has been produced in partnership with the Annual Report Focus Group.

This year we have worked hard to make this report as useful to you as possible. As your tenant representatives, we have again worked with officers to ensure the information provided is the information tenants are interested in and is presented in a way that works for you.

With that in mind, we would like to thank those of you who have contributed to this report; whether it's been through a comment you submitted to the council, the satisfaction survey you filled in about a contractor, or the event you attended in your neighbourhood, all these contributions matter. We also hope we've represented you well and have produced a report of which you can be proud.

### **Annual Report Focus Group**

If you have any comments or would like more information about this document, please contact the tenant involvement team by emailing **[involvement@norwich.gov.uk](mailto:involvement@norwich.gov.uk)** or calling **0344 9803333**.

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**Key** - Inserted faces show how we performed compared to last year:



means we are level with this target



means we are above this target



means we are below this target

# Section one

## Tenant involvement, empowerment and customer care

Norwich City Council has a long tradition of empowering tenants and involving them in decision making. We pride ourselves on putting you, our tenants, at the heart of housing matters. During the last year, we have worked with tenant representatives to revise and improve our involvement framework. We want you to have more influence on our service standards, to scrutinise our performance and to ensure value for money.

We have also been working hard to make sure more opportunities

are available, at a local level, for tenants and their families to get together and meet officers in an informal setting. The idea is to exchange ideas and experiences and also have some fun!

This section of the annual report shows how we have met our ongoing commitment to work together collectively with you, our tenants, to improve services. At the same time we have continued to listen and learn from feedback from individuals.

### Local offers

In 2011 we agreed a set of 'Local Offers' with tenants after carrying out a large consultation exercise. These Local Offers are based on what tenants said were important to them and are our pledge of how we will keep you involved.

The next five pages set out our four Local Offers and what we have done to continue to achieve them.

### Getting involved

**"We will provide a variety of opportunities for you to get involved in shaping the service you receive."**

**What we have achieved: Increasing the ways in which you can be involved**

In addition to the work we have already been doing with you we have:



Tenant graduation ceremony sponsored by Norse.

- worked with tenant representatives to develop a brand new structure of involvement to make sure that tenants can be involved at both a strategic and local level
- held roadshows to promote involvement in the development of sites around the city
- developed a laptop lending scheme for tenant representatives, to help them do their own research and reports
- developed workshops that look at areas of housing policy including disabled adaptations and customer satisfaction surveys
- enabled tenants to respond to important corporate consultations on issues such as council tax, customer service and community involvement
- delivered briefing sessions to update tenants on developments within the housing service, eg housing rents and business planning.

### **Providing a variety of training and learning experiences:**

- Delivered two rounds of our new tenant



*CWB sub-group helping us design our training programme*

- training academy called Tenant Training for Norwich (TTfN). Tenant representatives trialled the first round of training and their feedback helped shape training for future tenants.
- Delivered briefing sessions to inform tenants about developments within the sheltered housing service, eg changes to sheltered housing services and housing rents.
- Raised awareness of how housing services work by offering open days and shadowing opportunities.
- Helped tenant representatives gain a better understanding of how the council works by taking part in *Democracy Week*.

### **Celebrating your achievements:**

- Tenant representative appeared on Anglia TV promoting the benefits of the Norwich Switch & Save scheme, which helps Norwich residents save money on their energy bills.
- Used *TLC* magazine to promote the hard work done by tenants within their neighbourhood and with the council.
- Arranged for tenant representatives to attend national conferences to promote the work they have been doing and share best practice with others.
- Arranged a focus group to discuss ways of recognising positive achievements made

by tenants in their community – such as getting involved or being a good neighbour – and made recommendations for a new incentive scheme.



## **“We will improve the way we communicate with you”**

### **Having more opportunities for you to speak to staff face-to-face in your neighbourhood.**

- Developed ‘patch panels’ where you can meet informally with your neighbourhood housing officer to discuss issues in your local area.
- Worked with tenant representatives to deliver a series of successful housing family fun days around the city.



*Splat the bat game at our Halloween event.*

- Worked with partners to enable tenants to speak to council staff and contractors about housing topics that matter to them.

### **Ensure that we communicate with you and provide feedback in a variety of clear and easy to understand methods.**

- Worked with tenants to increase the number of leaflets and posters that are ‘tenant approved’, with the focus being on content length, appearance and use of plain English, eg tenant involvement poster.
- Worked with tenants to further develop *TLC* magazine so that it focuses on subjects tenants enjoy reading about.

### **Increase opportunities for tenants and staff to work and train together.**

- Developed project teams made up of both tenants and staff to deliver on projects that tenants view as important, eg this Annual Report.
- Provided opportunities for tenants to attend local and national conferences with officers to learn about improving housing services.

- Enabled tenant representatives and senior staff to work together and make joint presentations to the council’s formal committees on important issues such as the new involvement structure and this annual report.

- Provided opportunities for tenant representatives to spend time behind the scenes with the customer contact team in order to get a better understanding of how frontline services are delivered.

### **Regularly update you on how the housing service is performing.**

- Continued working with tenants to publish performance scorecards. These cards are a way of sharing key housing performance information with all residents.
- Provided tenant representatives with the understanding to better scrutinise performance figures at their performance group, eg training given to tenant representatives by council staff.

- Worked with tenants to pick out performance figures you are interested in and published them in the Annual Report, performance scorecard, *TLC* magazine and on our website.



## **“We will work with you to make your neighbourhood cleaner and safer”**

### **Involving you in ways to monitor and improve the neighbourhood you live in.**

- Nominated a tenant representative to the Eastern Procurement Consortium (EPC) tenants’ panel to be involved in activities such as awarding funding to community initiatives that benefit the whole local area.
- Arranged a tenant focus group to look at how our communal areas are inspected and kept clean and tidy.
- Worked with tenants to identify neighbourhood projects and funding requirements to improve estates.

- Invited tenants to score the condition of estates using national benchmarking criteria so we can compare how well they are maintained.
- Signposted tenants to our new community walkabouts where residents can highlight local issues that staff can focus on making better.

### **Provide up-to-date information on how to address important issues (such as antisocial behaviour)**

- Continued to work better with tenants to keep our literature and website up-to-date with clear information on issues such as antisocial behaviour, and highlighting any ‘need to-know’ information in *TLC* magazine.
- Continued to develop our tenancy awareness sessions aimed at young people to focus on the most important elements of a tenancy.
- Worked with tenant representatives to deliver events for tenants to explain how they may be affected by the new welfare reform changes.



## **“We will offer you more chances to be involved in the delivery and monitoring of the repairs and maintenance service”**

### **Involving tenant representatives when we re-let major contracts**

- Involved tenant representatives in scrutinising the procedures of our new contractor Norse, to ensure that their policies were fit for purpose and tenant friendly.
- Involved tenants in discussions about future housing investment options and worked together to identify priorities.

### **Provide organised opportunities for you to meet contractors and ask questions**

- Arranged site visits for involved tenants to contractors, such as Norse and Anglian Windows, to help increase understanding of how they provide services to tenants.
- Worked with Norse to deliver a series of local roadshows which gave tenants the opportunity to ask questions and resolve issues.

