

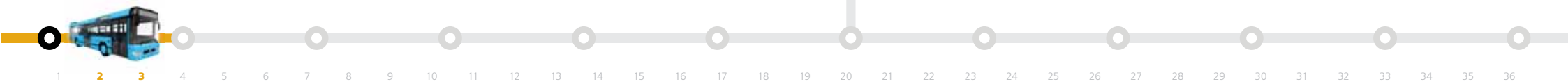
***ALL  
ABOARD***

**THE  
TENANTS'  
ANNUAL  
REPORT**

2013/14

# CONTENTS

- Why do we need an Annual Report for tenants written by tenants? 04
- The Annual Report Working Group 05
- The word from the top 06
- The borough 08
- Performance at a glance 10
- Allocations and mutual exchange 12
- Managing your tenancy 14
- Quality of your home 16
- Repairs and maintenance 18
- Neighbourhood management & local co-operation 20
- Housing Plus 24
- Involvement and empowerment 26
- Customer service, choice and complaints 30
- Making sense of the money 32
- Come and join my gang 34





## WHY DO WE NEED AN ANNUAL REPORT FOR TENANTS WRITTEN BY TENANTS?

### The Regulatory Framework for Social Housing 2012

The Homes and Communities Agency is the regulatory body responsible for social housing. The regulatory framework sets out what the Homes and Communities Agency expects from registered housing providers by setting out what it calls its 'standards'.

South Tyneside Council, in partnership with South Tyneside Homes, is responsible for ensuring these standards are being met in a clear and accountable way.

South Tyneside Council must demonstrate to the Homes and Communities Agency that it has worked with customers to develop and agree standards that set out how services will be delivered. It is the job of tenants of the borough to work with South Tyneside Council and South Tyneside Homes to make sure the standards are being met.

The standards and how they are being met are outlined in this report.

## THE ANNUAL REPORT WORKING GROUP

Each year tenants from across the borough join together to help to write the annual report. This group of tenants look at all the facts and figures provided by South Tyneside Homes to assess how it is performing against the standards.

This year, as well as looking carefully at the figures, we have questioned managers about their performance in our themed scrutiny workshops. Through our role as tenants we are independent and are able to provide you with a balanced report on how South Tyneside Homes is performing and importantly where there is room for improvement.

*This is why it is important that the annual report is written by tenants for tenants.*





## THE WORD FROM THE TOP

*Times have changed but I believe tenants are at the core of what social housing is all about. These days tenants want something different and we can only achieve this if tenants are involved in the decision-making processes and are empowered to scrutinise us.*

Councillor Ed Malcolm,  
Chair of South Tyneside Homes' Board

The Annual Report Working Group thought it would be good to hear from those at the top of the organisation. We talked to Councillor Allan West, Lead Member for Housing and Transport; Councillor Ed Malcolm, Chair of South Tyneside Homes' Board and Managing Director, of South Tyneside Homes, Paul Mains. Here are the important messages they told us.

### On the performance of the company:

Most of the performance figures for this year are really good and we have achieved great things in many areas, however there are still some important challenges for the next year including:

- Delivering Decent Homes by the end of 2016 to a good quality standard with high customer satisfaction
- Managing the overall impact of Welfare Reform and supporting our tenants through difficult times
- Modernising our Homefinder service and speeding up the letting of empty homes
- Changing the way in which we manage your tenancies and neighbourhoods to make sure that we offer a proactive and responsive area management service
- Improving the process for tenants who need aids and adaptations



*As a member of the Cabinet, it is my job to ensure that tenants' views are heard at the highest level as well as monitoring South Tyneside Homes' performance.*

Councillor Allan West,  
Lead Member for Housing and Transport

### On tenant involvement and empowerment:

Tenants are at the heart of everything we do and it's important that we work together with our tenants to improve the services we deliver. The involvement of tenants allows a different perspective to be brought to the table and your suggestions, ideas and recommendations are really useful.

Commitment for tenant involvement needs to come from the top of the organisation and it is our job to make sure that we act upon tenants' insight and recommendations and that actions result in positive outcomes for all tenants.

Housing has always been one of the top priorities of South Tyneside Council and tenants play an important part of our overall vision for council housing.

On behalf of South Tyneside Council and South Tyneside Homes we would like to thank the tenants who have worked really hard to produce this report.

The Annual Report Working Group would like to thank Councillor West, Councillor Malcolm and Paul for meeting with us. We intend to monitor the progress against the challenges mentioned.

*The involvement of our customers in writing this report is a scrutiny process in itself and is a key piece of work to make sure that the company continues to improve year on year. Listening to our customers is extremely important, if we don't listen to customers and seek their views, we will be unable to meet their aspirations.*

Paul Mains,  
Managing Director



Area Housing Offices:

