



Leicester  
City Council

# Annual Report

## TO TENANTS SEPTEMBER 2006

### Introduction by the Cabinet Lead for Housing



Councillor  
Paul Smith

I am delighted to be able to welcome you to this year's Annual Report to Tenants. We aim to make it as informative as possible and hope you find it useful and interesting.

The purpose of this report is to allow you to judge the achievements of the Housing Department by presenting you

with information about our performance over the last year. In addition this report will inform you about the progress and introduction of new initiatives designed to improve the quality and effectiveness of the service we are providing.

This report has been developed in consultation with community representatives to reflect the wide-ranging nature of the Housing Department's work, from housing benefits and homelessness through to rents and repairs.

In order that we can continue to improve the services we offer, we would welcome any suggestions you might have relating to the housing services mentioned here (or any other housing related issues which are of concern to you). This will help us to ensure that our commitment to high quality service is maintained.

### How many Council homes are there in Leicester?

Since last year, the City Council's housing stock has decreased by another 321 dwellings. This has mainly been the result of tenants buying their homes through the Right to Buy scheme (258 properties were lost this way).

The current stock of properties is as follows:

Property Type	1 Bed	2 Bed	3 Bed	4 Bed +	Totals
Houses	1	2,427	8,594	622	11,644
Maisonettes	2	1,296	385	0	1,683
Flats	4,652	1,569	40	0	6,261
Bungalows	2,694	158	24	1	2,877
Bedsits/rooms	528	0	0	0	528
<b>Totals</b>	<b>7,877</b>	<b>5,450</b>	<b>9,043</b>	<b>623</b>	<b>22,993</b>

### Who gets Council homes?

Council properties are allocated on the basis of a points system, which is used to decide who will be rehoused and what sort of housing they will get. Points are allocated on the basis of need.

Applicants with the highest number of points have priority. The number of points each applicant is awarded depends on their personal circumstances (need), such as overcrowding, having to share amenities, access and health issues, etc. When a property becomes available for letting it will be offered to the applicant with the most points who is eligible for the type and size of property, and who has chosen the area in which the property is located.

We can also put applicants' names forward for housing association vacancies. Between April 2005 and March 2006, 346 housing association tenancies were granted to new council tenants as a result of nominations by the Council.

The following table gives an illustration of how Council properties were let over the last year - (1st April 2005 to 31st March 2006).

Dwellings let to new tenants on introductory tenancies	1,438
Transfers .....	243
Mutual exchanges .....	121
Dwellings let to statutory homeless households .....	233

Copies of the Council's Housing Allocations Policy (called 'Housing In Leicester: A Short Guide To Leicester City Council's Allocations Policy') and application forms are available from neighbourhood housing offices or from the Housing Options Centre.

Existing Council tenants can move through transfers or exchanges into other Council properties. Tenants who transfer have to apply to go on the Housing Register. Tenants can also exchange by simply swapping homes with one another, though they must apply in writing to their housing office for permission to exchange. A Homeswap scheme exists to help to find prospective partners in Leicester and beyond: details are again available from neighbourhood housing offices or from the Housing Options Centre.

## The cost of managing Council housing

We are constantly striving to provide as efficient a service as we possibly can, and as a result our housing management costs are lower than average for most similar size authorities.

The average weekly cost per dwelling of managing council homes is £11.28. This cost covers a range of activities including transfers and exchanges, rent collection, dealing with tenancy applications, the management of improvements and modernisations, tenancy regulation and agreements, and general administration.

## Council rents

The Council is required by law to set rents at affordable levels, based on government guidelines. Within these guidelines, rent levels will vary according to the size and type of the property. In addition, rent levels may also differ for properties of a similar type and size because of modernisations and improvements.

The average weekly rent for a three-bedroom property is £57.16 (on 50 week basis). This is less than half the average weekly rent for a three-bedroom property in the private sector.

## Equality Mystery Customer Programme

During 2005 our Customer Service Development Officers introduced an innovative Equality Mystery Customer Programme. We worked in partnership with community groups to assess service provision for customers with a disability. Five volunteers from VISTA (an organisation which provides services for blind and partially sighted people in Leicester) with different levels of visual impairment, and two profoundly deaf volunteers from the Centre for Deaf People were trained and undertook mystery customer exercises at our neighbourhood housing offices.

