



Housing

Annual Report to Tenants 2009/10

Tenant
Approved 

Kettering
Borough Council

WELCOME

Welcome to our annual report to tenants. This is the first time we have published an annual report and we think it offers a great opportunity for you to find out how well the Council is doing in managing your homes and neighbourhoods.

We want to make sure that the Council's housing services meet your needs and that you are satisfied with our performance. So, during the summer, we have visited all our tenants to find out what are the issues that matter to you most.

To date we have heard from 1,369 tenants and the message from you is loud and clear. Your top priorities are:

- Keeping your neighbourhoods clean and tidy
- Tackling crime and anti-social behaviour
- Providing a reliable and efficient repairs service

We will do our best to improve our services in these areas. We will also work with you to devise local service standards so that you can hold us to account for the services we provide to you.

If you have any comments or suggestions about this annual report, or you want to get involved more in our work on local service standards, then please get in touch. Our contact details are on the back page.

We hope that you enjoy reading the report.



**Councillor
Chris Smith-Haynes**
Portfolio Holder for Housing Standards and Chair of the Tenants Forum



Colin Medlycott
Vice Chair of the Tenants Forum



John Conway
Head of Housing

WHY ARE WE PUBLISHING AN ANNUAL REPORT?

The Government's regulator for social housing, the Tenant Services Authority, requires us to issue an annual report every year so that tenants can see how well we are managing their homes. This is the first year that a report has to be published and it focuses on our performance in the last financial year, 2009/10. The annual report also sets out our plans for improving the housing service and describes how we will involve tenants in agreeing our new local service standards.

The annual report was prepared in collaboration with a tenants steering group and was discussed and approved by the Tenants Reading Panel and Tenants Monitoring Group. The Tenants Forum approved the report at its meeting in September.

KETTERING'S HOUSING SERVICE

Kettering Borough Council owns and manages 3,812 homes; making us the largest landlord in the Borough. Our housing stock includes 403 flats in ten sheltered housing schemes.

Most council housing is located in Kettering but we also have large housing estates in Rothwell, Desborough and Burton Latimer. The remainder of the stock is spread across 17 villages.

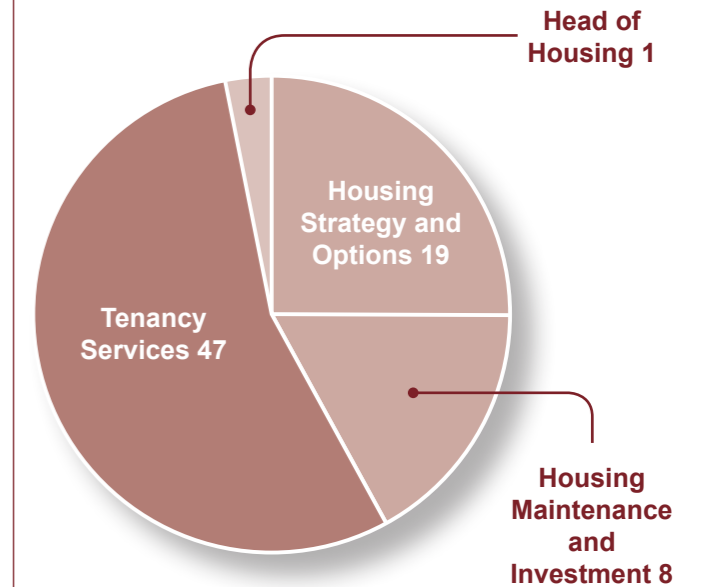
Family houses account for almost half of our housing stock with flats making up another 41%.

Our housing stock	
Type	Total
Low rise flat	1221
Medium rise flat	337
Maisonettes	12
House	1767
Bungalow	475
Grand Total	3812

Almost 70% of the council housing in Kettering was built before 1975 with a third of the housing stock built before World War Two.

How old is our housing?	
Age band	Total
Pre 1930	514
1930-49	636
1950-66	1432
1967-75	513
1976-82	388
Post 1982	329
Grand Total	3812

A total of 75 people work in Kettering's housing service.



