



Housing and Community Services

Annual Report to Tenants 2013/2014

This year's **Annual Report to Tenants** tells you how we, Southwark Council's Housing and Community Services have performed and what we have achieved in the 2013/14 financial year.

Our vision is to make Southwark's homes and neighbourhoods great places to live where good quality services are delivered right first time. In many areas of the service we do just that. We are forward thinking and are always looking for ways to improve the services that we provide to you.



Contents

Introduction from Gerri Scott	4	Tenant rents	20
Task and finish group	6	Tenant Management Organisations (TMOs)	21
Housing and Community Services at a glance	7	Homeowners	22
STAR Survey	8	How do we ensure your neighbourhood is clean and safe?	23
What's new	10	How well do we deal with antisocial behaviour?	24
Major works	14	Welfare reform	25
How wisely do we spend your money?	16	How to get involved	26
Repairs and maintenance	18	How well do we manage our complaints?	29
Making the best use of homes	19	Comments, compliments and contact	30



Introduction

Innovation

Right now pressure on local housing supply is intense and we know that truly affordable housing for local people is in greater demand than ever before. We are always looking for ways to increase the availability of high quality housing to those who need it most. Last year we set ourselves a really ambitious target to build 11,000 new council homes over the next 30 years - a decision that bucks the trend of most other authorities. A lot of work has already gone into ensuring that this important project goes ahead.

For the first time, we visited every one of our tenancies in one year to verify occupants as well as look at the condition of our properties. This process led to more than 1,000 referrals for repairs and has helped to recover 379 illegally sublet tenancies, by far the most homes reclaimed by a council in England and Wales this year. We have also identified additional vulnerable residents who are now receiving the right support for the benefit of everyone in the area.

We have put more of our services online and provided face to face services through our new *MySouthwark* Service Points as well as bringing the contact centre inhouse.

Overall satisfaction

There have been tangible improvements in many of the services we provide; overall satisfaction with landlord services came out as 64% according to the 2013/14 annual survey.

When we break this down we can see there are some real improvements in the satisfaction with recent repairs and ease of contact, however there is less satisfaction with the way we deal with antisocial behaviour and with keeping you informed of progress. These are our key priorities in 2014/15.



Your views matter

We are always looking to involve our tenants in everything that we do. We listen to your views at Tenant and Resident Association (TRA) meetings, forums, at task and finish groups and working parties, and a group of residents meet quarterly to scrutinise performance at our performance review group. If you want to get involved see page 26, but if you are randomly chosen to give us your opinion please take the time to respond; your views are really important to us and help shape the services we provide.

We would like to thank everyone who has taken the time to contribute to the success of the department this year.

We continue to provide a high quality tenancy management and maintenance service that delivers improved homes and better services that offer good value for money.

We know we don't always get everything right and that is why we are keen to work with our tenants to ensure that what we deliver is what you want.



Gerri Scott
Strategic Director of Housing
and Community Services



Task and finish group

What you told us about the last annual report

You told us that you liked the report but that it had too much text and you wanted to have more photographs and pictures. We have listened and this time have included more images and we will be providing a summary of the report that gives you an at a glance picture of what and how we are doing and the challenges we face together.



“We’ve given careful thought about what should be included in this year’s annual report and the best way of sharing this information with a wide range of people. Additionally, we’ve tried to make sure you get a true picture of what is happening without a load of statistics.

We hope we’ve succeeded and that you enjoy reading this year’s report.”



Annual Report to Tenants' working party, May 2014



Housing and Community Services at a glance

We carried out
170,665
repairs last year



Our handypeople carried out **2,445** jobs last year, with a

100%
SATISFACTION RATE

We received
1,048
graffiti
notifications



We have
13
TMOs

(Tenant Management Organisations) that supply housing management services to **3,576** homes

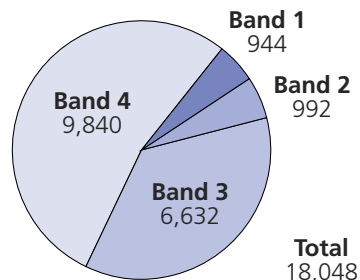
71% of Southwark tenants are satisfied with their neighbourhoods



The average wait for a **Band 3** priority wait can be as high as three years for a two bedroom property and six years for a four bedroom property

 **3 YEARS**  **6 YEARS**

Numbers on housing waiting list by band:



We received
4,605
fly tipping
notifications



Total number of tenants

37,014



We carried out **3,149** estate inspections to ensure services are always being provided to an **excellent standard**

We are embarking on a programme to build

11,000
new homes

in Southwark over the **next 30 years**

We let
empty homes
in an average of



24
days

2013 Survey of Tenants and Residents (STAR)

In July 2013 Southwark Council undertook an independent survey of its residents to gather opinions on attitudes about the landlord services we provide.

