



Sandwell Homes

Quality Housing, Excellent Services



Social Landlord of the Year 2010

Annual Review 2009/10



Introduction

Sandwell Homes is an Arms Length Management Organisation (ALMO) set up by Sandwell Council. Formally launched in October 2004, it manages and maintains the council's 29,000 council properties and is delivering a £425 million Decent Homes programme, one of the largest in the country.

In addition, it delivers a full range of housing services to the six towns of Oldbury, Rowley Regis, Smethwick, Tipton, Wednesbury and West Bromwich. These include:

- Letting homes and signing up new tenants
- Collecting rents
- Offering advice to tenants on their rights and the services available to them
- Repairing and maintaining homes through day-to-day repairs as well as planned maintenance and improvement works
- Supporting tenant involvement
- Providing a caretaking and cleaning service on flatted estates
- Managing sheltered housing and related services such as community alarms and tenancy support
- Housing Options Service - working to prevent homelessness through housing advice and offering options for housing
- Investigating and taking action with Sandwell Council on anti-social behaviour by council tenants

In November 2008, following inspection by the Audit Commission, Sandwell Homes was awarded three-star status for providing an excellent service with excellent prospects for improvement, the highest rating that can be awarded.

During 2009/10, it achieved the Government's Customer Service Excellence standard and was voted Social Landlord of the Year 2010 in the Housing Excellence awards.



Our Vision

To be nationally recognised as a best practice social housing provider by delivering sustainable quality homes and excellent customer services through committed and motivated people.

Our Mission

To improve the quality of life for people in Sandwell, by providing quality housing and excellent services, to enable healthy living in safe and sustainable neighbourhoods.

Our Values

- Continuous improvement
- Respect and fairness
- Environmentally responsible
- Actively seeking and listening to stakeholder views
- Trusted and caring
- Integrity, honesty and openness
- Value for money
- Encouraging and supportive

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Foreword

2009/10 was another busy year for Sandwell Homes which continues to make a big difference to the lives of thousands of people living in Sandwell.

First, I would like to acknowledge the contribution of the Chief Executive Brian Oakley for steering the organisation to so many successes. Brian retired at the end of June after 22 years working with Sandwell Council, the last seven of which were spent heading up Sandwell Homes.



He has supported the Board to deliver a one-star, two-star and subsequently achieve a three-star Audit Commission inspection in 2008, as well as delivering the on-going £425 million Decent Homes programme – one of the largest in the country.

Paul Field, Finance Director and Company Secretary since 2004, has been appointed Interim Chief Executive and we wish him well in his new role.

As a key player in the regeneration and transformation of Sandwell, we have achieved a great deal during the last 12 months. Most notably, we were named Social Landlord of the Year in the Housing Excellence Awards, which means we are the best performing regional and social landlord in the country.

We also achieved the Government's Customer Service Excellence award which endorses our commitment to delivering a quality service to our customers.

Other highlights included: achieving the milestone of spending £250 million on our Decent Homes programme, completing £3.1 million pounds worth of environmental improvements on our estates and having created 250 apprenticeship opportunities working with partners.

We were also ranked 27th in the Sunday Times Best Green Company of the Year scheme and our Tenancy Support service won Best Social Care Team of the Year at the Association for Public Service Excellence awards.

Through our partnership working with the private, public and voluntary sectors we are not only providing decent homes and housing services but providing a foundation

for tenants and residents to enjoy good health, education and employment opportunities and ensure sustainable communities for the future.

Our partnership with the Council contributes to Sandwell's – Great People, Great Place, Great Prospects – agenda.

We're recognised nationally as a tenant-led organisation which means that our customers are at the heart of all that we do. Ensuring they receive a first class service is paramount, which is why we take a 'Let's get it right, first time' approach.

To this end, during the past year, we have introduced a dedicated customer service centre at Roway Lane, Oldbury along with a 'Golden number', which makes it easier for customers to contact us.

It is only possible to achieve all this with a team of dedicated employees and we are proud to have such committed people whose energy and enthusiasm is passed on to our customers.

Although we have come a long way, we still have many challenges ahead as we continue to shape our services in line with customers' needs and create an even better organisation through close working relationships with Sandwell Council and our partners.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'L Gibbs', written in a cursive style.