Jarrow Town Hall



1

Hebburn Civic Centre



2

Landreth House



3

South Shields Town Hall



4

Marsden Road Wellbeing Centre



5

Homefinder



6

Strathmore House



7

THE BOROUGH

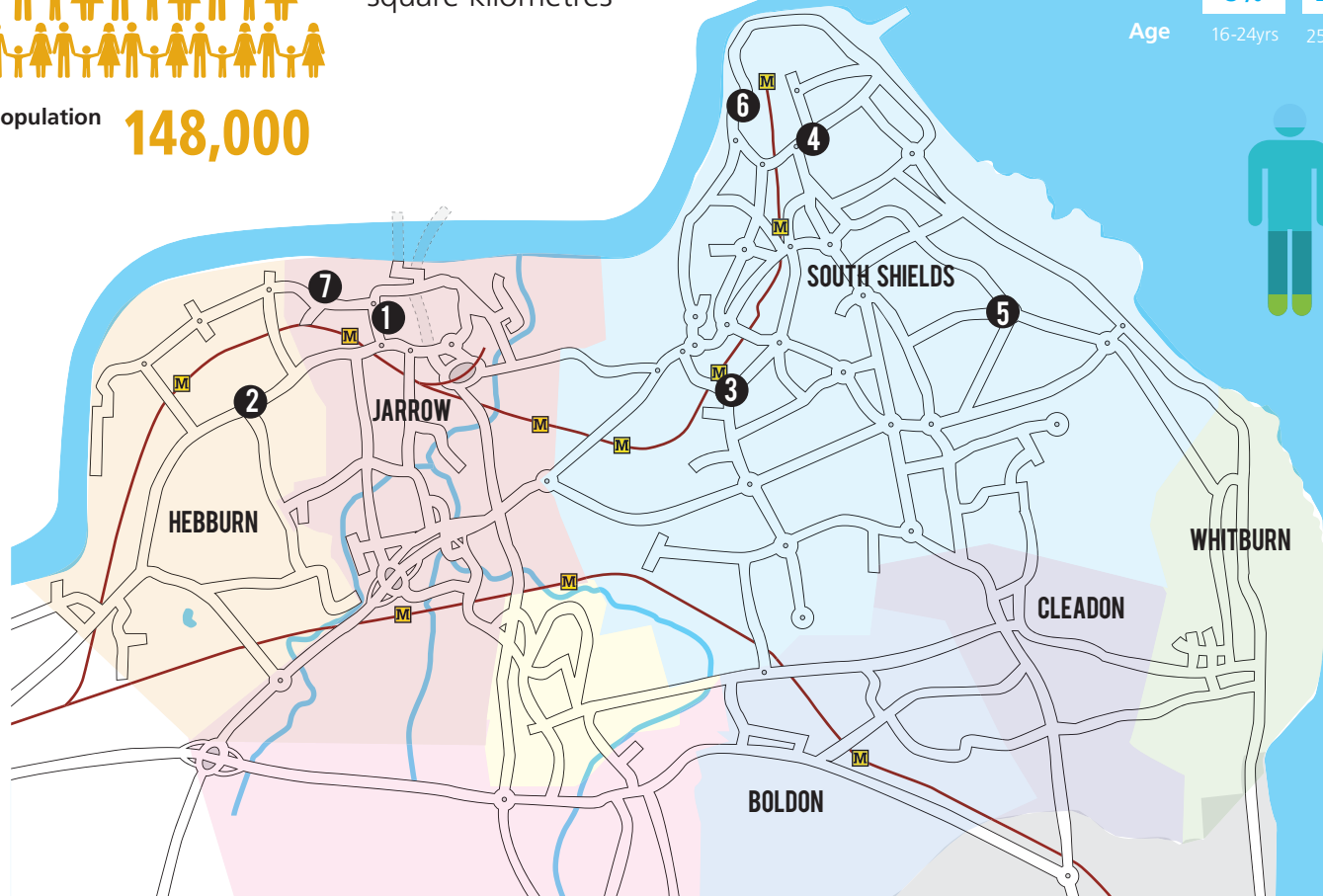


Population **148,000**

Size

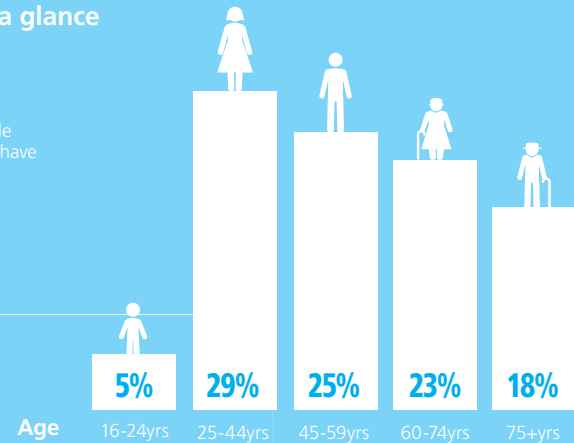
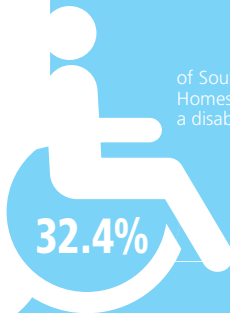
**64**

square kilometres

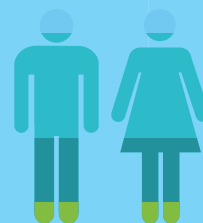


Tenants at a glance

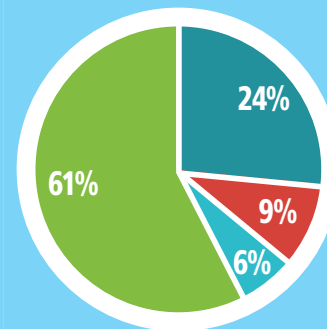
of South Tyneside Homes' tenants have a disability



Ethnicity

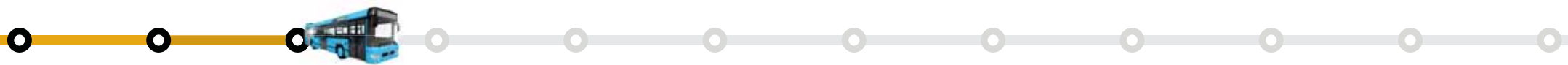


White British **97.5%**  
 Black, Asian, Minority Ethnic **1.7%**  
 White Irish/other **0.8%**



Tenures in the borough

- Council-owned properties
- Private (home owners)
- Private rented
- Other social housing.





Hi  
it's me,  
Robee!

As my reward for being in service to the Annual Report Working Group for the past three annual reports, they have given me my very own page. I am going to use this wisely to tell you all about how South Tyneside Homes has performed. Here are a few snippets so you can see for yourself where performance and customer satisfaction has gone up and where it has gone down.