The volunteers' main findings from the exercises were that staff seemed nervous or panicked when they served a customer with a disability and they lacked the confidence to ask the person what help they needed. Our volunteers found the exercise extremely useful. One volunteer commented: "Awareness is a key to breaking down barriers". The process of Mystery Shopping raises staff awareness and will help disabled people in the future."

A two-day customer care training programme was developed as a result of the mystery customer exercises to address the issues identified.

This innovative programme gained recognition when the Customer Service Development Officers won the Council's Best Practice Award for this work in June 2005.

## Rent Arrears

**WE AIM TO COLLECT ALL THE RENTS DUE TO US because it improves the quality of the service we are able to offer, and it is only fair on tenants who are prompt in paying.**

98.59% of rent was collected during 2005/06 (as a proportion of Housing Revenue Account rent available for collection in the year). This is an improvement on last year, and now means that we're one of the top performing councils with regard to rent collection in the country.

This marked improvement in the collection of rent (arrears stood at £1.67 million at the end of last year, but is now down to £1.3 million) has been achieved by a combination of making it easier to pay and targeting those who don't pay. The reasons for the improvement in rent collection include: ▶▶

In terms of reducing rent arrears it has been a very successful year and we are keen to build upon this improvement. As a result, we advise tenants to pay promptly in order that we can continue to provide an efficient service and to ensure that they are not subject to the consequences resulting from non-payment. There are over 13,000 applicants waiting to be rehoused to Council accommodation,

**1. More tenants are now paying by Direct Debit with flexible payment dates.**

**2. Leicester City Council has introduced the ability to pay by telephone using a credit/debit card.**

**3. Persistent non-payers are being tackled early. An example of this approach is the Housing Court Team, which was set up to deal swiftly with non-payers in terms of repossessions.**

**4. Payments can now be made on the internet.**

**5. Payments can also be made by using the automated telephone line (0116 252 7012)**

**6. There is now an Income Collection Team to deal with the recovery of outstanding rent arrears. They are specially trained staff who will do their very best to assist you and work out a solution that is best for all. They can be contacted through the Customer Contact Centre on 0116 252 6868.**

so payment of rent is vital to ensure that repossession does not take place. Leicester City Council does not want to evict you, but may have to if you do not pay your rent. Last year there were 130 evictions for the non-payment of rent.

## Vacant properties

One of the Housing Department's priorities is to make sure properties are let as soon as possible when they become empty.

**Most of the vacant homes are empty either:**

- ✓ because they are waiting for their new tenants to move in.
- ✓ because they need minor repair works and health and safety checks, although they have been provisionally accepted by new tenants.

The percentage of dwellings empty and available for letting or empty and awaiting minor repairs at the end of the last financial year was just 0.38% of our total housing stock, which is an improvement on last year's figure of 0.5%.

This year (2005/2006) has seen a significant improvement in the average time taken to re-let properties (excluding those let after major works) - just 24 calendar days, compared with 34.8 days for 2004/05 and 49.1 days for 2003/04.

**The main reasons for this continuing improvement are:**

By continuing the important work of keeping empty properties to a minimum, we are ensuring that as many council houses as possible are made available for those in need of a home. In addition, the improved performance in reducing the number of voids and their duration has provided financial savings – for example, rent is being paid on more properties now, and the Council Tax we pay on empty dwellings has been reduced (from £95,000 in 2005 to £12,000 in 2006).

## Voids - empty properties

**1 The Voids Team.** The Housing Department now has a Voids Team in place to make sure that the procedures regarding re-letting void (empty) properties are followed and that all problems are dealt with as soon as possible. They also ensure that properties are in good condition before they are handed over to new tenants.

**2 Working to meet local needs.** City-wide targets have been replaced by targets for individual neighbourhood housing offices which reflect their particular circumstances. These targets are more practical and provide more of an incentive for neighbourhood offices in their voids work.

**3 Taking immediate action to tackle voids.** Management staff are now getting into vacant properties as soon as they become empty so that the process of getting them re-let can start as soon as possible.

**4 Improved joint working between teams.** Communication between the management and technical services teams has been improved, so that management let technical services know immediately a property becomes vacant, and technical services let management know straight away when a property is available to let.