Len Gibbs
Chairman, Sandwell Homes Board

Board Members and Executive Management Team 2009/10

Board Members (Directors)

The Directors who served the Company during 2009/10 were as follows:

Directors	Type of Representative	Date of Appointment
Norma S R Hutchings	Tenant	11 June 2004
Michael C Babb	Tenant	11 June 2004
Aynols B Reid	Tenant	20 July 2006
Peter B Gospel	Tenant	26 July 2004
Linda Paskin	Tenant	18 July 2005
Alfred W Woodhouse	Independent	11 June 2004
Len Gibbs	Independent	11 June 2004
Tina Brown-Love	Independent	11 June 2004
Christopher P Gray	Independent	26 July 2006
Frederick T Carter	Independent	4 February 2008
Darshan Singh Matharoo	Independent	30 March 2009
Councillor Geoffrey J Lewis	Council	11 June 2004
Councillor Dr Anne E G Jaron	Council	11 June 2004
Councillor David L W Hosell	Council	21 May 2008
Councillor Paramjit Randhawa	Council	21 May 2008
Councillor John D McHard	Council	6 August 2008
Councillor Keith Allcock	Council	7 September 2009

Executive Management Team

Brian J Oakley	Chief Executive
Paul Field	Finance Director and Company Secretary
John Clayton	Investment Director
Chris Poulton	Repairs and Maintenance Director
Adrian Scarrott	Housing Services Director
Norman Fletcher	General Manager, Housing Services
Judy Guest	Finance Officer
Chris Walton	Performance and Resources Manager

Celebrating the journey 2003 - 2010

This is the last Annual Report covering the period of Brian Oakley's stewardship as Chief Executive. The last seven years have been an eventful time for Sandwell Council, its tenants and Sandwell Homes.

In a bid to tap into millions of pounds worth of Government funding to carry out the largest ever improvement programme to the borough's housing stock, Sandwell Council took the big and brave decision to set up an arms length management organisation, Sandwell Homes, in 2003.

Hundreds of council employees transferred to the new organisation and Brian Oakley, then Executive Director of Sandwell Direct at Sandwell Council took up a new role as Chief Executive of Sandwell Homes. The objective was to steer Sandwell Homes to at least a two-star Audit Commission rating, to open the door for the ALMO to bid for some £350 million of funding to deliver the Government's Decent Homes programme across Sandwell.

Following the Government's go-ahead, Sandwell Homes officially went 'live' in October 2004 and launched the Sandwell Decent Homes programme, the following year, working with a group of construction partners to deliver the programme of work.

2003/04



- Sandwell Homes Shadow Board set-up
- TUPE transfer of employees from Sandwell Council
- Brian Oakley appointed Chief Executive
- Achieved one-star 'fair service' rating by Audit Commission Inspection
- Submitted Round 4 ALMO bid to Government
- Sandwell Homes went live
- First Tenants Satisfaction Survey shows 75% overall satisfaction with services

2005/06



- Sandwell Decent Homes Partnership launched
- Achieved two-star 'good service' rating by Audit Commission Inspection
- £350 million awarded for Decent Homes Programme
- Achieved Investors in People status
- Awarded Best of the Black Country for Customer Service – Express and Star

“ Sandwell Homes is clearly delivering the council's agenda by being a key player in the regeneration and transformation of Sandwell. ”

Cllr Darren Cooper leader of the council.



“ In 2003, the challenges facing the organisation were immense. The scale of change needed and the size of the Decent Homes programme was staggering. Now in 2010, it is clear Brian has delivered and exceeded the expectations of us all. Personally and on behalf of the Board, I would like to express my gratitude and sincere thanks for a job well done. ”

Len Gibbs, Chairman of Sandwell Homes' Board.

A two-star rating was achieved in October 2005, guaranteeing Decent Homes funding to not only improve the physical fabric of homes but improve the quality of people's lives and their neighbourhoods. By now the company was on a roll, aiming for the next accolade, the prestigious three-star rating, which was achieved in October 2008.

Since then, the company has gone on to deliver higher and higher levels of customer service, achieving the Government's Customer Service Excellence award in October 2009. The accolade, Social Landlord of the Year was achieved in May 2010 with Brian Oakley retiring on 30th June, after 22 years at Sandwell Council and Sandwell Homes, ending his career on a high.