## PERFORMANCE AT A GLANCE

### Rent collected

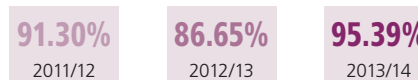


### Empty homes

Average number of empty homes at any one time



### Customer satisfaction



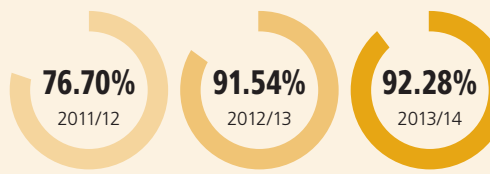
### Decent homes

Number of homes made decent each year



### Customer satisfaction

(Every customer had the opportunity to fill in a customer satisfaction survey in 2013/14, 1,160 surveys were collected)



### Keeping your estates safe (anti-social behaviour)

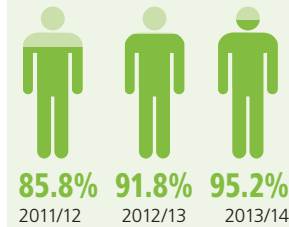
Number of complaints



% of complaints responded to within timescale

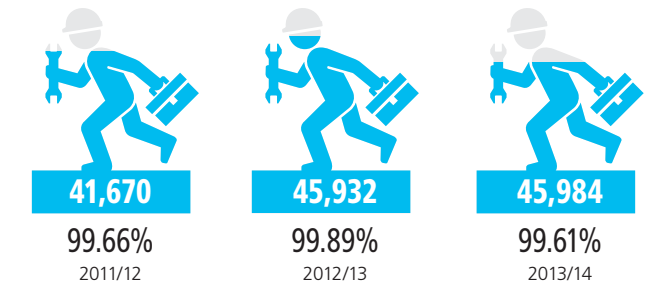


Customer satisfaction



### Repairs and maintenance

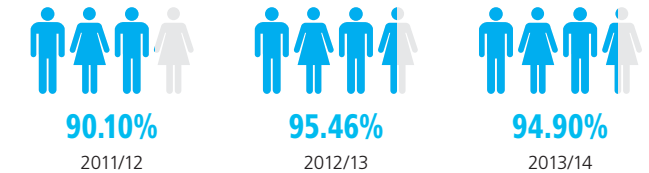
Number and % of routine repairs delivered within the 20 day timescale



Number and % of emergency repairs delivered within the 4 hour timescale



Customer satisfaction (100 people surveyed every month)

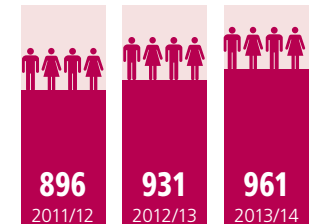


### Complaints and compliments

Compliments received



Complaints received







## Empty homes

The number of empty homes in the borough has reduced, however, the number of empty three bedroom properties has increased as tenant's down-size to avoid paying under-occupancy charges (the bedroom tax). Some of these are now classed as hard-to-let and can be standing empty for longer than South Tyneside Homes would like – this results in loss of rental income.

South Tyneside Homes has made improvements to some houses to make them more appealing to prospective tenants and South Tyneside Council amended the criteria for who can bid for these properties. This has helped, and reduced the number of empty homes.

### DID YOU KNOW?

**246** properties were on average empty at any given point

**1,822** homes were let

**34.52** days is the average time taken to re-let a property

**36,372** bids have been placed for housing

**206** homeless households assisted into permanent housing

**95.17%** overall satisfaction of new tenants

**3,122** offers have been made

# Allocations and mutual exchanges

## KEY PROJECTS AND ACHIEVEMENTS

### Homefinder is still evolving

Last year South Tyneside Homes made preparations to take over responsibility for the homelessness service on behalf of South Tyneside Council. The aim is to provide customers with an enhanced Housing Options service that focuses on homeless prevention.

Enhanced Housing Options is where a customer is given advice and help to suit their needs and circumstances. It can also give alternatives to social housing that

may make it quicker and easier to secure a home. A big challenge for next year will be to improve this service and assist South Tyneside Council to review the allocations policy.

South Tyneside Homes has employed an armed forces outreach worker to help re-house members of the armed forces and their families. This is proving to be a big success for the Homefinder service and the borough.

*I qualified for an allocation under new legislation passed by the Government, which realised that service families can move around a lot, and often spend little time in the area they wish to settle. I was overjoyed when I realised that I could return home and get the same rights as if I had lived in the area all my life. I found the online service very good to use as it fitted in with my busy life. The whole process was simple and we received lots of advice and support. Although the move was not stress free and the house we have needs some work we love it and are happy that we are in a home that is family friendly and has space for the kids to play.*

Peter McKenna,  
Jarrow



### Empty homes tenant inspection

A new simplified Lettable Standard and Customer Checklist have been developed so that new tenants are clear what standards to expect in their new home when they move in. These changes were made as a result of a tenant inspection that found that the Lettable Standard was not always in place for new customers as it should have been.

### Watch out for...

A new leaflet showing in pictures what the Lettable Standard is – tenants have worked with South Tyneside Homes to develop this and it should help improve customers' understanding and satisfaction.

### Mutual exchanges

Mutual exchanges (house swapping) offer an alternative, often quicker, way for tenants to move home than bidding in the conventional way. Last year 138 households were able to move using mutual exchange and as of the end of March 2014 there were 799 live applications.

### ACTIONS TO DO

- ✓ Start carrying out minor repairs to a property before they become empty
- ✓ Continue to reduce the number of empty houses
- ✓ Reduce the time it takes to let a property
- ✓ Assist the Council to review the allocations policy
- ✓ Carry out a review of homeless accommodation and introduce Accommodation and Support Offices
- ✓ Produce a pictorial Lettable Standard
- ✓ Investigate multi sign-ups, a process where the main points of a new tenancy are explained to all of those accepting a new home at one or two sessions per week



# Managing your tenancy

It is the responsibility of South Tyneside Homes to help support its tenants to maintain their tenancies and prevent unnecessary evictions.