In line with best practice in social housing, Southwark uses an annual tenant survey based on the STAR methodology. The survey is commonly used in the housing sector to enable comparison of performance with previous years' annual surveys as well as other social housing providers.

This is the second year of the STAR survey; the last survey was undertaken in 2012. Over 17,750 randomly selected tenants were invited to complete a questionnaire during July and August 2013.

This is one of the most important surveys undertaken by the department as it engages with a large number of tenants, gathering opinions on the services that have the most impact on them. The survey results help us understand residents' views and help us with planning the services we provide.

Key findings

- **Improvements in your neighbourhood** – More tenants were satisfied (71%) with their neighbourhood compared to 2012 (69%). The main issues affecting residents were litter and noisy neighbours. The area of greatest improvement is the fall in the number of people experiencing racial or other harassment which is down from 23% in 2012 to 13% in 2013. Staff have been working with residents and contractors to improve estate cleaning, grounds maintenance and communal repairs. This is evident as satisfaction with communal repairs saw a significant increase from 53% in 2012 to 58% in 2013.
- **Improving repairs service** – It was disappointing to see that overall satisfaction with the repairs service has dipped slightly from 64% in 2012 to 62% in 2013. However, what is very reassuring is that many more residents were satisfied with repairs completed in the last 12 months (67%) compared to those who had a repair completed over 12 months ago (54%). This indicates that the significant changes made to the repairs service have begun to have a positive impact.



- **Satisfaction with resident officers** – This is an area showing consistent improvement. Tenant satisfaction with the overall service provided by resident officers has increased. Residents found it easier to contact their resident officer and satisfaction with the outcome also increased.
- **Dealing with your enquiries effectively** – In July 2013 the council brought its contact centre and One Stop Shops back inhouse. Results show that it is now easier to get enquiries sorted. Satisfaction has increased from 51% in 2012 to 58% in 2013. These early indications of improvements are encouraging.
- **Southwark Council website** – The council is always seeking to improve its online services, making it easier for residents to report issues and find the information they require, so it is very pleasing to see that use of the council's website has increased considerably from 34% in 2012 to 45% in 2013. Tenants rating the information on the website as good has risen from 66% to 77% in the same period.
- **Keeping tenants informed** – There was a small decrease in satisfaction in this area which was surprising given the extensive consultations about the future of housing in Southwark and the tenancy conditions. The council will explore other ways of keeping residents informed about the big picture as well as day to day tenancy issues affecting their homes and neighbourhoods.
- **Managing antisocial behaviour** – Results of the STAR Survey show this is an area that requires attention as satisfaction was lower than expected.

Watch out for the 2014/15 annual survey which will be on its way this summer. It's really important we hear your views so if you are randomly chosen please spare some time to complete and return the survey. Last year we had five lucky winners of our survey prize, so complete and return your survey to have a chance of winning this year's prize.



What's new?

There have been a number of really important changes that have happened over the last year.

Contact centre

In June 2013, we brought the contact centre inhouse. The contact centre takes calls for the whole council, including freephone calls to the repairs service on 0800 952 4444.

During the year we took an average of 23,000 repair calls a month with 80% of them being resolved at the first contact. Our overall performance improved consistently throughout the year although we did not meet the target to answer all calls within an average of 60 seconds as we took just over two minutes. This is an area we know we can improve as we achieved 68 seconds on average by March 2014.

For the first time we started monitoring our call agents and are delighted that satisfaction with call agents ranges from 92% to 100% since July 2013. However, you told us that it wasn't always easy to order a repair, with satisfaction ranging between 82% and 92%. This again is an area we know we can improve in 2014/2015.

MySouthwark Service Points

We have three *MySouthwark* Service Points in the borough:

- 11 Market Place, The Blue, Bermondsey
- 122 Peckham Hill Street, Peckham
- 376 Walworth Road, Walworth.

The total number of customers seen across the service points is 125,000 since June (an average of 13,000 customers per month) with the Peckham *MySouthwark* Service Point having the highest number of visitors.