**5 Being better informed.** The introduction of a new computer system (IBS) allows us to tackle voids more efficiently by highlighting the problems and letting us know where they are occurring so that they can be addressed as soon as possible.

## Housing Benefits Service

**It's been a busy year for the Housing Benefits Service. One of our priorities has been to promote the take up of benefits, in particular Housing Benefit that helps people to pay their rent and Council Tax Benefit, which helps towards paying the Council Tax charge.**

We have again been working very closely with the Pensions Service to identify older people who may be entitled to help, and launched a campaign to encourage all people on low income to apply for benefits. Since February, over

300 new households are now claiming and receiving help with their rent and Council Tax. However, there are many other groups that may be entitled to assistance, such as lone parents and families on low incomes. If you would like more information, please contact the Revenues and Benefits Service on (0116) 252 6948.

Overall, the Service is able to make an initial assessment on claims for benefits within seven days. However, in many cases we cannot make a decision and start

making payments because we need more information. Therefore, if you are making a claim or intend to make one in the future, please remember to send in any information that has been requested on the original application form.

In addition, the Revenue and Benefits Service now operates a new claims service. If you bring in all the information required to deal with your claim, we guarantee that the claim will be processed within 24 hours.

# REPAIRS SERVICE

*There are three types of repair categories:*

## DAY TO DAY REPAIRS

In the Housing Department we recognise the importance of an effective and efficient repairs service.

The repairs section has dealt with over 112,000 repairs last year (that is, day to day repairs rather than work carried out as part of the planned maintenance programme).

To deal with this workload in the most effective way possible the types of repair requests that are received are put into categories when they are received so that we can deal with them according to their urgency. ▶

**EMERGENCY REPAIRS (or Category 1 repairs)** Repairs which require immediate attention, such as gas or water leaks, power failures, etc.

◆ The time for completion of Category 1 repairs is 24 hours.

### URGENT REPAIRS (or Category 2 repairs)

Work which requires swift attention, but is not immediately detrimental to security or health, such as minor door/window repairs (where they don't affect security), overflows, sanitary fittings such as new taps (where it is not detrimental to health).

◆ The time for completion of Category 2 repairs is 10 days.

### ALL OTHER WORK (or Category 3 repairs)

General maintenance repairs, such as fences, gates, internal joinery, floorboards, skirting boards and general carpentry.

◆ The time for completion of Category 3 repairs is 9 weeks.

The following table shows the three repair categories, the number of jobs requested in each one, and the percentage of each repair category that were completed within the target time limit.

*Day to Day Repair Categories (for the 12 months to 31st March 2006)*

Category:	Category 1	Category 2	Category 3
Type of work:	Emergency Repairs	Urgent Repairs	All Other Work
Timescale:	To be done within 24 hrs	To be done within 10 days	To be done within 9 weeks
No. of repairs:	44,372	45,093	23,203
Average number of days taken to complete repair:	1 day	7 days	36 days
In time:	97.84%	99.45%	99.18%

## Home Improvement Programme

We are constantly looking to improve the condition of our properties and the facilities available within them. As well as the Kitchens and Bathrooms Programme, there are a number of other on-going initiatives which are ensuring that our properties are maintained to a high standard. The following table shows the number of homes that have benefited from each of these programmes over the last financial year (April 2005 to March 2006).

*Improvements:  
April 2005 - March 2006*

*Number of homes improved/serviced*

New uPVC windows & doors	2,993
New boilers	1,266
Central heating	155
Rewiring	501
Gas servicing	All properties



# REFURBISHING

## Council housing kitchens and bathrooms

A major programme to refurbish old kitchens and bathrooms in Leicester's Council housing is currently underway. For a small weekly rental charge, tenants get the opportunity to enjoy new modern kitchens and bathrooms. During the last financial year (2005/06) we have refurbished 842 bathrooms and 745 kitchens.

In order to decide which kitchens and bathrooms should be replaced, a selection policy has been developed after consultation with relevant groups.