In addition, another 61 people, in our Environmental Care service, work on housing maintenance; carrying out repairs and major improvement works.

WHO ARE OUR TENANTS?

In August 2009, we sent a Tenant Profile questionnaire to all our customers so that we could find out more about them and their needs. We found out that:

- The majority of our tenants are retired:
- Three in five of our tenants are aged 61 or older
 - One in five tenants is aged 81 or older
 - Only 6% of our tenants are aged 30 or younger

- Most of our tenants live in households without children:
- 44% of households were one adult aged 60 or over
 - 18% of households were two adults with at least one aged 60 or over
 - 8.8% of households were one-parent families
 - 6.3% of households were two parent families

- Less than 5% of our tenants are from an ethnic minority:
- 98.31% are White (of which, the significant majority (95.31%) are White British)
 - 0.75% are mixed race
 - 0.19% Asian or Asian British
 - 0.66% Black or Black British
 - 0.09% Chinese and other ethnic groups

- A significant number of tenants have a disability:
- 444 tenants, amounting to almost 12% of our tenants, have impaired mobility
 - 224 tenants are hearing impaired

We are using the information from the Tenant Profile questionnaire to reshape our services so that they meet your needs better. For example, we found that many tenants would like to improve their reading and writing

skills, learn more about computers, and return to work. As a result we have run training courses and advice sessions for tenants to help them enhance their skills

HOW ARE WE DOING?

CUSTOMER CARE AND INVOLVING TENANTS

Customer service and choice

There are a variety of ways in which tenants can contact the Council:

- We have four Customer Service Centres at Kettering, Desborough, Rothwell and Burton Latimer which handled 7,944 enquiries from tenants last year.
- Our Customer Response Centre on 01536 410333 handles telephone calls from tenants. Last year, the Centre took 22,131 calls from tenants.
- Our website at www.kettering.gov.uk provides useful information on a variety of housing topics. Tenants can also order repairs, report anti-social behaviour and make rent payments using the website.
- In addition, tenants can email us at customerservices@kettering.gov.uk with service requests and enquiries.

We publish a tenants' newsletter, Connect, four times every year. A tenants' editorial panel co-ordinates the production of Connect and ensures that it contains features which are of interest to tenants. In 2009, Connect was re-launched in an easier to read format.



Comprehensive information on how to manage your tenancy is contained within the Tenants Starter Pack, which is issued to all new tenants. The current starter pack, which was first issued in 2005, is currently being reviewed by a tenants' working party and the Silver Service Forum. We are planning to publish two new handbooks for tenants in March 2011 including one specifically for Silver Service customers.

Complaints

Tenants who are dissatisfied with the level of service they receive from us can use the Council's complaints procedure.

Complaints provide valuable feedback about our services. We regularly monitor trends in complaints so that we can identify areas where we need to improve our services. In 2009/10, we received 10 complaints about tenancy management and another 11 complaints about repairs. This compares to 26 complaints about tenancy services and six complaints about repairs in 2008/09.

i Find out more about our complaints procedure at: www.kettering.gov.uk/complaints

Tenant involvement

We offer a variety of ways for tenants to get involved and to have their say in decisions affecting their homes and neighbourhoods. These include:

- Surveys and questionnaires – including email, telephone and face-to-face
- Public meetings
- Estate inspections
- Major works consultation and project teams
- Focus groups
- Tenants reading panel
- Connect editorial group
- Tenants Forum Monitoring Group
- Tenants Forum

We also arrange support for tenants who attend regional and county tenant participation events and we provide training courses for tenants through TPAS and InStep.

In early 2010, a group of tenants reviewed the structure and function of the Tenants' Forum. As a result, we are introducing a formal elections process to ensure all members of the Forum have a remit from their communities.