MySouthwark Service Points offer a range of facilities including a free phone line to any council service, free access to the council's website and immediate telephone interpretation. Nine out of ten customers were seen within ten minutes, and with the exception of October to December, satisfaction with the service was above 90%.



MySouthwark website

You may have noticed that it is now easier for you to find information about our services. By signing up for a *MySouthwark* account you also have instant access to the council so that you can make payments such as rent, council tax, parking and so on. You can apply for garages, licenses and permits or report noisy neighbours, fraud, and tell us what you think. You can tell us about what you think via consultations or the [compliments, comments and complaints page](#).

In 2013/14 we nearly doubled the number of *MySouthwark* account holders to 64,000 residents. If you would like to sign up for your own personalised *MySouthwark* online account go to **www.southwark.gov.uk/mysouthwark** or connect with what's going on via social media using [Twitter](#) and [Facebook](#).

 [@lb_southwark](#)

 facebook.com/southwarkcouncil



Housing advice

The Gold Standard inspection of housing advice services (the first undertaken in England) was carried out in November 2013 when we achieved a score of 73% against the pass mark of 60%. More improvements are scheduled in 2014/2015.

Hostels

We have 17 hostels in Southwark, housing 257 homeless individuals, couples and families in temporary accommodation. A new hostel is currently being built which is due to be completed in March 2015 providing an additional 53 homes in Willow Walk. This is an exciting project as it is the first hostel to be built in the borough for decades.



Artist's impression of new hostel at Willow Walk



New sheltered services

We started our three year, £9.7m programme of works across our stock of sheltered housing units to deliver fire safety upgrades, redecoration, and other improvements.

We have installed new front and communal doors, improved the lighting and external pathways, and are rolling out sprinkler systems within the units so that we can maintain the highest standards of fire safety as well as decorating communal areas to give these homes a bright, fresh look. Upgrades to heating systems and a programme of boiler renewals and pipe work where needed is being coordinated with existing major works programmes on our estates, to deliver a wide range of improvements, inside and out, with minimal disruption.

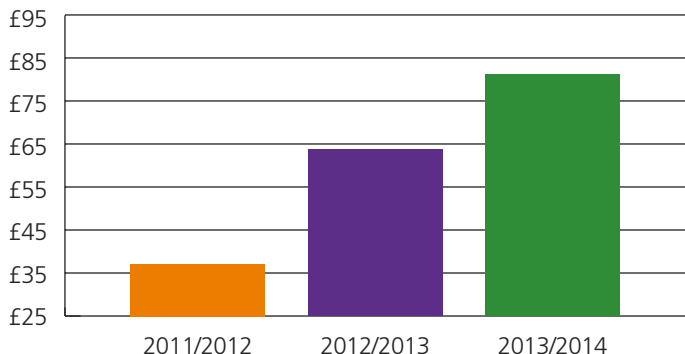
Works at four of our schemes have already been completed, with other schemes starting in 2014/15.

These are just some of the key changes to our services. We hope that you agree they work well, but if you have any suggestions for further improvements please do get in touch.



Major works

Major works expenditure 2011 to 2014



We continue to make good progress in the delivery of our five year Warm Dry Safe (WDS) programme with £183m spent in total on improvements to council housing stock since April 2011. The overall WDS programme is expected to be fully committed by March 2016. Over 4,000 residents across the borough have benefited from WDS major works since the programme began.

The programme spend in 2013/14 was £82m with the majority of the spend at the following estates:

- New Place
- John Kennedy House
- Southampton Way
- Denmark Hill
- Clifton
- Dickens
- Brandon
- Draper House
- St Saviours
- Manor Estate Scheme
- Consort
- Comber
- Croxted Road.

We are also expecting to bring forward over half of the 2015/16 schemes to start in 2014/15. Our individual heating and lift programme continues to run ahead of schedule – in fact work has begun to bring forward the majority of the remaining 2015/16 district heating schemes in 2014/15. For specific schemes see the information on our website.

Fire safety works have also been completed on 28 of the highest risk high rise blocks as well as 175 moderate risk blocks. Funding has been agreed to work on substantial risk lower rise and street properties.