The following criteria are considered when assessing which properties should be done first:

1. Oldest properties first;
2. The kitchen/bathroom should be over 40 years old;
3. The property should not have been subject to previous modernisation;
4. There should have been no major work carried out on the kitchen/bathroom in the last five years;
5. The Council is not in the process of taking legal action against the tenant, for example for rent arrears or anti-social behaviour;
6. The tenant has not submitted a Right-to-Buy application;
7. The length of time the householder had been a Council tenant;
8. Which area work programme a tenant is located in.

If a property is selected for a kitchen or bathroom replacement, council staff will notify them by letter. Tenants are **NOT** able to apply to have their kitchens or bathrooms refurbished.



If both the kitchen and bathroom are eligible for refurbishment, then the eligible tenant will have to choose to have one or the other done.

### What's available? Bathrooms:

- New suite: wash handbasin, toilet and bath;
- New lever-arm taps;
- New shower;
- New ceramic wall tiles;
- New heat recovery extractor fan;
- New waterproof non-slip floor covering;
- Redecoration;
- New shower curtain.

And you will get a new uPVC double-glazed window if one has not already been fitted as part of our window programme.

You will also have the opportunity to have an input into the design of your bathroom (though this may be limited by plumbing arrangements).

### What's available? Kitchens:

- New wall-mounted kitchen units;
- New roll-edge worktops;
- New stainless steel sink and drainer;
- New ceramic floor tiles;
- A new heat recovery extractor fan (if possible);
- Additional electrical sockets;
- And redecoration once the work is completed.

You will even be able to have an input into the design of your own kitchen – what layout, furniture and fittings, where the electrical sockets need to be and which colour scheme you'd prefer.

### ● Payment

As refurbishing the kitchen or the bathroom counts as an improvement to council housing, the rent will be increased according to the value that each improvement adds to the property. A refurbished kitchen will add £1,500 to the value of a property, resulting in an increase of 57 pence per week. A refurbished bathroom will add £1,000 to the value of the property, resulting in an increase of 39 pence per week.

### ● Further information

Further information is available in leaflets that can be obtained from the Housing Options Centre, your local neighbourhood housing office or the internet. If you are selected to be part of the programme, you will also be sent a video or DVD, which will show you what work is involved.

# Customer Contact Centre

The Customer Contact Centre has been created to deal with front line Housing Management phone calls. It is expected they will deal with 80% of the calls currently coming into the neighbourhood housing offices. The benefit of this is having one telephone number to advertise to tenants. The customer contact centre uses the call handling technology recently purchased by the Council for Benefits and Revenues. It is dedicated to answering calls and giving the highest standard of customer care. The call handling technology assists in managing calls more effectively and ensuring customers speak to the right person. Neighbourhood housing offices (NHOs) will still receive calls from internal customers including Councillors and tenants who are being dealt with by a NHO on an ongoing case, e.g. ASB.

Other advantages of the Customer Contact Centre are the longer opening hours; Monday to Thursday 8am to 7pm, Friday 8am to 4.30pm and Saturday 8.30am – 12.30pm. Service Level Agreements are in place to ensure clarity on what the Contact Centre will deal with and what the neighbourhood housing office will deal with.

## Why do we need a Customer Contact Centre?

Consultation with stakeholders (tenants, residents, leaseholders, councillors and other internal departments) during the Best Value Review in 2004 highlighted the only problem in accessing the housing management service was by telephone. The main area for concern was engaged or unanswered phones.

Elected members requested a housing call centre during the 2005 budget process.



Evidence suggests it will improve levels of customer satisfaction with the housing service.

## How has the Contact Centre been implemented?

There has been consultation with our customers, staff and stakeholders to determine how the Contact Centre will function.

The implementation team carried out a 'Test Go Live' answering Saffron NHO calls for one week. Feedback was obtained from our customers, and this was extremely positive.

## Who works in the Customer Contact Centre?

The Customer Contact Centre went live on the 11th April 2006. It deals with almost 2,000 calls from tenants and residents each week. On average calls are being answered within 25 seconds. A total of 16 experienced officers staff the contact centre. A new post of Customer Service Team Leader has been created to manage the Customer Contact Centre.

## The Future

The Customer Contact Centre will form part of a larger team that is called the Tenancy Advice Team. This will take responsibility for all front line Housing Management customer service at neighbourhood housing offices not covered by Customer Service Centres.