Agreeing local service standards with you and your representatives

The Tenants Services Authority requires all providers of social housing to agree local service standards with their tenants by April next year. The standards will apply to the following areas:

- Customer care and involving tenants
- Maintaining your home
- Looking after your neighbourhood and tackling anti social behaviour

We are working with a tenants steering group to develop our local service standards. We started this process by evaluating our own strengths and weaknesses in a series of staff workshops and then visiting all our 3,812 tenants over the summer and asking them about their priorities for the housing service. We heard from 1,325 tenants and they told us:

- Keeping your neighbourhoods clean and tidy - 546 tenants (39.9%)

- Crime and anti social behaviour – 312 tenants (22.8%)
- Providing a reliable and efficient repairs service – 153 tenants (11.2%)

We will develop three sets of service standards – for housing estates, block of flats and sheltered housing.

Over the next few months we will work with the tenants steering group and the Silver Service Forum to ensure that our local service standards meet their priorities.

The Tenants Forum will be asked to approve our new local service standards in January 2011; after which they will be published in the spring issue of Connect. Throughout 2011/12, the Tenants Monitoring Group will monitor our progress in meeting the standards and we will regularly update tenants in Connect.

Our plans for 2010/11:

- We will introduce a more representative structure for the Tenants Forum.
- We will agree new local service standards with the Tenants Forum.
- We will issue new tenant handbooks.

MAINTAINING YOUR HOME

Repairing and maintaining your homes is one of the most important things we do.

86% of tenants tell us that they are happy with the repairs service.

During 2009/10, our achievements included:

- Meeting the Government's Decent Homes standard. This means that all our homes are weather-tight, easy to heat and have modern kitchen and bathroom facilities.
- We carried out a stock condition survey which told us where, how and when we need to improve the housing stock. Over the next five years we will need to spend £8.79 million on refurbishing and updating our housing stock.
- As part of our capital programme for 2009/10, we refurbished and improved 938 homes at a cost of £1.9 million. This work included renewing electrical systems, installing central heating, replacing roofs and structural repairs.
- We adapted 101 properties for disabled residents.
- We carried out an annual gas safety inspection to all our properties with gas-fired central heating to ensure that heating systems are safe and efficient to use.



There are some areas where we want to improve our performance.

- In 2009/10, it took us an average of 35 days to turnaround properties between lettings. Although this is an improvement on our performance in the previous year when it took an average of 41 days, top performing landlords are re-letting their properties in an average of 25 days.
- Sometimes, we can take longer than other landlords to complete repairs. For example, we complete 96.88% of emergency repairs within 24 hours but top performers are achieving 99.14%.
- The cost of our repair service is also higher than some other landlords. In 2008/09, the cost per property for responsive repairs and void works was £657.37. This compares to an average of £497.84 per property for top performing councils in our benchmarking group.

To help us improve, we have carried out a major review of the repairs service. As a first step, we asked tenants for their views. Over 1,000 tenants responded with more than eight in ten people telling us that they were satisfied with the current service overall. Over 70% said that reporting a repair was easy and many tenants told us that our repairs staff were courteous and polite when they visited their homes.

However, there were some areas where tenants were less happy:

- Many tenants were unsure about what to expect from our repairs service
- Some people did not know about our target times for completing repairs
- It was often difficult for tenants to get information about when their repairs would be carried out.
- It sometimes took more than one visit to complete a repair
- We were slow in carrying out external repairs to fencing and pathways, etc

We have taken these concerns seriously and, over the past year, we have worked hard to improve the repairs service and make it easier for tenants to find out what is happening when they report a repair.



As a result, during 2009/10, we have introduced:

- appointments for all responsive repairs
- a new way to report repairs using the Council's website
- clearer repairing responsibilities for tenants and the Council
- new target times for completing repairs
- a new computer system to improve on-site communication with our workforce
- a firmer and more consistent approach towards those tenants who do not look after their homes by recharging for work required as a result of damage, neglect or anti-social behaviour.

i Report a repair online at: www.kettering.gov.uk/councilhouserepairs

Our Plans for 2010/11

- We will prepare a new Asset Management Strategy which will set out our plans for making sure that our housing stock continues to meet the Decent Homes standard
- We will introduce new ways for tenants to get involved in planning and delivering improvement works to their homes and neighbourhoods
- We will provide better information to tenants whose homes are to be affected by capital works.