Major works



Croxted TRA before



Croxted TRA after

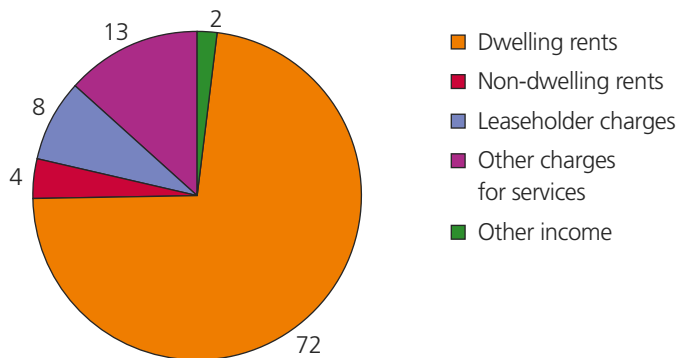


How wisely do we spend your money?

The Housing and Community Services department made over £6m of savings in 2013/14, as part of an ongoing programme to find more efficient ways to work, a similar amount to what we saved in 2012/13. This money was put straight back into the areas of housing services that are of most importance to residents.

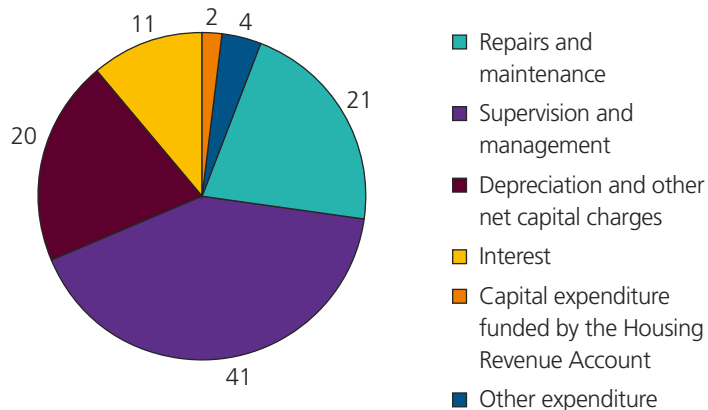
Income 2013/2014

(where every pound we receive comes from)



Expenditure 2013/2014

(where every pound was spent)



Key priorities for 2014/15

We will deliver better value for money by improving key areas of performance and continuing our savings programme. Measures to achieve this include:

- Maximising income through rent recovery and increasing garage income (creating a borough waiting list database showing geographical locations of all garages)
- Reducing empty property times whilst ensuring this is not done at the expense of quality
- Reviewing contracts to ensure they are focused on the customer and deliver better value for money
- Continuing with robust contract management, including for the new customer contact centre
- Implementing recommendations from key reviews and refreshing our repairs process to ensure value for money.



Styles House, SE1



Repairs and maintenance

Our performance is improving and repairing our ever ageing stock is still a concern. We carried out 170,665 repairs last year with just under 93% completed on time. Over 97% of appointments were kept and satisfaction increased to 84% based on close of job surveys. We know we still have some way to go to rival the best performance but that is our aim. If you have had a repair, we'd like to hear your views about how well we dealt with it so make sure you complete the satisfaction survey to have a chance of winning one of our quarterly prize draws.

We have had 158 statutory disrepair claims, an improvement of 28 on last year. We also completed:

- 2,445 handyperson jobs with a satisfaction rate of 100% with those who completed surveys
- 501 housing adaptations (290 majors and 211 minors) with 94% satisfaction for major adaptations
- 100% of homes had an up to date gas certificate in March 2014.



Kingswood Estate, SE21



Making the best use of homes

We want to make sure our properties are managed with you in mind, providing you with the best advice about your housing options and offering homes to eligible people most in need.

- 251 tenants chose to move through the SmartMove scheme in 2013/14, freeing up larger properties for larger families
- 2,378 properties were let during the year, the majority advertised and let through the Homesearch service. Of the total properties let through Homesearch, 1,171 were council homes, 465 were housing association nominations and 66 were through TMOs. We also let 404 council homes, 123 housing association homes and 30 TMOs via direct offers
- 37,500 customers visited the Homesearch centre. Applications for housing remain very high and average waiting times for a Band 3 priority can be as high as three years for a two bedroom property and six years for a four bedroom property
- In the last year, 379 properties were recovered from illegal sublets. This is the highest recovery rate in the country and shows just how determined we are to make sure our homes go to those most in need

- By the end of the year we were managing 387 estate short life properties, providing much needed temporary accommodation to 642 homeless families, couples and individuals while they wait for permanent accommodation. Rental income of £3.52m was generated from these properties that would otherwise have been empty
- Letting our empty homes quickly and completing good value repairs first time saves the council money. In 2013/14 we let our empty homes in an average of 24 days, slightly up on last year, and we increased satisfaction with the quality of property let from 72% in 2012/13 to 90% satisfaction in 2013/14.