- Held a 'lunch and learn' interactive session with our contractors Foster Property Maintenance giving tenants the chance to ask questions.
- Tenant inspectors visited Foster in February 2013 to see for themselves how kitchens and bathroom upgrades are managed.

### **Involve you in setting performance targets and the monitoring of how we are doing against them.**

- Created a service user group, made up of tenants and other customers to look at how our Norwich Community Alarm Service (NCAS) performs, which helped the service achieve full accreditation to the Telecare Services Association.
- Set and scrutinised targets for the year with the performance sub-group.
- Ran various focus groups including scrutinising the communal window cleaning contract.



## **Tenant involvement activities**

### **Representing the entire city:**

#### **Formal meetings with your representatives:**

#### **Norwich Tenants' CityWide Board (CWB) public meetings**

where developments in the housing service were presented and general tenant queries discussed, including laptop and tenders for training.

#### **CWB publications sub-group**

where literature for tenants was checked for suitability and given the 'tenant tick' Publications included a sheltered housing handbook and our tenants' handbook.

#### **Performance sub-group**

where targets were set and the figures you see in this report were monitored and challenged.

**"The performance sub group has achieved a lot this year with their monthly meetings. This is work in progress and will be carried forward as part of the new structure."**

Performance sub-group.

#### **Repairs and recharges**

**sub-group** where tenants influenced and improved the repairs service including the contracts we have.

#### **Constitution sub-group**

where the focus of work that the board did was kept relevant to your needs. In the last year the group has been involved in designing the new structure.

#### **Housing revenue account sub-group**

where the housing services finances were reviewed. Discussions included the move towards self financing.

#### **Satisfaction surveys group**

A group comprising members of the performance and publications groups met to consider customer satisfaction surveys for the housing service and the group considered and fed back on the following topics:

- responsive repairs and estate management
- new lettings
- gas servicing
- preventing and tackling antisocial behaviour
- antisocial behaviour enforcement
- money advice
- rent recovery.

### New structure

In April 2013 a new involvement framework for tenants and leaseholders was implemented. Your representatives were consulted every step of the way. One of the Homes and Communities Agency's (HCA) standards for social housing is for landlords to positively engage with tenants, incorporate tenant views, and be transparent and accountable to tenants. While we have a long history of tenant involvement, our new involvement framework ensures we continuously improve how we do this. We want you to have more influence on our service standards, and for you to be able to scrutinise our performance and ensure value for money. Our new framework, which we will review in 12 months time, will:

- ensure tenants are able to influence and monitor the housing service
- increase opportunities for you to engage with the housing service
- build on our working relationship with non-resident and resident leaseholders.

### Three levels of involvement:

- At a local level, the framework will ensure engagement with neighbourhoods and estates through tenant and resident groups; focus groups; the TalkBack panel; patch panels; events; and your feedback.
- At a city-wide level, tenants will monitor and scrutinise the housing service to improve standards and services through tenant panels.
- At a strategic level, an annual review group (ARG) will provide feedback on the housing service through panels.

### How the current roles are adapting:

- **Norwich Tenants' CityWide Board** – the board's constitution and publications sub-groups have been incorporated into a tenant involvement panel. The functions of its performance, repairs and recharges sub-group and HRA sub-group are now handled by a tenant scrutiny panel.
- **TalkBack panel** – focus groups drawn together from the TalkBack panel will continue to provide

feedback as normal.

- **Tenant and resident associations (T&RAs)** – will continue to work with us at meetings and events.
- **Resident leaseholders** – will be able to participate at a local level through T&RAs; as individuals; and as members of task and finish groups.
- **Non-resident leaseholders** – will continue to work with the home ownership team and be represented on relevant task and finish groups.
- The home ownership team will work with all leaseholders and the Norwich Leaseholders' Association to implement the new arrangements in the coming year. Statutory consultation (section 20) rights are unaffected and will remain as they are.

### Who did we consult with about this new framework?

Norwich Tenants' CityWide Board; Sheltered Housing Tenants' Forum; Norwich Leaseholders' Association; newly involved tenants; scrutiny committee; our corporate leadership and housing management teams; cabinet; and our frontline staff.



*Sheltered Housing Tenants' Forum away day.*

### **Representing tenancy support services:**

#### **Sheltered Housing Tenants' Forum (SHTF)**

The SHTF has been set up to represent all tenants living in sheltered housing schemes, managed by Norwich City Council, looking at a range of issues which affect older people, including health and social care.

#### **Some of the key outcomes for 2012-13 are:**

Engaged and consulted with tenants as part of the sheltered housing review. Performance monitoring for the sheltered housing service has been introduced and a guest room review was undertaken. A handyman service was integrated into the schemes and day care opportunities were trialled and implemented in various complexes.

The average number of sheltered housing schemes represented at the SHTF was **22 out of 28, with 34 tenant representatives involved in the forum.**

A tenant representative from Norwich Tenants' CityWide Board also attended the forum. This helped improve communication between the two groups.

#### **Families Unit user group**

The families unit user group has 12 to 14 members and has been

operating for 12 months. The group meets every six weeks and in the last year it helped develop the unit's handbook, adapted the service feedback form and helped organise a family unit event, which took place in April 2013.

#### **Norwich Community Alarm Service (NCAS) user group**

As part of attaining accreditation to the national Telecare Services Association, NCAS set up a user group to ensure the in-depth involvement of a variety of people to develop and improve the service it provides. Recent contributions the group has made include helping to review and develop a customer information handbook, influencing the content and format of customer satisfaction surveys and involvement in the first annual report to be issued in October 2013.



*The NCAS focus group in action.*

### **Representing local areas:**

We have six tenant and resident associations (TRAs) across the city. These help tenants take an active role in their neighbourhood and contribute to improving housing and environmental standards, as well as increasing the sense of community. Look out for information on our community noticeboards.

New Lakenham Residents Association recruited willing volunteers to improve the look of open spaces and garden areas, starting with locations in Trafalgar Street and Southwell Road.

Ideas included the planting of native bulbs and wildflowers in grassed areas and improving the look of some of the shrub beds and seating areas.

**“The area is quite**

**heavily populated,”** said local resident Alyson.

**“And most of the properties are flats. It is good to get groups of residents together, so we can make our surroundings more attractive and get to know our neighbours. I would love to see more people using open spaces that we have improved together and can be proud of.”**

Other ideas include the planting of cornfield flower seeds and low-level sustainable, drought-resistant perennials.

**“We want to encourage wildlife into our open spaces, especially birds and pollinating**

**insects, including bees,”** added Alyson.

It is also hoped that the project, which started in late spring, will benefit residents by reducing fly-tipping, dog fouling and other antisocial behaviour in the area, while increasing community pride in their surroundings.

We are continuing to develop patch panels – our informal get-togethers for small groups of tenants and the local neighbourhood housing officer (NHO) to discuss issues in the area. It could be a meeting over a cup of tea in your home or elsewhere – whatever environment feels comfortable for you to help you have your say.