The number to call for housing enquiries is:  
**0116 252 68 68**



## Equality Assessments

**We regularly carry out equality assessments on the services we provide to our customers. Through these we have identified the need to collect and act on information about our tenants. This information includes age, gender, disability and ethnic origin.**

Over the next 12 months we will start the collection of this information in a more structured way. Whenever we have contact with our tenants we will ask them to provide this equality information about themselves. Some people may have concerns

about giving this information. However, there is no ulterior motive. We want to gather this information to ensure our services meet the needs of our customers. We want to know if there are particular groups of tenants who are less satisfied with the service they receive, for example tenants from minority ethnic groups. We can also take action if this is the result of any disadvantage to them.

**Identifying our customers' needs is key and will enable us to improve our services to meet these. We would appreciate your help in collecting this information so we can improve our services for all our tenants.**

# HomeCome

## What is HomeCome?

HomeCome is a private (not-for-profit) company set up to provide good quality homes to rent to people on the Council's Housing Register who meet the need for the accommodation.

The Council's housing stock has fallen by 17,000 properties over the last 30 years (mainly due to Right to Buy). As a result, the Council can no longer meet the significant demand for affordable accommodation in the City (there are currently more than 13,000 applicants waiting to be rehoused by the Council), and so HomeCome has been set-up to help meet this need.

### What sort of homes do HomeCome provide?

HomeCome provides family accommodation in different areas of the city. It currently has 68 properties, with another 12 acquisitions due to go through soon. Of these, 35 have four or more bedrooms to meet the demand for affordable larger properties. The homes are made available for renting.

### HomeCome gets its properties from 3 sources:

1. Vacant council properties that require £10,000 or more spending on repair work;
2. Improving and letting empty private homes;
3. Properties are bought from the open market.

### Do HomeCome tenants have the right to buy?

No, HomeCome tenants do not have the right to buy. HomeCome lets properties as assured shorthold tenancies. This ensures that the home remains in the ownership of HomeCome and continues to provide accommodation to people in need of affordable housing for the foreseeable future. The shorthold tenancies are for a period of six months, which continues on a roll-over basis for the life of the tenancy (subject to the tenant paying rent, maintaining the property satisfactorily and abiding by the tenancy conditions).

### How are HomeCome rents set?

Rents will be no higher than the maximum payable under housing benefit, in agreement with the Rent Officer Service.

HomeCome tenants on a low income are entitled to apply for housing benefit towards the cost of the rent.

### Who will manage my home and sort out any repairs?

HomeCome buys its management and repairs service from the Council; there is no further cost to

tenants for this service. HomeCome tenants will receive the same level of management and repairs service that Council tenants receive.

### How can I be selected for a HomeCome home?

If you are looking for a family home, you can be considered for a HomeCome home if:

1. You have a live full priority application on the Council's housing register
2. You have enough points to be considered for re-housing
3. You do not have any rent arrears and have managed any tenancy you have had correctly.
4. You are looking for family accommodation.

### Where can I get more information?

You can get more information about being selected for a HomeCome home by contacting the Matching Team at the Housing Options Centre (Tel: 0116 222 2687, or minicom: 0116 222 2699).

## Tenant involvement

We are keen to improve the way we involve tenants and residents in identifying improvements to the Housing Management Service. As a starting point we have created a Tenant and Resident Involvement Co-ordinator post and two Resident Involvement Officer posts. These members of staff will be working to ensure every tenant has the opportunity to participate in service improvements in a way that suits their needs and lifestyle.

We already have a variety of methods in which tenants and residents can participate in service improvements. For example, by responding to questionnaires and satisfaction surveys, making complaints and suggestions and through the local Tenant and Resident Associations. However, we want to involve more tenants and residents because without your input we will not know what services you want us to provide to meet your needs and expectations.

We also want to improve the way we feedback information to you especially what we have done about your suggestions and complaints.

**Most importantly we want to make your involvement meaningful, fun, a driver of service improvement and to improve your satisfaction with the service we provide.**

# FEEDBACK

## What to do if you're not happy with our services

As part of our continuing effort to improve the services we provide, we need to know when you are dissatisfied with the service so that we have the opportunity to put things right. Every effort will be made to put your complaint right as quickly as possible.