Numbers on housing waiting list by band:



Tenant rents

35,014
tenants + **2,280**
TMO tenants TOTAL = **37,294**
tenants

13,319
service charge
payers + **1,273**
TMO
homeowners TOTAL = **14,592**
homeowners



In hard economic times we try to strike a balance between collecting all rent due and evicting non payers. In 2013/14 we improved our rent collection again, collecting 0.63% more rent than we did last year which meant that we collected 99.78% of the 100% target.

- We served 9,227 notices of seeking possession for non payment of rent
- We evicted 148 tenants for non payment of rent, seven more than last year, despite the economic conditions
- The Sustain Team, a service which helps vulnerable tenants maintain their tenancy, received a total of 712 referrals for 2013/14. The main reason for referrals was problems with arrears or financial hardship.



Tenant Management Organisations (TMOs)

There are 13 Tenant Management Organisations (TMOs) in Southwark that supply housing management services to 3,576 homes, including tenants, leaseholders and owner-occupiers. The services provided may include cleaning, repairs, rent/service charge collection, arrears work, leasehold management services, voids, and major works.

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

Styles House became our newest TMO and two other proposed TMOs are currently in development at the Gloucester Grove and D'Eynesford estates. It is anticipated that resident ballots to take over services will happen in the next 12 months.



Styles House, SE1



Homeowners

In March 2014 there were 14,592, service charge payers in Southwark, an increase of 128. This number includes 1,273 TMO homeowners. The number of service charge payers is increasing owing to the changes in the Right to Buy discount offered. For more information about the right to buy or other leasehold related information please visit our [website](#).

As well as the statutory Right to Buy scheme, in Southwark Council we offer two discretionary schemes for tenants looking to enter into home ownership: Social Homebuy and the Home Purchase Grant scheme.

As an affordable alternative to the Right to Buy, the Social Homebuy scheme enables secure tenants to purchase their council home on a shared ownership (part rent-part buy) basis at a discount in proportion to the Right to Buy discount. For example, if you were entitled to a discount of £100,000 under the Right to Buy and bought 50% under the Social Homebuy scheme, your discount would be £50,000.

For secure tenants with properties of two bedrooms or more, the Home Purchase Grant scheme is designed to assist those looking to buy on the open market and move from their council home. Grants start from £30,000 for a two bed property.

Both schemes are administered by the Specialist Housing Services Division.



How do we ensure your neighbourhood is clean and safe?

We provide a range of services to keep your neighbourhood clean and safe. In the year 2013/14:

- We received 1,231 graffiti notifications and carried out 99.6% of removals within 24 hours
- We received 4,914 fly tipping notifications and carried out 99.6% of removals within 24 hours
- We received 1,388 dog fouling notifications and carried out 99.8% of removals within 48 hours
- We carried out 3,149 estate inspections to ensure services are being provided to a good standard
- 97% of estates were rated good or excellent, improving again on last year
- We have now let over 5,000 garages and billed over £4m in the last year. We currently have vacant garages for rent across Southwark. See www.southwark.gov.uk/garages



How well do we deal with antisocial behaviour?

The council dealt with 1,381 cases of antisocial behaviour covering a range of complex issues. Many cases were resolved by early intervention and in some cases by offering support to households.

- 15 closure orders were obtained against homes being misused i.e. crack houses
- Eight injunctions were obtained for antisocial behaviour against residents for a range of behaviours including noise nuisance, harassment and intimidation. One resident is currently facing a custodial sentence for breaching an injunction
- 15 ASBOs (antisocial behaviour orders) were issued against individuals making life difficult for others i.e. through gang activity, aggressive behaviour and general antisocial behaviour
- 127 Acceptable Behaviour Contracts were signed dealing with a wide range of antisocial and nuisance behaviour
- 46 notices of seeking possession were served for antisocial behaviour in tenancies
- 14 possession orders were secured
- Seven evictions were carried out for antisocial behaviour. A number of these were linked to drug activity in and around council tenancies.



Welfare reform

By now you will have heard the expression welfare reform spoken about either by us or in the media. It is being used for the government's changes to benefits entitlement as part of their aim to help more people into work, while supporting the most vulnerable.