### **Providing learning and development opportunities for tenants:**

**Tenant training for Norwich**

**T.T.f.N**

Tenant Training for Norwich



Recently we celebrated our involved tenants' graduation from our new training academy with a graduation ceremony at Norse's Fifers Lane offices.

The graduation ceremony noted the achievement of the first



*A group photo of the New Lakenham Residents Association*



*Tenant panel training*

two groups of tenants to complete their training course. **15** tenants celebrated their graduation, all now armed with the knowledge and confidence to help improve the services tenants receive.

Housing officers worked with Norwich Tenants' CityWide Board last year to devise a free training academy, with tenant representatives voting to name it Tenant Training for Norwich (TTfN) and creating a logo themselves.

These tenants also helped to appoint the course provider and acted as 'guinea pigs' before the academy was opened up to other tenants looking to gain the self-assurance and skills to get involved.

TTfN is made up of 10 modules, with topics such as IT skills, positive thinking and behaviour, and influencing and

negotiating skills.

Tenants who complete the course are invited to apply for membership of our new tenant involvement panels.

Councillor Victoria MacDonald, then cabinet member for housing, presented certificates to those graduates who attended the ceremony, which was sponsored by our contractor, Norse.



*Charmain being awarded her certificate from Councillor Victoria MacDonald*

**Charmain Woollard, one of our TTfN graduates, was recruited at the Mile Cross Festival and joined our training programme, completing all the course modules. Charmain is now on our Scrutiny Panel which started in April.**

**When Charmain was asked about what she had learned she said: "The training has given me the confidence, knowledge and understanding to empower other tenants. I am now confident to speak up and challenge comments and ideas."**

## **Events and fundays 2012-13**

It has been a wonderful year full of successful events which gave the residents of Norwich and their families the opportunity to take part in a wide range of family fundays and free entertainment. Thanks to the hard work of everyone involved, and the sponsorship of our contractors, we have achieved some fantastic results and received wonderful feedback from residents who took part.



### **Easter funday**

Children in the east of the city were treated to games and chocolate, while parents picked up life saving and gas safety tips, at our Easter funday in April – run by housing staff in partnership with Gasway, our gas servicing and repairs contractor. Peter, a committee member of Mousehold TRA, added:

**"It was nice seeing children enjoying fun activities, while tenants could see**



*Gasway presentation at our Easter event.*

**some of what the council does. It's easy to get a bit of paper through the door giving you safety information, but it's better if you can see and hear it for yourself."**

### **Olympic Flame**

The city was a hive of excitement when the Olympic Flame arrived in Norwich on Wednesday 4 July. Everyone joined in and celebrated – cheering on the torchbearers and joining

in with entertainment along the route.

### **Queen's Jubilee**

As the Queen celebrated her Diamond Jubilee, 15 local communities closed their roads for celebration street parties. People in Norwich came together to enjoy this very special anniversary, decorating their streets with bunting and banners and sharing cakes and sandwiches.

### **Pride 2012**

The fourth Norwich Pride event took place on Saturday 28 July at The

Forum and Chapelfield Gardens. This is an inclusive and family-friendly celebration from the local Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transsexual community.



*Pride 2012.*

### **Olympic Funday**

Catton Grove Community Centre saw around 200 residents at its local funday enjoying free entertainment and trying their luck in the big prize draws. In keeping with the nation's Olympic spirit, there were chances for children to win their own 'gold' medals and pose for photos with an official Olympic Torch.



*Olympic Torch visits Norwich.*





*Halloween Funday at Lakenham Jubilee Community Centre*

### **Halloween Funday**

Lakenham's Jubilee Centre welcomed some 300 local residents to a day of Halloween festivities, scary activities, prize draws and facepainting. This kept little ones amused while council employees spoke to their parents about housing issues, budgeting advice and involvement opportunities. The event was a huge success thanks to our contractors Foster, Norse and Gasway. A local resident who attended the event said: **"I've never known an event like this and I think this is an excellent well organised event."**

### **Christmas Funday**

Excited children in West Earlham got the chance to meet Santa when he stopped by our Christmas funday, which also included prize giveaways of decorations and hampers, and lots of festive entertainment. Alphatrack provided thousands of fairy lights to ensure the magical scene was set. One resident praised the event saying it was

**"Nice to see a friendly Santa and elves! Event was better than I thought. Fantastic idea to bring community together in less formal setting. Thank you - children had a lovely time",** while another said: **"it was a great way of getting the information you need".**



*Children enjoyed writing letters to Santa at our Christmas event.*

### **Balancing your bread and butter - North Earlham**

Government changes will affect many tenants from April 2013 so, as part of our work to help and inform people, the housing service organised a 'Balancing your bread and butter' tea party in north Earlham, to give those hardest hit by the under-occupation rule a chance to learn about the changes.

The event, which attracted 150 people, gave families something free and fun to do over the half-term holiday, with children's entertainment on offer.

Children and their parents also took part in interactive budgeting games, including a 'prioritising outgoings' activity with income development officer Danny Davies.



*Danny running a budget game.*

**We would like to say a huge thank you to all tenants, staff and contractors who helped to make these events possible and look forward to more fun events.**

## Customer service, complaints and choice

### Customer centre

Our customer contact team continues to focus on improving the quality of the service it provides using complaint analysis, call monitoring, and customer insight information. The council's neighbourhood offices closed to the public on 1 June and we are now supporting you to use alternative more cost-effective ways to contact us. The team has changed its opening hours to use resources for when you want it.

The team has continued to help you self-serve by updating the 'contact us' pages on the web, report a repair online, fly-tipping and they have gone live with being able to change addresses online.

Voicemail now gives you the choice to leave a message which will be answered within 24 hours. Alternatively, you can email and **94 per cent** of emails are answered within five days.

Due to the more self serve approach there has been a reduction in phone calls by **eight per cent** and in person by **26 per cent**.

The customer contact team has also cut its costs by nearly **£400,000** this year.



### Call waiting times

Average time it takes for housing calls to be answered: **1 minute 49 seconds**. Better than last year

### Customer service excellence

In recognition of the joint work between tenants and staff, we continue to retain the Customer Service Excellence accreditation for another year.



### Talkback surveys

Red Quadrant, a market research organisation, has recruited more than 1,000 tenants and 200 leaseholders to the

Talkback Panel during the last year. Panel members have completed an estate management survey to find out views on whether neighbourhoods are clean, safe and attractive environments and some panel members have taken part in focus groups to give their views on how repairs are dealt with. We will report back on these results in next year's Annual Report.

### Customer satisfaction

Tenants have been involved in compiling questions and agreeing the layout and design of customer satisfaction surveys for all services provided by the council's housing department. Questions on the existing 'new home' survey were amended and the revised survey form has been in use since May 2012.

A responsive repair survey was introduced in November 2012 which has been sent to randomly selected tenants following completion of repairs. Satisfaction results have been presented to tenant groups and are included on the



Picture of Amber collecting her hamper

published performance scorecards.

New satisfaction surveys to gain feedback on antisocial behaviour services were introduced in the spring. Other new surveys are in the pipeline and so far all have had feedback from tenant groups.