Featured below are some of the highlights during his time at Sandwell Homes.



Deputy Mayor, Cllr Joyce Underhill congratulates Brian Oakley on his retirement.



2007/08

- Retained Investors in People (IIP) status
- Achieved three-star 'excellent service' rating by Audit Commission Inspection
- Completed relocation of Repairs and Maintenance Directorate to new purpose-built Operations and Development Centre in Roway Lane, Oldbury
- Tenants Satisfaction Survey shows over 80% satisfaction with services

2009

- Income Management Team voted Financial Team of the Year
- Ranked 27th greenest business in Britain - Sunday Times Green Award
- ICT achieved ISO 20000 Accreditation
- Awarded the Government's Customer Service Excellence Accreditation
- Achieved Eco-Management and Audit Scheme (EMAS) Accreditation

2010

- Decent Homes Programme reaches £250 million spend milestone
- Achieved Level 4 Equality Standard
- 250 apprenticeships created
- Ranked 21st greenest business in Britain - Sunday Times Green Award
- Awarded Social Landlord of the Year
- Brian Oakley retires
- Paul Field takes up role as Interim Chief Executive

“ Brian deserves our thanks and congratulations for a job well done. His overall contribution and commitment to Sandwell has been very significant and of measureable benefit, particularly for the borough's council tenants. ”

Cllr Geoff Lewis.

Decent Homes programme achieves significant milestones

Last year, 2009, marked the fifth year of the Decent Homes programme and in January the £250 million investment milestone was reached.

This has resulted in more than 15,000 properties being refurbished which means more than 23,000 homes, managed by Sandwell Homes, are now up to the Decent Homes standard.

The sky's the limit

A total of 21 high-rise blocks have been refurbished since the programme began in 2005 with an investment of £65 million. Many of the blocks were in serious need of repair and were a magnet for anti-social behaviour. The improvements have helped to instill new pride in our communities.

The signature £8m Lancaster House project in Oldbury was completed during the past year, transforming the run-down high-rise into a modern block with a brand new community room to bring residents together.



Tenant Cora Kemp (front left), 100 years old, celebrates moving into her newly created ground floor flat after a £3.1 million refurbishment of Mountford House, West Bromwich.

Decent Homes so far...
23,000 homes refurbished
12,450 replacement kitchens
12,282 replacement bathrooms
13,409 electrical rewires
10,617 new central heating systems
6,419 replacement roofs

10,000th milestone

Two major milestones have been achieved under the low-rise programme. The 10,000th kitchen was fitted, bringing the total spent on kitchens alone to £31.5 million. Plus, the 10,000th central heating system was installed. The new central heating systems include energy efficient 'A' rated boilers to help reduce fuel bills for tenants and cut carbon emissions in line with Government targets. It's hoped that by the end of the



Tenant Kelly Birkett (far right) celebrates receiving the 10,000th kitchen refurbishment.



The £8 million flagship project, Lancaster House in Oldbury has become an eye-catching landmark.

Decent Homes programme, the carbon emissions from the 29,000 homes managed by Sandwell Homes will be reduced by 25%.

Community support

Local community projects have benefitted from the success of the Sandwell Decent Homes Partnership. To celebrate achieving the investment milestone of £250 million, £25,000 worth of community projects were undertaken in the borough's six towns.

Opportunities for employment

A key aim of the Sandwell Decent Homes Partnership is to create a lasting benefit by providing training and employment opportunities for local people. Its on-going commitment to learning and development resulted in the Partnership being named Employer of the Year at the Sandwell Employment, Skills and Learning awards in 2009.

The Partnership has provided 160 apprenticeships working with council partners Think Local Construction/Future Skills Sandwell. A further 90 apprenticeships have been created directly by Sandwell Homes.



A friendly word and support from a customer liaison officer.

The Sandwell Decent Homes Partnership



Sandwell Homes in the community

Encouraging tenants and residents to play their part in shaping the future of housing services in Sandwell, is central to the way we work.

Our Community Involvement team encourages, supports and develops not only community groups but also individuals to foster a sense of community identity and pride, building stronger sustainable communities.