Social size criteria

One of the main changes to affect tenants, other than those receiving pension credit, is having one or more spare bedrooms. From April 2013, you will have been affected by what is known as social size criteria (commonly known as bedroom tax).

If you have one spare bedroom, your housing benefit is reduced by 14% of your total rent charge and if you have two or more bedrooms, your benefit will have been reduced by 25% of your total rent charge.

To help residents the council visited every tenant who was affected to explain and made discretionary payments to 2,685 tenants, made

251 moves to smaller properties and facilitated mutual exchanges to help put people in the right sized properties for their needs.

Universal credit

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

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



How to get involved

We have a great history of tenant involvement and in the last year tenants helped the council to make key decisions that impact on every tenant and leaseholder in the borough.

You can choose your own level of involvement from attending estate inspections, estate action days or responding to our surveys to being elected to Area Forums or becoming a delegate to the Tenant Council, the umbrella decision making body for tenants – you can even decide to manage your own estate.

Your continued involvement is a part of our success. For example, 3,149 estate inspections were carried out where residents helped us make decisions on standards of cleanliness or highlighted improvements to communal repairs.

Last year we had 150 Tenant and Residents Associations (TRAs) in Southwark. Look at our website to find the TRA that represents your area. Turn up to a meeting to find out what's going on in your local area or join the committee to get free training that you can use for your CV. Delegates from the TRA attend monthly Area Forums (11 in Southwark) to discuss important issues in different areas of the borough.

From forums you can be elected to attend Tenant Council where delegates contribute to decisions about a whole range of issues that affect tenants and the management of their homes across the borough, including rent levels, prioritisation for financial savings and council investment plans. Similarly homeowners can be elected to Homeowners' Council which works with Southwark Council on issues that affect the management of homeowners' properties.



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

A contribution of 26.5p from each tenant's weekly rent went towards the running of the tenant fund in 2013/14, an increase of 1.5p on 2012/13. This funding is for running TRAs and for grants to assist the SGTO in the work they do to support TRAs. Continued training is provided by two training officers and one grants and support officer, providing a valuable service to tenants across the borough.

A proportion of the administration fee of the homeowner's service charge is set aside to fund homeowner involvement, amounting to a total of £143,620. Part of this money helps fund TRAs. The rest is spent on funding two homeowner involvement officers as well as homeowner specific training and an information centre. These funds are managed by subgroups of the Tenant Council and Homeowner's Council, elected annually to make recommendations about how money should be spent.

Tenant and leasehold representatives do a huge amount of joint work with the council. Through their commitment in the last year we have updated the conditions of tenancy, the Tenants' Handbook, created this report and helped to improve services such as repairs, major works, the contact centre and we are in the process of developing a new lettings policy. Residents also provide independent scrutiny of our performance which is essential to ensure continuous improvement in the areas that matter most to tenants.

This list is not exhaustive but you can see there are very many ways of having your say.

If you would like to get involved in shaping services contact the Residents Involvement Team on **020 7525 3326** or email **resident.involvement@southwark.gov.uk** or visit our website **www.southwark.gov.uk/getinvolved**



Housing Heroes Awards

To recognise the important work that often goes unsung right across the community we launched Housing Heroes Awards in 2013/14.

We asked for nominations of people who have dedicated their lives to helping others on its housing estates and in its communities and were not disappointed. Our heroes were made up of individuals, small and large groups and all were recognised for their contribution – they showed that you can really make a difference in your community.



A selection of guests from the Housing Heroes Awards Ceremony



How well do we manage our complaints?

Overall, we received 5% fewer complaints than we did last year (4,327 compared to 4,564) and more complaints were resolved at the earliest possible stage (known as Stage One). Most complaints were about repairs. 339 complaints became a Stage Two complaint before being resolved, compared to 414 in 2012/13. We are also getting better at the way we handle complaints with 71% satisfaction compared to 35% satisfaction last year.

Housing Ombudsman

The government decided from April 2013 that if any tenant or housing services customer has a serious complaint that cannot be resolved between them and the council, it should be handled by the Housing Ombudsman rather than the Local Government Ombudsman. 63 complaints (including leaseholder matters) were escalated to the Housing Ombudsman.

Arbitration Panel

We also have a unique independent panel set up to consider disputes, free of charge, that arise from the conditions of tenancy. 126 cases were referred to the Arbitration Panel and £49,000 compensation paid. The panel is made up of a councillor representative, a tenant representative and an independent representative and both parties are bound by the decisions made.



Comments, compliments and contact

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