In 2012-13 we carried out some tenant incentive schemes which have been designed with the help of a specially formed focus group. The schemes we ran were:

- a quarterly draw of £50 for those tenants who maintain a clear rent account for three months
- a quarterly draw worth £50 for tenants who set up a new direct debit instruction for rent payment

- an annual winter draw to win a £100 hamper for all tenants who are involved, regardless of their level of involvement
- a good neighbourhood scheme where someone has done something special or is a constant help or support.

We continue to offer incentives for customer satisfaction returns (prizes provided by Norse and Gasway) and the Leave it Tidy scheme.

Amber Dugdale was the lucky winner drawn at random from more than 1,300 tenants who took part in surveys and other activities to influence our housing service during 2012. As a member of the TalkBack panel, Amber has given us her thoughts on a variety of topics,

including antisocial behaviour and her neighbourhood. She received the hamper in December and said the win could not have come at a better time:

**"I really appreciate receiving this hamper from the council and so does my daughter. It was a perfect time of the year for us to get this prize. Answering the questions wasn't hard work!"**

### Customer complaints

We have learnt some lessons from our complaints as highlighted below:

**A complaint came in about the cleanliness of a guest room in sheltered housing. This occurred due to the policy of the room only being cleaned before use and temporary coverage of the cleaning duties meant the guest room was overlooked. The cleaning was changed to a regular once-a-week duty to coincide with when the cleaner was due in.**

A complaint was made about the mobile caretakers and noise. A request was made for caretakers to be quieter while they are cleaning so as not to disturb either people working nights or sleeping children. The blocks can also echo. This comment has been taken on board and the caretakers are quieter when they are cleaning.

A complaint about Suffolk Square signage being confusing for residents and the emergency services highlighted this problem which resulted in the council working with emergency services and Norwich Property Services on a change in signage. We have added 'You are here' boards showing where people are from every angle. This has helped residents and emergency services to find the right flats more quickly.

## Understanding the different needs of our tenants

We are still using social media sites like Facebook and Twitter. Our Twitter page has **50 per cent** more followers (under **4,000 in 2011-12 to over 6,000 in 2012-13**).

Over 12,000 Facebook users viewed our posts relating to our Christmas funday and North Earham Tea Party. There are **19,137** people who have tenancies with Norwich City Council.

### Tenants - a diverse picture

Ethnicity	%
Asian	0.47
Black	1.16
Chinese	0.13
Mixed	0.61
Preferred not to say	0.22
White - British	75.85
White - other	3.35
Any other ethnicity	1.32
Unknown	16.86
Traveller	0.03

Male percentage **42.42%** Female percentage **57.25%**  
Unknown gender **0.33%**

Age	%
16-24	5.50
25-34	16.64
35-44	17.00
45-54	17.31
55-64	13.44
65-74	12.50
75-84	9.52
85+	5.26
Unknown	2.83

## Tenancy support

### Norwich Community Alarm Service (NCAS)

This service achieved accreditation to the Telecare Services Association (TSA) – an industry standard relatively few providers achieve and maintain.

The TSA is the industry body for telecare and telehealth, and it offers the only specific accreditation that assures quality. NCAS pursued this coveted seal of approval to ensure its customers could have confidence in its procedures – and not only did it achieve accreditation in the three hoped-for areas, it managed to achieve a higher level in five areas.

NCAS provides a 24-hour monitoring and response

service for anyone who feels in need of support or reassurance. The service also offers an out of hours service, lone working monitoring and prompt and welfare checks.

NCAS has been in existence for 25 years and has a good reputation in the greater Norwich area. NCAS works in partnership with Housing Associations, Social Services, Emergency Services and Norfolk County Council.

The total number of NCAS alarm calls in 2012-13 was **85,744**.

**97.46 per cent** of calls were responded to within 60 seconds. 😐

**99.84 per cent** of calls were responded to within 180 seconds 😊

## Sheltered housing

The sheltered housing service is undergoing a period of change. In April 2012 we saw the restructuring of the service, moving away from scheme managers to a team of support workers and sheltered housing officers, following the reduction in Supporting People funding.

We have actively engaged with the tenants' representatives in the Sheltered Housing Tenants' Forum to seek their views both on the restructure and their ideas as to how sheltered housing schemes should be remodelled and improved.

The support workers undertake all housing



*Ryrie Court sheltered housing scheme.*

related support with tenants on a needs led basis. There is also a team of sheltered housing officers who are responsible for all the housing and tenancy management issues within the schemes.

We are currently working with the tenants to rebrand the service and to see if there is a need to review the age eligibility criteria for applicants seeking sheltered housing in the future. We will report back on this in next year's annual report.



### Families unit support

The families unit currently operates in Norwich Children's Services Central Area to support families where there is at least one young person under the age of 18 living permanently at home and where there are significant risk factors threatening their tenancy or 'safeguarding' concerns within the family.

It supports families using the Family Intervention Project model. This means families have one key worker and long term intensive support while giving a persistent and

assertive approach. The model challenges families to effect positive change in their lives. To support this model, the unit has recently recruited an employment advisor to the team.

In 2012-13 a total of **52 families** received intensive support from the families unit.

As a result there has been no enforcement action taken on cases open to the families unit in the last year.



*Families Unit funday organised by the unit's user group*

**The families unit was involved with a family who owed £1,500 in rent arrears, had substantial debts, lived in a cluttered house and had frequent antisocial behaviour reports against them.**

**The case worker supported the family to avoid eviction and obtained grants to improve their living conditions. Their living conditions improved and the reports of antisocial behaviour complaints against them decreased.**

### **Mow and Grow**

More people are now able to access the service provided by Mow and Grow as the criteria has been widened to react to developments in the benefits system. As the number of people receiving incapacity benefit is decreasing tenants are now able to subscribe if they are in receipt of employment support allowance, providing they have the support or transitional element. If they however fall just outside this criteria and it is appropriate they may still be able to apply.

For further information please contact our customer contact team on **0344 980 3333** who will ask your neighbourhood housing officer to discuss your options.

Number of tenants using the assisted garden service was **202 people**.



### **Money Advice Team**

The money advice team can help you to take control of your finances and relieve the burden of debt.

In the coming year we are looking to increase the budgeting support available to tenants, especially those affected by welfare reform.

**A 72 year old widower had intermittent contact with his money adviser when finances were in crisis. The crisis resulted from bereavement, intimidation from his youngest son and hiding away from the situation through alcohol.**

**Through several sessions we reduced the rent liability by having a water meter fitted at the property and negotiated repayments with the utility provider.**

**The widower's chaotic son had been living at the property several times for short periods, intimidating and taking money off him. When the son was housed, the widower was left with a huge council tax bill to pay, which he could not afford due to previous sporadic payments. Rent payments were still sporadic so a court order was gained for the property.**

**His money adviser suggested he set up standing orders to ensure that essential payments - rent and council tax - were made, which he did, and helped him set up a basic bank account. He also linked him in with counselling services and helped to apply for financial assistance. The funds raised resulted in his rent arrears and court costs being cleared and council tax debts being halved. He is now in control of his drinking and able to manage his budget.**

**When asked about the service the client said "I was not the easiest client to deal with and I was in deep money trouble but she was always there to help"**

**Key** - Inserted faces show how we performed compared to last year:



means we are level with this target



means we are above this target



means we are below this target

## Section two

### Maintaining your home



In March this year, council employees from our property services team transferred to NPS Norwich, and you will continue to receive your services as normal.