YOUR TENANCY

Allocations

Kettering Keyways

We allocate our housing through the Kettering Keyways choice based lettings system. This was launched in January 2009 and enables applicants to apply for a vacant council or housing association property in an area of their choice.

During 2009/10, we let 332 council properties to new tenants. 30% of lettings were allocated to applicants with the highest priority in band A; 60% to applicants in band B; 8% to applicants in band C; and 2% to applicants with the lowest priority in band D.

In addition, 74 existing tenants were transferred to new homes and another 30 tenants completed mutual exchanges.

i Find out more about Keyways at: www.keyways.org.uk

HomeMove



HomeMove

Our Tenants Profile tells us that around 30% of our tenants are living in homes which are bigger than they need. If we can help these tenants to downsize then we will be able to increase the supply of family homes. To help do this, our HomeMove service was launched in August 2009. HomeMove provides practical support and assistance to tenants who want to move to a smaller home. This can involve arranging furniture removals, carpet fitting and redirecting post. In 2009/10, 17 under-occupying council tenants moved to smaller properties freeing up much needed family homes. A further 43 were registered with the service and are currently waiting for an offer of accommodation.

i To find out more about HomeMove, contact: **Alison Spence, HomeMove Advisor, on 01536 535 682**

House Exchange

Council and housing association tenants can use the House Exchange service to seek mutual exchanges. A total of 374 residents registered in 2009/10 and 13 households successfully completed mutual exchanges.

Tenure

Introductory Tenancies

All new tenants are given Introductory Tenancies. This is a one-year trial tenancy which gives new tenants most of the rights as a secure council tenant but, if they break their tenancy agreement, they can be evicted more easily. During the Introductory Tenancy, Neighbourhood Managers visit tenants after two weeks, three months, six months and nine months to check that the tenancy is going well. If there are no problems, Introductory Tenancies are converted into Secure Tenancies after twelve months.

In 2009/10, we served Notices of Termination on three Introductory Tenants and two were evicted for rent arrears.

Rent

In 2009/10, the average weekly rent was £60.61. We offer a variety of ways to pay including direct debit, online at www.kettering.gov.uk, over the phone, at post offices, and All Pay and Pay Zone outlets.

We have improved our performance in collecting rent. During 2009/10:

- We collected 98.61% of the rent which was due.
- Rent arrears were reduced from £207,405 at the end of March 2009 to £171,935 at 31 March 2010.
- We have reduced the number of tenants owing more than seven weeks rent from 149 in March 2009 to 117 at the end of March 2010.

Rent Arrears – Position at 31 March	
Financial year	Rent arrears
2000/01	£554,101
2001/02	£472,080
2002/03	£390,861
2003/04	£316,918
2004/05	£294,008
2005/06	£266,519
2006/07	£291,600
2007/08	£236,836
2008/09	£207,405
2009/10	£171,935

We take a sympathetic but robust approach towards rent arrears. Wherever possible we will help and support tenants who are finding it difficult to pay their rent. However, where tenants choose not to pay their rent, we will not hesitate to take action. Last year, we evicted 14 households for rent arrears.

Our Tenancy Support Advisor offers practical advice and assistance to any council tenant who may require assistance in maintaining their tenancy. The service is delivered directly to the tenant by the Advisor or through other local agencies.

Housing officers in the Rent and Business Support team will be working more closely with their colleagues in Housing Options over the next year. When tenants are experiencing serious problems paying their rent and their tenancy is at risk, they will be referred to our Housing Options team. The aim is to help tenants receive appropriate advice and support about their housing options before eviction is considered.

Silver Service

Silver Service, our sheltered housing service seeks to make a positive difference to older people's lives by tailoring support services to meet their individual needs and aspirations.