Getting involved

Tenants can get involved in a number of ways including: Tenants and Residents Associations (TRAs). There are nearly 30 TRAs in Sandwell – residents come together to discuss issues that affect their community and to engage with Sandwell Homes and other agencies to resolve these issues

Housing Service Panels (HSPs). There are six HSPs, one for each Sandwell town, made up of tenants and residents. They meet four times a year to discuss issues that affect their town

Tenant Inspectorate Project. Founded in 2001, and the first in the country, this ground-breaking scheme enables tenants to carry out spot checks on the services

Sandwell Homes delivers. This can be through face-to-face interviews, mystery customer, shadowing officers, conducting telephone surveys and attending bi-monthly meetings.

Innovation is recognised

Sandwell Homes has a well-earned national reputation in the social housing sector for its range of innovative and interactive board games created and devised by its Community Involvement team. Presentations about the games are regularly requested by other housing and government organisations. Their inventiveness and practicality was recognised when they were shortlisted for a Tenant Participation Advisory Service award in the Best Practice in the Community category.

Beautiful gardens

The fourth annual Sandwell Homes gardening competition attracted a record number of entries with prizes sponsored



Taking part in Sandwell Council's 'The Big Spring Clean'.



Wednesbury Brownies get ready to go to camp, thanks to the Community Chest Fund.



Celebrating diversity at the Sandwell Community Show.



Pam Smith, winner of the Best Garden competition 2009.

by a number of partners and the judging panel was made up of tenants and board members.

Cash boost for individuals and groups

The second year of our popular and successful Community Chest scheme saw 62 projects benefit from a cash boost. The scheme offers individuals and groups the opportunity to bid for a grant of up to £500 to support a one-off community project. Selected to enable residents to make a positive impact on their community, schemes were as diverse as youth activities, sports events, environmental schemes and good neighbourhood projects.

Young People Plus Services

A working group made up of representatives from all service areas has been set up in a bid to make services more relevant to young tenants. Consultation has been carried out with current young tenants, prospective young tenants, potential young tenants and former young tenants. This has identified there is a need for practical support such as help with budgeting, identifying rights and responsibilities as a tenant and for a dedicated point of contact where this group can go for assistance.

SCIPS

Sandwell Homes works closely with SCIPS – Sandwell Community Information and Participation Services – which is an umbrella group for the borough's Tenants and Residents Associations (TRAs). SCIPS was commissioned

to review the effectiveness of the support package available to TRAs and, as a result, have developed a standardised training pack for community involvement officers to deliver to TRAs. Modules include roles and responsibilities of committee members and access to funding.

Providing training and work experience

Nearly 200 work experience placements were provided for Sandwell youngsters by the Repairs and Maintenance Directorate giving them the opportunity to experience a taste of the world of work.

Working with Sandwell Council for Voluntary Organisations (SCVO), 52 long-term unemployed people have benefitted from work experience with 21 achieving Construction Skills Certification Scheme awards and eight people getting permanent employment.

DIY project for young tenants

Using a team of multi-skilled trainers, a 'Home Maintenance Skills for Young Tenants' pilot scheme was delivered. Targeting young tenants, aged 16-25 years who had previously been homeless or in care, its aim is to reduce the higher than normal level of failed tenancies of this group.

The project encourages them to take care of their properties, tackle a DIY project in their own home helping to increase self-confidence, sustain their tenancy and open up potential job opportunities.

Raising the standard

All the achievements and successes of Sandwell Homes would not be possible without a committed and motivated team of employees who go that extra mile for tenants and residents.

Loyal service

The 1,350 employees of Sandwell Homes are central to its achievements and successes. The annual Rewards and Recognition event, held at West Bromwich Albion Football Ground which commemorates long service milestones of 25, 30,35, 40 and 45 years service, saw those employees who were recognised, clock up a staggering 2,360 years of service.

Raising thousands for charity

Outside of work, caring and socially aware employees have raised more than £10,000 either individually, with colleagues or partner organisations. A wide range of local and national causes have benefitted including: the Neo-Natal Unit at Sandwell Hospital, Breast Care Cancer, Children in Need, the Haiti Earthquake Appeal and Sandwell Women's Refuge.

To reach this impressive total, employees have been climbing Snowdon, running half-marathons, selling cakes and taking part in charity football matches along

with a host of other activities. Cosmetics and toiletries have also been collected for Sandwell Women's Aid Network Community Carelink.

Healthy living, healthy employees

A number of health and well-being initiatives have been run, encouraging employees to think seriously about health issues. This has helped reduce sickness absence levels.