Norwich Norse also began to deliver our grounds, streets and trees maintenance contract in March for the coming nine years. This work had previously been delivered by Biffa on a temporary basis.

#### Repairs and maintenance

A total of **32,673** non-planned repairs reported by you have been carried out to homes, communal areas and blocks. This cost **£3.79million** or an average of **£109.25** per repair.

**91 per cent** of responsive repairs carried out during 2012-13 were completed right first time.



Tenant satisfaction with these repairs was **97 per cent**. Better than last year.



**100 per cent** of homes had an up-to-date gas safety certificate. Better than last year.

Gasway continues to carry out its gas and solid fuel safety inspection, annual servicing and repairs.

**Remember to let us in.** We have a legal obligation to inspect your home and if you do not allow us access to carry out a gas safety inspection we cannot prevent serious incidents occurring within your home. However, always ask callers for identification.



## Upgrades and improvements

**14882** (95.3 per cent) have met the Norwich Standard by fitting:

- **1,267** new kitchens at an average cost of **£4,642**
- **717** new bathrooms at an average cost of **£3,451**
- **838** new heating systems at an average cost of **£4,102**
- **978** new front or back doors at an average cost of **£347**

We replaced windows in **1,687** homes in 2012-13. Anglian Windows continued to be our contractor between 2012-13.

Our Norwich Standard continues. The aim of the standard is that by 2017, all homes that give us access will have kitchens less than 20 years old, bathrooms less than 30 years old, front doors less than 40 years old, and boilers less than 15 years old. We work on a neighbourhood-by-neighbourhood basis, using a stock condition survey. Homes surveyed this year will get the work done next year.

The housing improvement and upgrades contract continues to be delivered by Foster Property Maintenance Ltd.

Linda, one of our volunteer tenant inspectors visited Foster and said:

**“I was really impressed with how organised they were and the family atmosphere the depot had.”**

## Celebrating 1,000 new kitchens

Our contractor Foster recently celebrated its 1,000th installation of a new kitchen as part of our improvement programme, and presented the delighted tenant Mrs Spauls with a bouquet of flowers to mark the occasion.



*Mrs Spauls receiving her bouquet from Nick Wright, programme manager at Foster.*



*Vic, one of our volunteer tenant inspectors.*

## Tenant inspectors

Tenant Inspectors are volunteers who ask other tenants who have just had some improvement work carried out, such as a kitchen or a bathroom about how the work went. Volunteer tenant inspector Vic said:

**“We give tenants the chance to voice their satisfaction or dissatisfaction with the work that has been completed.”**

Inspectors were recruited in January and are contributing to a new project to follow on from the previous work on decent homes upgrades. The new project takes into consideration the whole

‘customer journey’ from the tenants’ point of view and asks questions about the whole process of having a kitchen or bathroom fitted under the Norwich Standard.

## Energy efficiency

There has been various energy efficiency work carried out in the last year.

- Homes have benefited from energy efficient A rated boilers, loft, cavity-wall and external wall insulation through funding secured from CERT (Carbon Emission Reduction Target) & CESP (Community Energy Saving Programme). This funding stream has now been replaced with Green Deal and ECO (Energy Company Obligation).

- Solar panels have been installed at 31 homes across the city, including 19 homes at our sheltered housing scheme at Fellowes Close. These homes are now benefiting from free electricity.

- We carried out a trial of internal wall installation (IWI) at Suffolk Square. This has been very successful with very positive results. The IWI has helped to reduce residents’ energy bills as these homes are now much warmer and can retain the heat. We hope via the ECO funding we may be able to carry out further installations in the future.

- We have been installing voltage optimisation units to homes where a bathroom, kitchen or electrical upgrade has taken place. These units reduce the amount of wattage entering into the home and reducing the resident’s electrical bills. We have programmed for up to 300 units to be installed this year.




## Adaptations

We spent **£1 million** on adaptations to our properties. This included **157** major adaptations (like walk-in showers/wheelchair ramps) and **89** minor adaptations (like grab rails and lever taps).

## Empty council homes

The average number of days council homes stood empty between a tenant moving out and a new one moving in was **15 days**. 😊

Total rent loss as a result of empty properties **£384,799** better than last year 😊

The council voids team has built on the success of last year by homes being advertised earlier and the continuing success of the Norse contract. The council's empty homes team works alongside other teams, contractors and staff, using open communication to deliver the results. 

The team is pro-active in looking at ways to improve the process and always puts the customer at the heart of the service.

Jean and Ron moved into a sheltered housing scheme where adaptations were required in the property. The council transformed the bathroom into a wet room while fitting a new toilet. We also fitted steps at the rear of the property for easier access for Ron. Ron explained how the wet room had made a big difference to their lives. When asked about the service they received Ron and Jean said "Everything was brilliant. We have no complaints about anything. We would like to

praise everyone from phone operatives to workmen and other staff. We would especially like to praise Michelle, our sheltered housing officer, who supported us all the way through."



Jean and Ron who have just had an adaption in their property

## Leave it tidy scheme

Each year, the council has to spend lots of time and money cleaning and clearing out empty properties vacated by previous tenants before they can be re-let again. This delays re-letting the property to those who need it.

It also means that we have less money to spend on other repairs and improvements to our properties.

Leave it tidy scheme gives an incentive

payment to tenants who leave their properties tidy at the end of their tenancy with the aim of reducing re-let times, void clearance costs, rechargeable repairs costs, and former tenants arrears.

When a tenant moves out of a council property we will give them £100.00 if they have left the property clean and clear.

**479** tenants have qualified for the leave it tidy payment in 2012-13, costing **£47,900**.

**Key** - Inserted faces show how we performed compared to last year:



means we are level with this target



means we are above this target



means we are below this target

## Section three

### Allocating homes and sustaining tenancies



#### Waiting lists

In April 2012, the Greater Norwich Housing Partnership dissolved and Norwich Home Options launched with our 12 housing association partners. This resulted in a new website, **www.norwichhomeoptions.org.uk** and a new allocations policy, designed to ensure the housing needs of Norwich residents are prioritised.

As part of Norwich Home Options, the service was redesigned, to move towards an

impersonal web based approach towards a more personal approach. This ensures the individual circumstances of each client are considered and discussed with the client when they first contact the council. To this end, housing options advisors are now more accessible, with full counter and telephone service and daily drop-in advice sessions all provided by specialist housing advisors, to provide expert assistance at the first point of contact. The new service means

new housing applications are processed accurately and quickly, with most new applications activated within 24 hours of receipt.

**769** households joined the waiting list.

The average number of tenants on the Norwich Home Options waiting list is **4,600**.

#### Allocations

The council goes to great lengths to ensure social housing goes to those in the greatest need and in 2012 an officer was employed to visit applicants on the housing register to maintain accuracy and prevent fraud.

Last year the housing options team allocated **1,560** properties in Norwich.