Since Silver Service was launched in August 2008 we have continued to develop the service with our tenants. During 2009/10 this has involved:

- Establishing the Silver Service Forum in June 2009
- Holding monthly meetings at each of our ten sheltered housing schemes
- Launching the quarterly Silver Service Matters magazine in September 2009
- Introducing Silver Service standards
- Following a Silver Surfers event, holding regular computer training courses in conjunction with Southfields School for girls

i Find out more about Silver Service at: www.kettering.gov.uk/silverservice

Our Plans for 2010/11

- We will extend Kettering Keyways so that applicants can also bid for housing in Corby and Wellingborough.
- We will review the management of Introductory Tenancies to ensure that tenants receive high quality support and advice throughout the first year of their tenancies
- We will ensure that tenants with rent arrears whose tenancies are at risk are referred to the Housing Options team for advice and assistance at an early stage
- We will produce scheme profiles for sheltered housing scheme to assist applicants in choosing the right scheme to meet their needs.

LOOKING AFTER YOUR NEIGHBOURHOOD

A team of four Neighbourhood Managers manage council tenancies throughout the Borough. In addition, our sheltered housing schemes are managed by the Silver Service team of scheme managers and support workers.

When we asked tenants about what were the most important issues for them, around 40% told us that they wanted the area around their homes to be clean and tidy. This was particularly the case in some blocks of flats in Kettering town centre and Highfield Road where tenants were most likely to be unhappy about the state of the communal areas.

As a result, we will be piloting the regular cleaning of communal areas in selected blocks of flats next year. If this proves to be successful, we will implement cleaning of communal areas across the Borough during 2012.

Co-operating with other agencies

We work closely with a range of other agencies to make sure that our neighbourhoods are places where people are happy to live. In particular, we have well established partnerships with Northamptonshire Police, the Probation Service and Catch 22 to tackle anti social behaviour. Our life skills training programmes – 'Move On, Move In' and 'New Opportunities, New Skills' – are run in collaboration with Accommodation Concern, Kettering MIND, Northamptonshire Fire Service and the Red Cross.

Tackling anti-social behaviour

Our approach to dealing with anti-social behaviour has three strands:

- Taking decisive enforcement action against those committing antisocial behaviour where there is evidence to do so
- Working in partnership with the police, youth offending services, probation and other agencies
- Developing preventative and educational initiatives to reduce anti social behaviour and to support vulnerable households.

We have published our service standards for anti-social behaviour on our website. These set out how the Council and other agencies will respond when residents complain about anti-social behaviour.



New tenants are made aware of their responsibilities when they take up their tenancies. Complaints of anti-social behaviour are most often resolved by early intervention. However, if problems continue, we will consider either further support or legal action, depending on the problem.

In 2009/10, we received 117 complaints about anti-social behaviour. Most complaints were about noise, harassment or threatening behaviour, and litter or rubbish. In 42 cases, the problem was serious enough to warrant formal action.

Where there has been a serious breach of tenancy, we will serve a Notice of Seeking Possession. Over the past year, we have worked closely with Northamptonshire Police to improve our response to anti-social behaviour. As a result, the number of Notices served increased from 24 in 2008/09 to 42 last year.

We also evicted seven tenants for anti-social behaviour; of which four were introductory tenants.

As well as taking action where anti-social behaviour has

i If you want to report anti-social behaviour or to know more about our service standards, go to: www.kettering.gov.uk/antisocialbehaviour

occurred, we have also developed a range of initiatives to help prevent anti-social behaviour occurring in the first place.

In 2006, we launched 'Move On, Move In', our tenancy training programme for young adults and in 2008, a further programme for vulnerable adults, 'New Opportunities, New Skills'. was introduced. These courses teach new tenants the basic skills they need to maintain a successful tenancy such as budgeting, home maintenance, healthy eating and managing a tenancy.



Since the programmes were launched there have been twelve courses which over 100 people have successfully completed. Only three people have subsequently lost their tenancies.