## KEY PROJECTS AND ACHIEVEMENTS



"Our award-winning Welfare Reform team will go to great lengths to try and help people affected by Welfare Reform. We have been able to keep over 93% of people who wanted to stay in their home and pay the 'bedroom tax' to do so. Where people haven't been able to afford to stay, we have helped to find them new homes and supported them to access discretionary housing payments."

Hannah Shepherd, Welfare Reform Project Manager



*As manager of the Income Team I have seen lots of tenants who are struggling to pay their rent. However it is my job to ensure that there is lots of support available for those who seek help. Taking action through the courts and eviction is a last resort taken when tenants do not engage or maintain rent payments.*

Elsa Clarke, Income Team Manager

## Collecting your rent

Due to Welfare Reform and the increasing cost of living, this year has been challenging for the Income Team whose job it is to collect rent. Despite all of this South Tyneside Homes managed to collect £62.8million with the collection rate actually increasing to 99.8%.

However, compared with last year:

- Referrals to specialist advice agencies went up from 163 in 2012 /13 to 229 2013/14
- The number of notices seeking possession served on tenants went up by 9% and those that went to court went up 27%
- Eviction warrants have almost doubled

## Housing management support

Housing staff offer day-to-day support to help tenants sustain their tenancies. 3,240 tenancy support visits were carried out last year to ensure that tenants receive the correct support. Making positive relationships with new tenants early is key to ensuring that tenancies are sustained and do not fail. Last year only 2% of tenancies ended in the first six months. Housing staff are always out and about on estates dealing with all areas of estate and tenancy management and anti-social behaviour.

## DID YOU KNOW?

Your rent statement is available at [www.southtynesidehomes.org.uk](http://www.southtynesidehomes.org.uk)

**£40,000** was saved by no longer sending out paper rent statements

**40** tenants were trained in Welfare Reform to support other tenants

**99.8%** of all rent was collected, up from 99.64% in 2012 /13

**170** referrals were made to help tenants sustain their tenancies

## What has South Tyneside Homes done to help?

- Helped tenants to get bank accounts to manage their income and prepare for Universal Credit
- One-to-one support from Income and Welfare Reform teams to families and individuals
- Secured £281,000 in Discretionary Housing Payments to help keep tenants in their homes
- Retrieved over £115,000 for tenants from the 'bedroom tax' loophole
- Delivered training to tenants on Welfare Reform
- Provided outreach through partnership work to make sure support is as readily available

## ACTIONS TO DO

- ✓ Provide support, advice and help to enable tenants to get ready for the introduction of Universal Credit
- ✓ Increase the number of tenants completing Welfare Reform training
- ✓ Investigate the introduction of pre-tenancy checks
- ✓ Introduce mobile working for income and housing staff
- ✓ Develop new ways to support people to manage their money, pay their rent and stay in their home
- ✓ Increase the number of people paying by direct debit





BEFORE



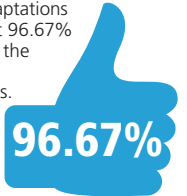
AFTER

### Challenges

Although there has been some fantastic work carried out to improve homes there have also been some significant challenges with three of the Decent Homes contractors. South Tyneside Homes would like to apologise to tenants who were affected by this and want tenants to know how hard they are working to secure new partnerships with contractors who are able to carry out quality work with a commitment to customer care.

### Aids and adaptations

Customer satisfaction with the aids and adaptations service is high at 96.67% with 99.43% of the work completed within timescales.



# Quality of your home

## KEY PROJECTS AND ACHIEVEMENTS

### Real Improvements for tenants' homes and their lives

A lot has been done this year that has made a real difference for tenants. Many homes have been transformed.

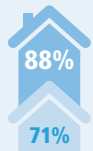
Decent Homes is not just about improving the physical aspect of a home but can also have an impact on the health and wellbeing of tenants. Work has been carried out in partnership with Newcastle University who conducted a study into the impact Decent Homes work can have on health. Using the Jarrow high-rise for their study, early findings suggest:



An increase in general wellbeing



An increase in people quitting smoking



Tenants agreed their home was a comfortable temperature

Tenants are feeling the positive impact in their purses too. Customers living in non-traditional style properties reported savings of up to 57% on gas and 43% on electricity. They are also more satisfied with the warmth of their homes since improvements were made:

	Very Content	Quite Content	Not Content
Before	2%	16%	81%
After	67%	30%	2%

*"I lived away for a spell and when I returned I moved into my mother's home. I suffer with MS and her home not having any adaptations made my life extremely challenging. I had to shuffle up the stairs and use a drag sheet to transfer into the upper rooms.*

*I now have my own home and it is because of the aids and adaptations that my life has been completely changed and that I am living as independently as I can.*

*It's absolutely wonderful, all the steps have been taken out. I have new floors so my wheelchair can move about freely, I have an accessible toilet and all my doors have been widened too."*

Frank Urwin, Marsden



In addition to Decent Homes, South Tyneside Homes was successful in securing Green Deal Eco Funding (from fuel provider's profits) that has helped to get additional energy efficiency measures for homes in the borough, including cavity wall and loft insulation and renewable technologies such as solar panels.

### DID YOU KNOW?

**£34.5 million** was spent on Decent Homes

**3,207** homes were made decent

**2016** is the agreed year for South Tyneside Council-owned homes to be made decent

**280** homes have benefitted from solar panels

**170** staff and 40 tenants have all received energy efficiency training

### ACTIONS TO DO

- ✓ Establish partnerships with new contractors
- ✓ Communicate with tenants and display the programme for future Decent Homes work on the website
- ✓ Increase the uptake of tenants receiving energy efficiency advice
- ✓ Review the aids and adaptations service focussing on the customer experience



# Repairs and maintenance

## KEY PROJECTS AND ACHIEVEMENTS

The performance of South Tyneside Homes' repairs and maintenance service is constantly monitored to check that the work carried out is to a high standard, within timescales and good value for money. Over the last year the team met all their targets and perform well compared to other similar housing providers and this has resulted in a customer satisfaction score of 94.9%.