Over the year there was an average of **4,600** applicants on the housing register, of whom about **30 per cent** had a priority need.

The average bids per property was **45**.

The total number of new tenancies (including introductory tenancies, mutual exchanges and transfers) was **1,560**.

## Homelessness

A number of local agencies, as well as individuals who have lived in supported accommodation, worked together to produce 'Off the street'. The protocol gives guidance for identifying those at risk of being evicted from, or abandoning, their accommodation. Many of the agencies which helped to shape 'Off the street' took part in a 12-week consultation and came together at the launch to share lively discussion and experiences.

### Learning, employment, accommodation, project (LEAP)

LEAP empowers people who face homelessness to lead an independent life by coaching them towards employment and providing independent accommodation.

St Martin's Housing Trust, in partnership with LEAP, Norwich City Council and Construction Training



*A LEAP trainee with his certificate.*

Services, have received funding through the Homes & Communities Agency to bring empty homes back into use while helping local people gain new skills and become more employable.

This project is unique in that it offers real work environment opportunities with direct links with employers.

The first project was a property that had been empty for 10 years. It needed new central heating, new windows and doors, some electrics, a new kitchen and bathroom. There were a lot of skills for them to deploy.

Over the course of restoring 10 properties, we hope to work with

more than 50 trainees.

### Floating support service

Our floating support service, delivered by Stonham Homestay, holds two drop-in sessions in City Hall each week. Stonham advisors also arrange to meet their clients in City Hall to support them to use the council's counter services.

Where applicable, customer contact advisors will refer customers and tenants to Stonham.

The service is used extensively. This partnership arrangement is working well and both the council and Stonham have received positive feedback from their clients.

Of our tenants, **81** were referred to Stonham Homestay.

## Maintaining your tenancy

### Housing officers

All new introductory tenants receive two visits by a neighbourhood or sheltered housing officer during their first year of tenancy. All new introductory and secure tenants also receive a settling-in visit within four to six weeks of their tenancy commencing.

**769** new introductory tenancies started in 2012-13.

**97 per cent** of introductory tenants from the previous year became secure.

### Income officers

These officers can advise and assist you to manage your rent payments and settle any arrears you have in an affordable way. Sometimes, however, there are times when tenants do not co-operate with us and we have to take further action.

There were **nine** evictions due to rent arrears.

The number of possession orders due to rent arrears was **259**.

### Former tenant rent arrears

This service has a polite, friendly-but-firm approach to gathering arrears and other debts from former tenants. Every effort is made to contact former tenants who owe the council money, by telephone and letter. We offer them support to clear their debts, as well as explaining what will happen if they ignore the problem. If this approach does not work, the debt is passed for legal action or to a debt agency for further recovery action.

The team's success is due to a personal approach where the tenant is treated firmly, fairly and with respect.

In 2012-13 it collected:

- arrears of **20 per cent** above target.
- cash totalling **£333,278**.
- **£22,349** via a debt agency.



### Pre-tenancy awareness sessions

Sessions with Norwich City Council's money advice team are held for prospective tenants to increase understanding of what



is expected of them, to raise awareness of the costs involved and to help identify priority payments. The sessions cater for different learning styles so the information gets across to the attendees.

The sessions highlight the importance of good communication and ensure that potential new tenants understand what is expected of them by the council and also tell them what they can expect from us.

During 2012-13 a total of **144** people attended these sessions. Out of these **43** went on to accept a tenancy with the council. In the previous year (2011-12) **32** people accepted a tenancy. Of these

**23** were still in tenancy and **six** had transferred to another housing provider.



## New homes

We have embarked on a project to build new homes. Plans have been submitted for **12** new homes at Pointers

Field (four shared ownership, eight council stock) and **three** new council homes at Riley Close. We have also completed the **100 homes** programme, with **48** houses being built on former council land. These can be offered to Norwich City Council housing applicants.



*New properties on Exeter Street.*

*Danny Davies and Louise Williamson, money advisors and session organisers.*

**“The tenancy awareness sessions have been running for seven years. Over this time these have become an acknowledged exercise in breaking down the barriers between the council and prospective tenants; as well as working with an increasing number of supporting agencies.**

**No two sessions are the same and they all provide thought-provoking, two-way discussion. This helps us develop future sessions based on the needs of those referred, and allows attendees to share experiences they may have had. At the session itself, we have the opportunity to**

**reinforce the message that we as a council are here to help, and that we have a wealth of knowledge at our disposal, which we can use to support and assist our tenants. Those who have been on the courses get an understanding that will enable them to better manage their tenancies.”**

# Section four

## Neighbourhood and community



*A walkabout.*

### Fly-tipping

Over the past year officers from Norwich City Council's environmental protection team have used a range of enforcement options to tackle the persistent problem of fly-tipping. Formal written warnings, fixed penalty notices and formal cautions have all been issued to residents who have been caught fly-tipping.

As well as all the enforcement work the team has also worked closely with colleagues in housing and citywide services and residents

to tackle fly-tipping hotspots. For example, in the West Pottergate area, fly-tipping around communal bins was becoming a recurring problem. The environmental protection team, along with staff from housing and waste and recycling, tackled the issue by conducting a door-knocking campaign in the area. As a result, fly-tipping around the bins decreased significantly.

The number of fly-tipping instances in 2012-13 was **2,421** at a cost of **£157,888**.

### Walkabouts

This year we have delivered **40** walkabouts attracting **800** tenants and residents, and **four** road shows, one in each of our neighbourhood areas.

There are daytime and evening walkabouts organised and these are an opportunity for residents and the council to work together to address ongoing local issues, such as fly-tipping, graffiti or antisocial behaviour. When planning a walkabout, information about a particular area is obtained from the council's hotspot maps, along with feedback from a variety of sources including local councillors, neighbourhood wardens and external agencies.

A letter is sent to all residents to invite them to join council officers on a walkabout of their local area.

After the walkabout, feedback is posted on our website and letters

are sent out in reply to any issues raised. This is followed by a debrief session, involving the walkabout team, to look at how the process can be improved further.

**“Walkabouts are an opportunity for Norwich City Council to bring services to the community and to work with residents and tenants to increase the quality of their lives.”**

**Lenny Stamp**  
– neighbourhood manager

## Estate audits

This year estate audits concentrated on new sites with a focus on the caretaker service, as well as looking at sheltered housing services.

The top three issues resolved were fly tipping, graffiti removal and general repairs to communal areas.

Of **17** sites visited (**three** were sheltered housing)

Les, a volunteer estate inspector, said: **“Estate inspections are very important because we get**



*Les, volunteer estate inspector.*

**an overview of our estates and what areas are not up to standard, while highlighting where money should be spent.”**

## Antisocial behaviour

In 2012-13 we had **3,885** reports of antisocial behaviour (ASB). The most common types of complaint are noise, nuisance behaviour and harassment.

This year, actions taken by the Antisocial behaviour and tenancy enforcement (ABATE) team in response to the most serious cases were as follows:

**Six** evictions  
*Fewer than last year*

**Nine** possession orders  
*Fewer than last year*

**Four** Injunctions  
*Fewer than last year*

**No** demotion orders  
*Same as last year*

**One** crack-house closure

Joint working between our ABATE team and Norfolk Constabulary, has achieved notable successes. The team is now based with our police partners, enabling information to be shared more freely between the two organisations.