The average number of sickness absence days per full-time employee has reduced from some 18 days in 2003/04 to just under eight days in 2009/10.

Awards recognition

The dedication and skills of our employees is increasingly being recognised at a regional and national level in the social housing sector, with many of our innovative projects being successful in a wide range of award schemes.



Celebrating 2,360 years of loyal service.

Winning awards

This dedication to delivering excellent services has now been endorsed with a prestigious national award. Sandwell Homes was named Social Landlord of the Year, making the company the best performing regional landlord in the country.

This Housing Excellence award recognises the high level of performance across all areas including the Decent

Homes programme, meeting repairs deadlines, effectively dealing with anti-social behaviour and the success of our apprenticeship scheme.

Sandwell Homes also achieved the Customer Service Excellence standard, awarded by Government's Cabinet Office. The standard recognises the delivery of a customer-focused service which includes consulting customers, identifying their specific needs and providing a timely and quality service.

Winners

May 2009 Sandwell Decent Homes Partnership

West Midlands Centre for Constructing Excellence
Integration and Collaborative working

May 2009 Financial Inclusion Team

Chartered Institute of Housing/Housing Heroes
Financial Team of the Year

June 2009 Sandwell Decent Homes Partnership

Business in the Community
Power in Partnership Award

Sept 2009 Sandwell Decent Homes Partnership

Sandwell Employment, Skills and Learning awards
Employer of the Year

September 2009 Tenancy Support Service

Association for Public Service Excellence
Best Social Care team

May 2010 Sandwell Homes

Housing Excellence
Social Landlord of the Year

Finalist

April 2009 Carer's Emergency Card

National Federation of ALMOs
Most Innovative project

May 2009 Sandwell Homes

Sunday Times Best Green Companies,
Ranked 27 out of 60

May 2009 Sandwell Homes

Housing Excellence
Social Landlord of the Year

May 2009 Sandwell Decent Homes Partnership

West Midlands Centre for Constructing Excellence
Sustainability category

May 2009 Gas Access Procedures

Municipality Journal Awards
Legal Achievement category

June 2009 Sandwell Decent Homes Partnership

Business in the Community
National Power in Partnership Award

March 2010 Community Involvement Board Games

Tenant Participation Advisory Service
Best Practice in the Community

March 2010 Ian Robbins

Tenant Participation Advisory Service
Tenant/Resident Involvement Officer of the Year

March 2010 Lisa Hudgeon, Sandwell Decent Homes Partnership (Thomas Vale)

Tenant Participation Advisory Service
Tenant/Resident Involvement Officer of the Year

March 2010 Sandwell Move-On Process

Tenant Participation Advisory Service
Best Practice in Supporting People

March 2010 Tenancy Support Service

Chartered Institute of Housing/Housing Heroes
Support/Care Team of the Year

April 2010 Sandwell Homes

ASBAction Net Awards
Family Intervention Project

May 2010 Sandwell Decent Homes Partnership

West Midlands Centre for Constructing Excellence
Leadership in People award

May 2010 Sandwell Homes

Sunday Times Best Green Companies
Ranked 21 out of 60

Accreditations

May 2009 RoSPA Gold Standard Award (second year running) - recognises we operate safety management to an excellent standard, apply a rigorous approach to occupational health

June 2009 ISO-IEC-20000

Awarded to Sandwell Homes' ICT team
International Standard for IT Service Management

September 2009 Positive About Disability (Reaccredited)

Awarded by Jobcentre Plus to employers who have made a commitment to employing and developing people with disabilities

October 2009 Customer Service Excellence Accreditation

The Government's standard for delivering customer-focused services

Eco-Management Audit Scheme (EMAS)

International standard for Environmental Management

January 2010 Telecare Services Association

Community Alarms Service retained Parts 1, 2 and 3 of industry standard

May 2010 RoSPA Gold Standard Award (third year running) * see May 2009 entry

Leading the way on green issues

Sandwell Homes has a proven track record of 'being green' as an organisation and was delighted to move up from 27th in 2009 to 21st in the Sunday Times 60 Best Green Companies List 2010.

But that's not all! It also actively encourages all its employees and tenants to become more environmentally aware and has been helping to spread the word about taking responsibility for the environment.