A tenant inspection was carried out earlier in the year and they found that the repairs operatives were very polite, helpful and friendly, that repairs were carried out within timescales but there were also a few areas for improvement.

### Making progress

On the recommendation of tenants, South Tyneside Homes has introduced a new scheme for carrying out minor planned works which includes repairs to fencing, roofing and guttering. The scheme will ensure that all tenants are offered appointment slots for the work to be carried out within a three month period.

We have produced a series of films to help tenants maintain and manage their homes. We hope this will stop money being spent on unnecessary repairs.

The 'Looking after your home' films are available at [www.southtynesidehomes.org.uk](http://www.southtynesidehomes.org.uk)

*It was really interesting inspecting the repairs service. We found that the text notification system did not work properly, the service for tenants who need a follow on repair was problematic, some tenants spent lots of time chasing up follow-on work and not all tenants received an appointment and job number. South Tyneside Homes has listened and accepted our findings and are already working to put things right – that's the beauty of tenant involvement.*

**Douglas Mather,**  
Tenant Inspector



### Gas servicing

Every property received an annual gas safety check and has a valid gas safety certificate for a third year in a row. As part of this, a fire safety check is carried out too. This is an excellent achievement and could not be done without tenants co-operating and letting the operatives into their homes.

### Gas safety

Keeping your family safe is a priority for South Tyneside Homes. Understanding the dangers around carbon monoxide can save lives.

#### What should you look for?

- Staining, sooting or discoloration on or around your gas boiler, fire and water heater

#### What should you do as a preventative measure?

- Keep air vents in doors, walls or windows clear and make sure your chimney or flue isn't blocked
- Check pilot lights and other gas flames that normally burn blue. If the flame changes to yellow or orange, CO might be present
- Allow South Tyneside Homes entry to your home to allow the annual service to be carried out

If you believe you or any of your family is suffering from Carbon Monoxide poisoning please consult your doctor immediately.

### DID YOU KNOW?

**123,279** repairs were raised by tenants last year

**99.61%** of routine repairs were completed within the 20 day timescale

**94.9%** of customers asked were satisfied with the repairs service

**99.3%** of emergency repairs were completed within the 4 hour timescale

### ACTIONS TO DO

- ✓ Work with tenants to review the Repairs and Maintenance Policy incorporating the actions from the tenant inspection
- ✓ Put in place the actions agreed from the tenant inspection of the repairs and maintenance service
- ✓ Introduce a customer checklist, including pictures, so tenants know what should happen as part of their gas safety check







# Neighbourhood management and local co-operation

## KEY PROJECTS AND ACHIEVEMENTS

### The way your area will be managed is changing

The Council and South Tyneside Homes have carried out a review of the way estates are managed. The focus has been about working more closely together, joining up services and working in a more efficient way.

The changes will start to happen over the next year bringing many benefits to tenants such as a more visible area management service that is customer focused and understands and responds to the needs of the local area.

### Borough-wide spring clean

March 2014 saw the start of a spring clean across the borough with area management services working together with members of the community. Events took place in neighbourhoods, estates, open spaces and local parks.

Activities included litter picking, shrub clearance and the removal of large items of rubbish. In total, 1,500 bags of waste were collected. School children and students also got involved helping with clean-ups in communal areas, fence painting and much more.



*For me no two days are the same. Part of my week is doing 'planned work' where me and the lads keep the estates clean and safe as well as attractive. This can be anything from litter removal, cleaning, gardening and anything else that is required. We are also responsive' and attend to complaints and issues from the public. This means removing fly-tipping, helping keep paths clear, cutting back bushes and helping older people with gardening issues.*

**Eddie Hope,**  
Handy Estates Team Member





*The allotment has brought the community together, both working on the garden but also having somewhere all the tenants can gather and socialise.*

*Growing my own vegetables has brought the cost of food bills down for my family. It has also allowed us to try new and exciting produce you can't buy in the shops.*

### Trinity Community Garden

The local community of Trinity Walk in the Laygate area of South Shields joined together with South Tyneside Homes and South Tyneside Council to transform a piece of open land into a community garden.

The project brought together local school children and residents of all ages and abilities. Those involved enjoyed working on a day-to-day basis propagating plants and vegetables in polly tunnels ready for planting into the raised beds.

The community said that the garden has made a huge difference to an area that was once ignored and now they can learn gardening skills and have a new hobby that can grow friendships alongside the fruit and vegetables.

### KEEPING YOUR ESTATES SAFE

#### Working responsibly and in partnership

South Tyneside Homes' Tenancy Enforcement team is part of the Safer Neighbourhoods Partnership. The partners involved include the Police, Community Wardens, Environmental Health and Tyne and Wear Fire and Rescue Service. They work very closely together and meet regularly to share information and plan how best to deal with anti-social behaviour issues on estates. They have tools to deal with problems including issuing of disorder letters, mediation, increased, targeted Police and Community Warden Patrols and joint visits from Anti-social Behaviour Unit and the Police to the people who cause the nuisance behaviour.

The partnership also identifies service improvements, for example many anti-social behaviour problems were drug and alcohol related. As a result a Drug and Alcohol Worker now

carries out joint visits to victims and perpetrators to help address issues of substance misuse.

By working in this way teams are able to mobilise quickly and deal with issues more effectively. The impact is likely to be an immediate reduction in anti-social incidents in the area and the likelihood is that the problems will not recur.

#### Starting young

RAP (Reducing Accidents at Play) events took place across the borough with 1,245 pupils from 32 schools taking part. Members of South Tyneside Homes' Tenancy Enforcement team helped deliver the sessions where the young people learned about anti-social behaviour, bullying, internet safety and not becoming a victim of crime. The children enjoyed the sessions and found them interesting and informative.