Last year, our new LifePlan service to help Council tenants into work, training and educational opportunities was introduced. During the past twelve months, our LifePlan Advisor, has been working with many of tenants to help them to make more of their lives

We also work closely with the Northamptonshire Police's Rose Project and Catch 22 to provide housing for ex-offenders. A total of 10 ex-offenders have been housed through these projects and all have successfully maintained their tenancies.

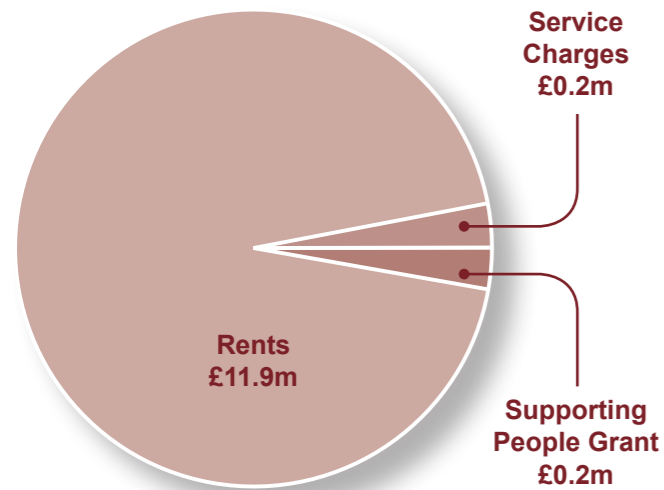
Our Plans for 2010/11

- We will introduce cleaning of communal areas in blocks of flats on a pilot basis
- We will provide regular feedback to tenants on estate inspections
- We will review our anti-social behaviour policy and procedures to include a service promise based on best practice and feedback received from our tenants
- We will work more closely with the Tenants Forum Monitoring Group so that it can monitor and scrutinise our performance in dealing with anti-social behaviour.

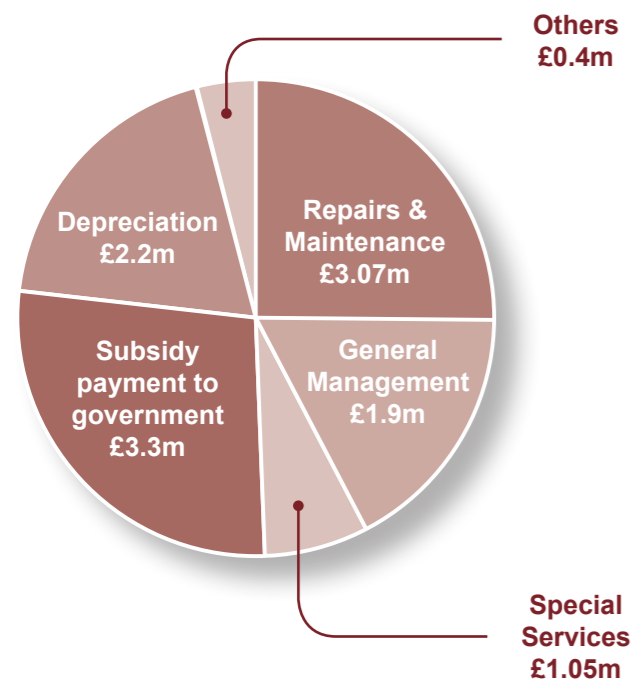
VALUE FOR MONEY

We want to ensure that our services represent excellent value for money. The Council's performance and costs are benchmarked with other local authorities and housing associations. We constantly seek ways to reduce our costs whilst maintaining the quality of services. Also, our services are independently inspected and tenants scrutinise how well we are doing through the Tenants Forum Monitoring Group.

Our income comes from...



And, this is how the money is spent...



The cost of managing our homes and neighbourhoods is £10.42 per property per week. This compares to £15.59 in Corby and £6.71 in Northampton.

The cost of maintaining our housing stock is £16.53 per week compared to £17.89 in Northampton and £18.59 in Corby.

Satisfaction with our services is high with 80% of our tenants saying we do a good job. This compares well with other landlords operating in our Borough.