When an incident is reported to the council it is risk assessed and prioritised. If there are any immediate concerns, the police are informed so that potentially dangerous situations are not missed.

Norwich City Council is committed to tackling ASB in our communities. If you are a victim of ASB, you can report an incident to us 24 hours a day, seven days a week, via our ASB hotline or email:

- **t:** 01603 212100
- **e:** [asb@norwich.gov.uk](mailto:asb@norwich.gov.uk)

## **Hate crimes and incidents**

**Hate crimes** take many forms and can be frightening, confusing and degrading. Hate crime is any crime that is targeted at a person because of hostility or prejudice towards that person's:

**The ABATE team works alongside the police's Norwich Operational Partnership Team (OPT). They share information and work to resolve challenging and complex ASB cases, using a variety of tools and powers. A serious ASB case involving loud music, drunken violence, excessive visitors and an aggressive dog was referred to the ABATE team early in 2013. Working collaboratively with the OPT, and other partners, the ABATE team began possession**

**action against the tenant. To support this action the OPT provided regular information and advice regarding the criminal behaviour at the address, and liaised with the local police team. Using information provided by the police, as well as the testimony of neighbours, the ABATE team took the case to court and was awarded possession of the property, ending several months of nuisance and disruption for neighbours.**

- disability
- race or ethnicity
- religion or belief
- sexual orientation
- transgender identity
- age
- lifestyle.

Hate crimes can be committed against a person or property.

A victim does not have to be a member of the particular group at which the hostility is targeted, eg elderly or disabled. In fact, anyone could be the victim of a hate crime.

**Hate incidents** are non-crime events, such

as name calling or spitting, that have been driven by prejudice.

They can feel like crimes to those who suffer them and often escalate to crimes or tension in a community.

For this reason, it's important that any hate incidents are reported. You can report an incident at **[www.hatefreenorfolk.com](http://www.hatefreenorfolk.com)**.

**Incidents can also be reported to the police non-emergency number 101 or at the council in the usual ways.**

The police can only prosecute **where an offence is committed**, but can work with partners to try and prevent any escalation of the incident.

In 2012-13 there were **151** hate incidents reported to us.

## Mediation

If our tenants have a dispute with people in their neighbourhood and are finding it difficult to resolve, we offer them help from Norfolk Community Mediation Service.

**22** referrals were made to the mediation service in 2012-13

Norfolk Community Mediation Service works across Norfolk, Suffolk and north Essex, offering community and family mediation to those who have issues with their neighbours, local community or within their own family.

They seek to open up lines of communication and help find resolutions with face-to-face meetings, shuttle mediation and family conferencing.

### How the mediation service helps

Anyone of any age in the community can benefit from the service, Norfolk Community Mediation Service signposts to other supporting agencies depending on individual needs.

It facilitates mediation and visits people in their own homes when appropriate. Participants are encouraged to engage in the process by identifying issues, looking for solutions and acting upon them. Face-to-face meetings between parties with issues can be arranged in neutral locations, and shuttle mediation is undertaken when

appropriate, when the mediator acts as a go-between for the individuals.

### Volunteers

When mediating, Norfolk Community Mediation Service works closely with volunteers who act as co-mediators on visits and in face-to-face meetings. They play a vital role in debriefing and providing another perspective, which is useful when working on complex issues.

They offer training in mediation techniques to their volunteers and funders, and also run accredited training for agencies wishing to equip staff with mediation skills.

**At the end of 2012 two neighbouring families were involved in a dispute that had been rumbling on for several years. Their complaints included name calling, shouting and swearing, threats of violence, and dog barking. The families were angry with each other, but were also tired of the ongoing dispute and wanted it to end. Their case was referred to the council's mediation service and**

**a mediator carried out 'shuttle' mediation (ie not face to face), spending time with each family and finding out what they wanted for the future. An agreement was subsequently drawn up and both families were relieved the dispute was over and that ultimately they had managed to get the result they wanted, without anyone telling them what to do or how to behave.**

# Section five

## Value for money



### Benchmarking

To help us assess value for money within Norwich City Council, we have joined HouseMark, an organisation that helps us compare costs and performance with other social housing organisations throughout the country – this is called benchmarking.

This information is used to highlight what we are doing well or where cost or performance improvements could be made.

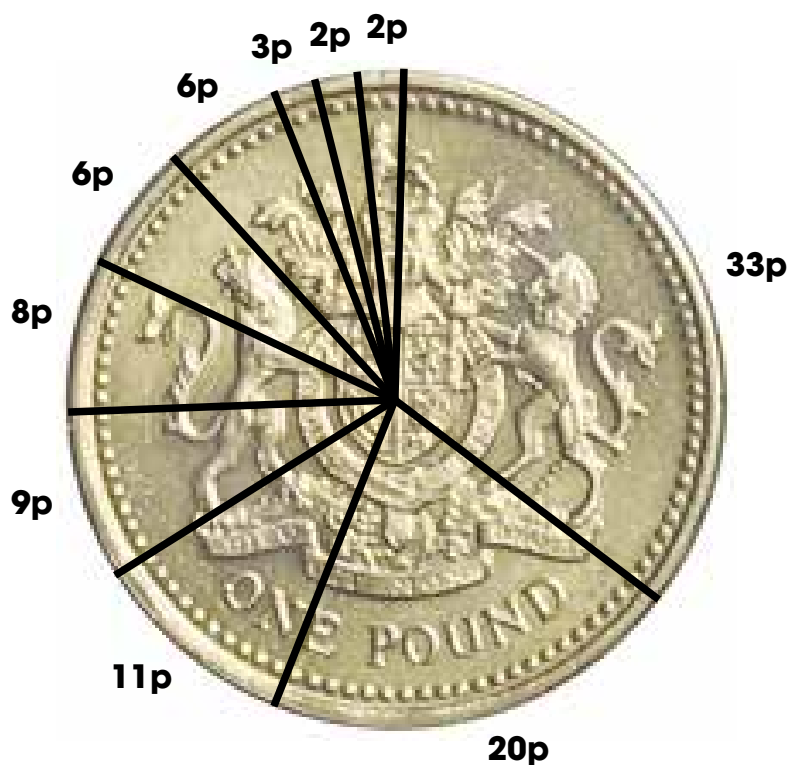
We actively benchmark ourselves throughout the year using HouseMark's quarterly tracking tool to assess our performance against other authorities. This information is then included in performance reports throughout the year. We also carry out an annual assessment of costs and performance through HouseMark. This is done in the summer, with cost and benchmarking information available in late autumn.

We will report back on our results for 2012/13 in next year's annual report.

We collected **£56.6 million** in rent money. A third of this was spent

on maintaining your homes including **£8.9 million** on repairs and maintenance and **£2.2 million** on bringing empty homes back to standard.