#### DID YOU KNOW?

**95%** of tenants asked were satisfied with the way the anti-social behaviour unit dealt with their case

**53** estate walkabouts were carried out each month

**1,100** tonnes of rubbish were disposed of by the Handy Estates team

**2,800** job requests were responded to by the Handy Estates team

**61** spring clean-ups took place across the borough

South Tyneside Homes is a key partner in the 'Darker Nights' campaign. This is an annual partnership backed by the Police and Crime Commissioner to combat the traditional rise in incidents of criminal damage, underage sales, misuse of fireworks and illegal bonfires around Halloween and Bonfire Night.

#### ACTIONS TO DO

- ✓ Develop a new policy for maintaining and improving neighbourhoods and communal areas
- ✓ Work with the Police to gain Community Safety Accreditation to enable community safety staff to issue orders for anti-social behaviour
- ✓ Put in place more rigorous arrangements for monitoring Hate Crime





## KEY PROJECTS AND ACHIEVEMENTS

### Investment in Housing Plus

At the end of last year South Tyneside Council was awarded £8.16million to deliver decent homes within Housing Plus schemes. To complement this the council has been able to create new environments for Housing Plus tenants that include:

- Construction of 19 conservatories/sky rooms
- Installation of four sensory rooms
- New CCTV systems in 26 schemes
- Upgraded telecare in 26 schemes
- Upgraded video entry
- Adding scooter stores where provision is inadequate

The funding was a one-off opportunity to create extra special physical environments for older people and it is hoped that the work will assist in keeping tenants independent for longer as well as improving the health and wellbeing of Housing Plus tenants.



### DID YOU KNOW?

**99%** of Housing Plus accommodation was occupied

**70%** of tenants living in social housing are digitally excluded

### ACTIONS TO DO

- ✓ Complete the work to improve the schemes
- ✓ Come to a conclusion over service charges and communicate the outcome to tenants
- ✓ Update the Housing Plus Manual and service information with tenants
- ✓ Provide training and support to help tenants access the internet

### Digital inclusion

Thanks to the funding, 26 Housing Plus sites will benefit from new technology to help tackle social isolation, including:

- Free WiFi access to all tenants
- Smart Notice Kiosks that display useful information about the scheme and can be used by tenants and their families to search the web
- New communal touch screen PC and printer

### Service charges

Although there has been a lot of positive work going on in Housing Plus, South Tyneside Homes is aware of tenants concerns about service charges and the charging for communal halls. A working group of staff and tenants is currently working on this issue.

*We have been lucky at Thomas Bell House as we are getting a new conservatory built. We will be able to have celebrations in there, it really will bring the outside in. For many of the residents who don't get out much this will be a new lease of life for them.*

*We are getting WiFi in all the bungalows and have a communal screen in the entrance - we are a little bit apprehensive and will definitely need some training! But it is exciting at the same time, people in here have family abroad so it will be great that families can keep in touch through Skype. Who knows, we might even learn to do online shopping.*

Pat Mains and Carrie Maxwell,  
Thomas Bell House







## Tenant scrutiny

In the last year the Scrutiny Panel and the Inspection team have worked really hard, giving up their free time to complete reviews of the website including the Repairs and Maintenance Service, the Empty Homes Lettable Standard and Decent Homes.

As a result there were some real positive outcomes for tenants:

- The Empty Homes Lettable Standard was transformed and a new Customer Checklist that is more tenant focussed has been introduced. Early indications show that customer satisfaction with the Empty Homes service has increased.
- Decent Homes has made significant changes to the overall customer experience by undertaking a review of the communications plan, including customer service standards in the decent homes specification and improving choice events.
- South Tyneside Homes is now working on updating the website to make it more customer friendly and will continue to deliver a plan of improvement actions over 2014/15.
- After tenants re-inspected the area housing offices their findings showed that customer service is better now, than it was before the initial inspection.
- The Repairs and Maintenance Policy has been amended as a result of the inspection. Tenants now get an improved service with regard to knowing when follow on work will be carried out and they will also have a named person to contact if promises are not kept.
- Savings have been made as a result of fewer missed appointments since the tenant inspection found the text reminder service needed to be improved.

# Involvement and empowerment

## KEY PROJECTS AND ACHIEVEMENTS



Tenant involvement and scrutiny is really important to South Tyneside Homes and I would like to thank our involved tenants for all the hours they put in to help us in continuing to improve services. The recommendations and insights that are made are invaluable and I am personally committed to championing their work to ensure positive outcomes are achieved.

Paul Mains,  
Managing Director

*Being a member of the Great Services Customer Forum has given me a much better understanding of South Tyneside Homes and what it means to be an involved tenant. As a group we are working with managers to help shape their services. Being involved in this way has made me feel part of something where I can contribute and make a change.*

*Every new tenant who gets involved gets an Induction and Equality and Diversity training.*

*For me these were really invaluable as not only do I know about how South Tyneside Homes works and the structure of the company, I now understand the different needs of everyone and the behaviour that is expected of me too.*

Laurentiu Papuc,  
Great Services  
Customer Forum  
member



## Customer forums

This year three Customer Forums were launched to work with managers on an ongoing basis, making sure tenants have a say on changes and developments across the organisation.



## Tenant training

New tenant training sessions were launched. Some were delivered in-house by South Tyneside Homes' staff and some were delivered by other organisations, such as Groundwork. All were free for tenants to attend and 41 sessions took place including IT for beginners, Equality and Diversity, Tenant Inspector and Scrutiny Training, Energy Efficiency and Welfare Reform.





 **Rainbow forum - Proud to be me!**  
A forum for lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender people

### Rainbow forum

Following Pride 2013 South Tyneside Homes supported the formation of the Rainbow Forum, a Lesbian, Gay, Bi-sexual and Transgender (LGBT) group that looks at housing issues.

Work of the forum has included planning and being part of the first regional LGBT awards event, getting involved in a number of awareness raising campaigns and having an input into the Stonewall Equality Index.