To deal with a complaint effectively, we need to know what the complaint is about, when the problem happened, who you are, how we can contact you and what we can do to put things right

If we can, we will sort out your complaint straight away, but sometimes we may need a little longer to investigate and reply. We will send a reply in writing to you within ten working days or let you know when you can expect to hear from us.

You can contact us at any neighbourhood housing office, or phone the City Council's switchboard on (0116) 254 9922 and they will put you through to the right person. Alternatively, you can contact the Customer Service Centre at New Walk Centre on (0116) 252 6480 (the minicom number is the same).

Or write to (no stamp required):

**Compliments, Comments, & Complaints**  
**Leicester City Council**  
**FREEPOST (LE985/33)**  
**New Walk Centre**  
**Leicester**  
**LE1 7ZP**

We would also like to know when we 'get it right' so that this standard can be maintained, and welcome any suggestions you have on how we can improve our services. Copies of our free leaflet 'Complaints, Comments and Compliments' are available from neighbourhood housing offices or from the Customer Service Centre. This leaflet has also been printed in Gujarati, Punjabi, Urdu and Bengali. Large print, braille, or audio tape versions can also be made available.

## Reading this publication

■ If you need help reading this publication or require it in a different format please call (0116) 252 6976.

■ Haddii aad u baahan tahay daabacaadan ama aad rabto iyadoo iskale loo diyaariyay, fadlan la soo xiriiir Qaybta Guryaha taleefon (0116) 252 6976.

■ આ પ્રકાશન વાંચવામાં જો તમને મદદ જોઈતી હોય અથવા એને તમારે જુદા રૂપમાં જોઈતું હોય તો, મદદમાની કરી કોલિંગ સેન્ટરનો (0116) 252 6976 ઉપર સંપર્ક કરો.

■ ਜੇਕਰ ਤੁਹਾਨੂੰ ਇਹ ਪ੍ਰਕਾਸ਼ਨ ਪੜ੍ਹਣ ਲਈ ਮਦਦ ਦੀ ਲੋੜ ਹੈ ਜਾਂ ਇਹ ਤੁਹਾਨੂੰ ਕਿਸੇ ਹੋਰ ਰੂਪ ਵਿੱਚ ਜ਼ਰੂਰੀ ਹੈ ਤਾਂ ਕਿਰਪਾ ਕਰਕੇ ਹਾਈਲਿੰਗ ਡਿਪਾਰਟਮੈਂਟ ਨਾਲ (0116) 252 6976 ਤੇ ਸੰਪਰਕ ਕਰੋ ।

■ এই প্রকাশনাটি পড়তে যদি আপনার কোন সাহায্যের প্রয়োজন হয় অথবা যদি এটি ভিন্ন কোন ফরমেটে দরকার হয়, তবে দয়া করে হাউজিং ডিপার্টমেন্টের সাথে (0116) 252 6976 নম্বরে যোগাযোগ করুন।

■ اگر آپ کو اس پبلیکیشن (اشاعتی مواد) کے پڑھنے کے لئے مدد کی ضرورت ہو یا یہ کسی اور شکل میں چاہئے تو ہاؤسنگ ڈیپارٹمنٹ سے رابطہ کرنے کے لئے براؤکرم (0116) 252 69 76 پر ٹیلی فون کریں۔

■ ئەگەر پێویستیت بە یارمەتیدان ھمبە دەربارە ی ئەم ناگاداری یە ، یان بە شیوەی جوێراو جوێر داوای دەکەیت ، تکایە پەھێوندی بکە بە بەشی خانوو بێرە (ھاوژینگ دیپارتمەنت) بە ژمارە تەلەفۆنی 0116 – 2526976 .

■ اگر شما احتیاج به همکاری دارید در مورد این اطلاعیه یا به شکل مختلف درخواستش میکنید ، لطفاً به قسمت خانه‌های مسکنی (هاوژنگ دیپارتمنت) تماس بگیرید به ژماره تلفن 0116 – 2526976

■ إذا تحتاج للمساعدة حول هذا الإعلان أو تطلبها بأشكال مختلفة، رجاء الاتصال بقسم المساكن (هاوژنگ

ديپارتمنت) على الرقم التالي 0116-2526976