### How our money was spent



**33p** Maintaining homes  
**20p** Housing management  
**11p** Empty property works  
**9p** Estate management  
**8p** Gas and solid fuel heating and servicing

**6p** Arrears and rent  
**6p** Sheltered housing service  
**3p** Caretaker service  
**2p** Home ownership  
**2p** Community alarm service

## Self financing

In April 2013 the government made a welcome change in the way your rent pays for the maintenance of your home and the services you receive as a tenant.

The Localism Act requires all local authorities to pay the government an amount equal to their share of the national housing debt. A £149m loan

‘bought us out’ from the previous housing subsidy system, in line with government reforms to the Housing Revenue Account (HRA). This means we can use more of your rents to maintain and improve our homes, instead of handing over an ever increasing share to the government.

The council has arranged to borrow **£149million** at a very low interest rate. The finance team worked

out how much we could afford to borrow, over what period, who to borrow from, and on what terms. The loan will be paid off by rental income, and as repayments are made and interest reduces, more money will become available to maintain our properties to the ‘Norwich standard’.

When explaining self financing Alyson, a tenant panel member said:

**“Self-financing is more beneficial than the previous system where the council had no choice but to pay money to the government. The council can now choose how to spend money where it previously could not. This does mean, however, the council has taken on additional debt under the terms of the self-financing scheme.”**



*Properties at Markham Towers, Norwich*



*Some of our council properties on Elm Hill, Norwich*

# Section six

## What we have planned for 2013 -14

Your tenant representatives will continue to play an even bigger part in developing the housing services you receive and all the newly involved tenants who volunteered in 2012-13 will have settled into their new, and very valued, roles.

Having enjoyed a successful start to our tenant training academy, Tenant Training for Norwich (TTfN) last year, we will be looking to attract more tenants to sign up so they can better equip themselves to effectively influence the housing service. We will be holding more graduation ceremonies to celebrate the achievements of those who complete our TTfN modules, which were developed in partnership with tenants.

Early in 2014 we are hoping to start the Three Score development, which will bring 1,000 new homes to Norwich and deliver a crucial part of Bowthorpe –

a village 40 years in the making. We are working in partnership with the Homes and Communities Agency (HCA) to deliver this project to boost our housing stock, as some of the properties will be available for people who are on the social housing register.

Building these homes will also give a meaningful boost to the jobs market and at least 10 per cent of the contractor workforce will be either young people breaking into the jobs market or those who have been unemployed.

We are going to be advising tenants who are feeling the impact of the welfare reform changes the government brought in towards the end of the financial year, which may present challenges. Some of you are receiving fewer benefits payments than in previous years and we will carry on working together to help you manage your money.

A key part of the Welfare Reform Act called universal credit will be rolled out in some parts of the country this autumn and we will need your involvement in helping us find the best ways to communicate with everyone affected. These opportunities and challenges can bring new prospects, as more ways to get involved with developing your housing service arise.

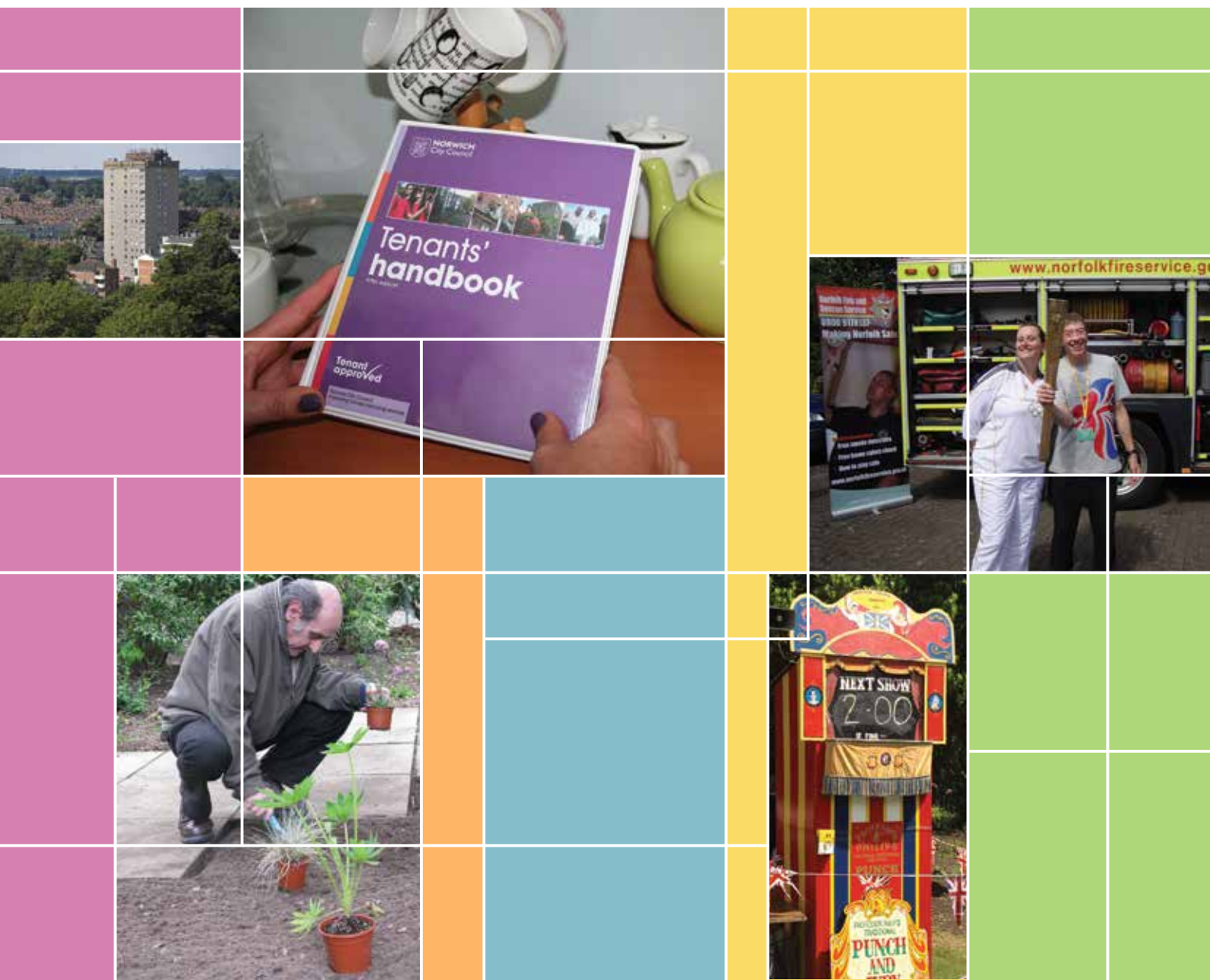
We look forward to working with you all once again.

Finally, I would like to thank Councillor Victoria McDonald for all of her work as cabinet member in 2012-13.



**Councillor Bert Bremner**  
*Cabinet member for housing*

If you would like this information in another language or format such as large print, CD or audio cassette or Braille please call 0344 980 3333 or email [info@norwich.gov.uk](mailto:info@norwich.gov.uk).  
t: 01603 213000  
[www.norwich.gov.uk](http://www.norwich.gov.uk)



t: 0344 980 3333  
e: [info@norwich.gov.uk](mailto:info@norwich.gov.uk)

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