Orbit Heart of England	84%
East Midlands Housing	83%
BPHA	81%
Kettering Borough Council	80%
Aldwyck Housing Group	79%
Home Group	67%
Leicester Housing Association	67%

We achieve value for money in several ways:

Comparing our performance and costs

We compare our performance and costs with other landlords by subscribing to the HouseMark and the Rent Income Excellence Network benchmarking clubs. We also use data from the Audit Commission to assess our performance.

Cheaper and Better

During 2009, we launched the 'Cheaper and Better' project to find ways of delivering better services to tenants whilst reducing our costs. A group of officers from across the housing service was brought together to work on this project and to consider best practice from other councils and housing associations.

We are now working through a list of ideas for cheaper and better services. Some of the ideas will be relatively quick to implement, whereas others will take much longer to bring to fruition.

Ideas which were implemented in 2009/10 included switching utilities to one main supplier and recycling door locks when properties are being turned around between tenancies. Initiatives for the future include reviewing our debt-collection arrangements, issuing new tenants with 'paint packs' rather than decoration vouchers and running a 'Home MOT' scheme which targets those properties where a high number of repairs are ordered.

Tenants Forum Monitoring Group

Our Tenants Forum Monitoring Group ensures that tenants play an active role in monitoring key aspects of the housing service and achieving better value for money. This year, members of the Monitoring Group have been learning more about all our services to help them prioritise those areas they wish to scrutinise in-depth.

The Tenants Forum Monitoring Group recently reviewed our performance on rent collection and was concerned that we allowed tenants, paying by direct debit at the end of the month, to pay in arrears. As this increases the level of rent arrears, the Monitoring Group asked us to revise our direct debit procedures. We have now arranged catch-up payment schedules for all direct debit payers who pay at the end of the month to ensure that they are no longer in arrears.

External accreditation and awards

We have received national and regional recognition for the quality of our services. Every year, the Northamptonshire Supporting People Team inspect our sheltered housing services under the Quality Assessment Framework and have assessed Silver Service as a level B service which "means that the service can evidence good practice." Over the past two years, we have been recognised by the Government as providing excellent housing services. Among the awards, we have won are:

- Department for Communities and Local Government
- Regional Homelessness Champion
- Centre of Excellence for Youth Homelessness
- Enhanced Housing Options Trailblazer for our housing options service
- Cabinet Office
- Customer Service Excellence Award for our customer services centre

Our Plans for 2010/11

- We will work closely with the Tenants Forum Monitoring Group to develop its scrutiny role
- We will issue new tenants with 'paint packs' rather than decoration vouchers
- We will run a 'Home MOT' scheme to target properties where a high number of repairs are ordered.

DO YOU WANT TO GET INVOLVED?

At Kettering, we want you to have your say about our services and how we can improve your neighbourhoods.

There are many ways in which you can get involved. You can dip in and out as you want. It's up to you to decide how much time you can spare.

i If you want to know more, please contact our **Housing Communications Officer, Linda Nash**, on **01536 535 650** or email **lindanash@kettering.gov.uk**.

PERFORMANCE INFORMATION

This table shows how we have performed over the past three years in key areas:

	2009/10 Target	2009/10 Actual	2008/09 Actual	2007/08 Actual
Percentage of homes meeting the decent homes standard	100%	99.8%	99.3%	91%
Percentage of tenants satisfied with the housing service	80%	80%	80%	77%
Time taken to re-let properties	30 days	35 days	41 days	44 days
Rent arrears as at 31 March	£195,000	£171,935	£207,405	£236,836
Rent arrears as a percentage of the rent roll	1.82%	1.39%	1.83%	2.16%
Percentage of tenants with high rent arrears (more than seven weeks rent)	4%	3.5%	4.3%	5.8%
Percentage of emergency repairs completed with 24 hours	98%	96.88%	87.78%	90.65%
Percentage of homes with gas fired central heating that receive an annual landlords safety check	100%	100%	100%	100%