### South Tyneside Homes' Apprenticeship Scheme

Developing the potential of the future generation is important for the borough. South Tyneside Homes has an apprenticeship programme for plumbers, electricians, plasterers, painters, general maintenance, ICT and housing.

11 apprentices started in September 2013 and they are all making good progress.

#### ACTIONS TO DO

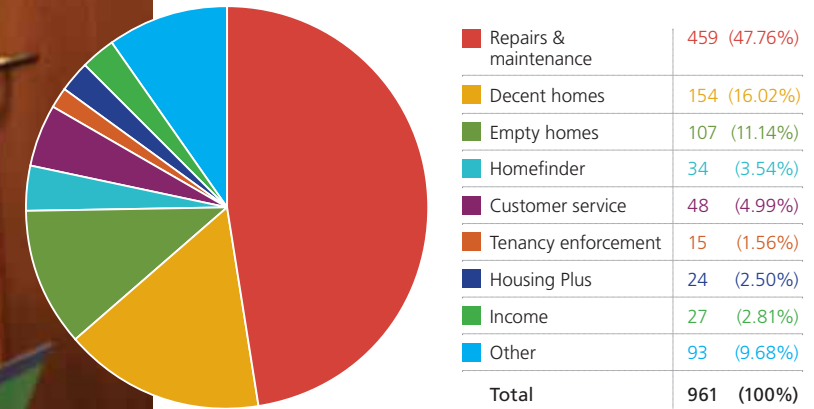
- ✓ Make involved tenants more representative of the borough by recruiting more young people and people from the Black, Asian, Minority Ethnic communities
- ✓ Develop additional ways for residents to be involved in their local area

#### DID YOU KNOW?

- 114** tenants received training in total
- 93** improvement actions have been agreed as a result of tenant scrutiny
- 36** of the 93 improvement actions have already been completed
- 15** work placements were provided for young people with learning disabilities
- 72<sup>ND</sup>** out of 376 organisations for its commitment to the Lesbian, Gay, Bi-sexual and Transgender community according to Stonewall



## COMPLAINTS RECEIVED



Of which:

	Number	Percentage
Upheld	259	26.95
Not upheld	313	32.57
Partially upheld	253	26.33
Other	101	10.51
Ongoing complaint	35	3.64
<b>Totals</b>	<b>961</b>	<b>100</b>

# Customer service, choice and complaints

## KEY PROJECTS AND ACHIEVEMENTS

### Improving complaints

This year South Tyneside Homes has been working hard to improve the way they deal with complaints. Staff have been re-trained on how to handle complaints more effectively and have been empowered to resolve issues promptly, putting the customer first.

It's really important that the company learns from customer feedback. South Tyneside Homes closely monitors the type of complaints it receives to identify common themes so that service improvements can be made and the same mistakes are not repeated.

### Reviewing service standards

Work has been carried out to review service standards so that customers know what level of service they can expect. Tenants were consulted at an event in December 2013 and their views contributed to the final set of standards that were put in place on 1 April 2014.



### Understanding and responding to diverse needs

South Tyneside Homes understands that not everyone is the same. Below are some of the initiatives that have been introduced to help meet tenants' individual needs:

- Drop-ins at Apna Ghar for the Black, Asian, Minority Ethnic Communities
- Compulsory training for all staff and involved tenants on equality and diversity
- Help with bidding for a home if a tenant is unable to do it themselves - this is called assisted bidding
- Completing 'Getting to Know You' questionnaires and tenancy support visits to make sure South Tyneside Homes tailors services to meet tenants' needs

## DID YOU KNOW?

**505** compliments were received

**99.86%** of complaints were acknowledged within timescales

**96%** of complainants were satisfied with the process for logging a complaint

**87%** of complainants were satisfied with the way their complaint was handled

**SEVEN DAYS** was the average time it took for a complaint to be fully investigated and a response sent to the customer, this is three days sooner than the target of 10 days

## ACTIONS TO DO

- ✓ Improve tenants' understanding of the complaints system through publicity campaigns and improved information on the website
- ✓ Ensure meaningful service improvements are made as a result of customer feedback
- ✓ Improve the way customer satisfaction is monitored

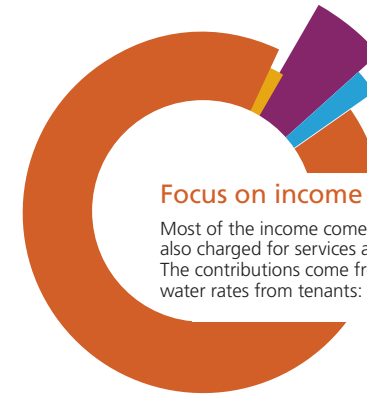
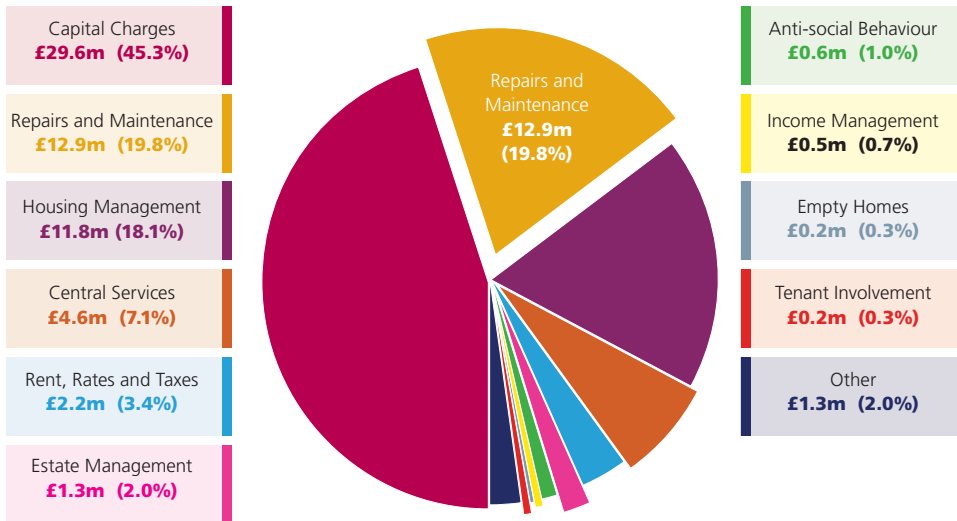




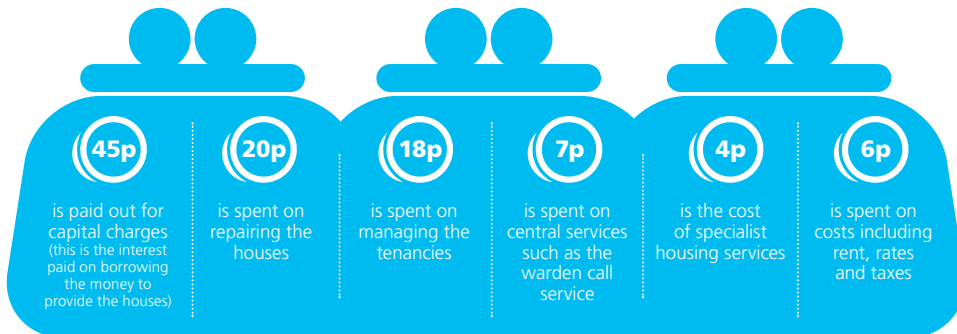
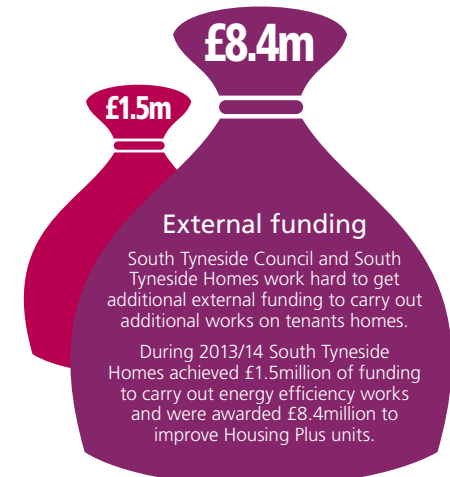
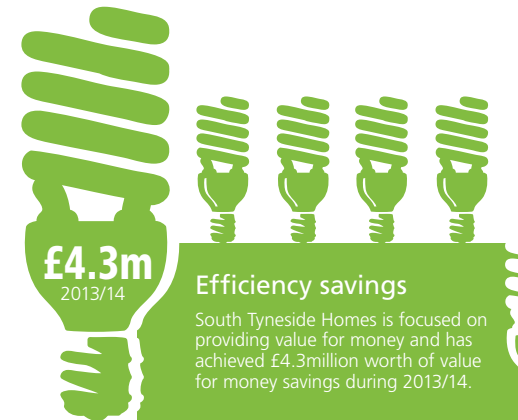
## MAKING SENSE OF THE MONEY

South Tyneside Homes manages around 18,000 homes on behalf of the Council. In 2013/14 income was £68.3million.

Below is an overview of how your rent was spent during the year.



- House rents **£62.8m (91.9%)**
- Garage and shop rents **£0.9m (1.4%)**
- Charges for services and facilities **£3.4m (5.0%)**
- Contributions towards costs **£1.2m (1.7%)**







# Come and join my gang!

Come and get involved, there's something for everyone, you never know, you might like it as much as we do.

Here are some of our stories...



**Maureen and Audrey,** members of the Great Homes Customer Forum

"We have been involved for a lot longer than we'd like to admit, over 12 years! For me (Audrey) it all happened because I got a form through the door asking if I wanted to get involved. My kids had grown up and I had nothing better to do, so I thought – why not? Something to fill my time.

Since starting neither of us has looked back, we've had a great time, made lots of positive changes for tenants and for us, we have become really good friends."



**Lisa,** Tenant Inspector

"I'm Lisa and have been involved for nearly two years. The things I have enjoyed the most is being able to interview and job shadow staff, it lets tenants get a real look inside services.

I have a lot to thank the Tenant inspectors for. When I joined, my confidence was at its lowest ebb. The fellow Tenant Inspectors and Involvement team were all warm, welcoming and friendly, encouraging me to join in with various projects and activities. I can honestly say I am very sad to have to leave, but also excited to start a new chapter in my life. If you too want to experience something new, want to put your skills to good use, join the team. You won't be disappointed."



**Peter,** member of Great Services Customer Forum

"As a younger tenant I am enjoying being involved with South Tyneside Homes so that I can make a difference in my community. Having my views and insight as a tenant valued and taken into consideration is most rewarding and I am looking forward to seeing some changes and results. Being open to learning new skills is a bonus for me as I can add the recent Equality and Diversity training to my CV along with any other relevant training that is on offer."



**Maryam,** Tenant Inspector

"My name is Maryam Vazindel and I have lived in South Shields with my husband and our grown up family for many years since moving from our home country of Iran.

Having met staff from South Tyneside Homes at a housing forum for residents from the Black, Asian Minority Ethnic community in South Shields I was encouraged to become a Tenant Inspector. This has given me a great understanding of the support given to non English speaking tenants to access the housing services and my confidence and knowledge has grown. It is good for me to be able to help other members of my community to contact their housing offices independently and to carry out a Mystery Shopping exercise to test how staff respond to our diverse needs."



**Norman,** member of the Scrutiny Panel

"My name is Norman and I am a member of the Scrutiny Panel. We are a passionate group of volunteers who believe that we can implement change with friendly challenge and discussion. The Scrutiny Panel doesn't just review services, it changes lives too! This time last year I couldn't do what I'm doing now. I've grown in confidence since being a Panel member. My perspective in life is a lot brighter and I look forward to continuing working with the Panel in the future."

If you know someone who needs this information in a different format,  
call Communications on 0191 424 7385.



**South Tyneside Council**



South Tyneside Council's  
Housing Company