Team is green

Employees at Sandwell Homes are certainly fully briefed on green issues! Over 1,000 employees have now completed half-day training sessions run by environmental consultancy, Environmental Solutions through Partnership Limited (ESP). As well as looking at best practice within the workplace, the training focuses on each individual's responsibility as an employee and considers how their work impacts on the community.

The company has also been working in partnership with local housing associations and Advantage West Midlands to provide environmental 'Fit for the Future' training sessions for residents.

Eco champions

Sandwell Homes' eco-champions project kicked off in early 2009 with the aim of encouraging residents to lead more sustainable lifestyles. More than 50 local people applied to become eco-champions and five volunteers were selected. An additional 12 members of the Residents' Environmental Forum also made a commitment to support the project.

Since then, the champions have been sharing their efforts and achievements to become more green through the Sandwell Homes website, in the hope that other residents will change their attitudes towards the environment.



Getting together to go green.



Eco-champion Derek Preece with his energy monitor.

Micro-site is a hit

The eco-champions project proved such a success that a unique Going Green 'micro-site' was developed in November 2009 through which residents could discuss their personal experiences of going green.

With the eco-champions leading the way, many residents have followed suit, logging on to the 'your stories' section and submitting their own opinions about caring for the environment. Since its launch, the site has received more than 3,000 hits and has enabled residents to share their good practice and to learn from each other.

Get Tweeting

As social networking sites, such as Twitter, continue to grow at a phenomenal rate, Sandwell Homes entered new territory by using social media to put residents in touch with each other through the internet and their mobile phones.

Eco-champions were given free Twitter training sessions last November to help them understand and use social networking technology. As a result, they've been busy discussing green issues with more than 200 Twitter followers and residents are able to contact Sandwell Homes directly on a less formal basis.



Customer Liaison Officer Kelly Kitto and tenant Jacqueline Sterling launch the Twitter site.

The big freeze

Free state-of-the-art fridge freezers were offered to 100 Sandwell Homes' customers in January 2010 as part of a one-year trial on groundbreaking energy saving technology.

The organisation teamed up with energy supplier N-power who were so impressed by the eco-champions project and its commitment to going green, they selected Sandwell Homes as one of the first companies to join the trial.

Sandwell Homes received 80 suitable applications for the trial – the highest number of all of the housing organisations who took part.

New vehicles are fuel efficient

Conscious of the company's commitment to reducing its impact on the environment, 46 fuel efficient vehicles have been purchased by the Repairs and Maintenance Directorate and its fuel usage has been reduced by 6% in 2009/10. Further efficiency gains are forecast with the development of electronic work scheduling, acquiring more fuel efficient vehicles and the delivery of driver training.

Since its launch, the site has received more than 3,000 hits and has enabled residents to share their good practice and to learn from each other.

Improving our services to tenants and leaseholders

Sandwell Homes' tenants and leaseholders are at the heart of everything we do, that's why we are here.

Sandwell Homes is constantly striving to update and improve services. Whether that means investing in state-of-the-art CCTV equipment, introducing new ways for customers to contact us, extending services or helping tenants to access debt advice.

Decent neighbourhoods for all

Living in a decent neighbourhood is as important as living in a decent home. Tenants have every right to expect their estates to be clean, tidy and well-maintained, providing a safe, secure and pleasant environment to live in.

The £2.2 million investment in a state-of-the-art CCTV concierge control centre will see services rationalised and modernised to make estates safer. In 2009/10, a total of 1,123 anti-social behaviour incidents were reported through our concierge operations with CCTV footage used in a number of successful court cases.

Anti-social behaviour has been reduced due to investing in two mobile CCTVs which can target areas of concern. The Family Intervention project has seen 12 families receive multi-agency support to reduce anti-social

behaviour and has been recognised nationally as an excellent example of good practice.

Introducing the 'Golden Number'

More and more customers are choosing to contact Sandwell Homes via the telephone instead of visiting neighbourhood or estate offices. In 2009, a customer service centre for general telephone enquiries was launched. This was followed by the introduction of the 'Golden Number' - 0121 569 6000. This is the first point of contact for all general enquiries as well as bidding for properties and making rent payments. The repairs service has been extended with Saturday morning appointments now available from 8am to 1pm.

Adopting a 'let's get it right first time' approach is also paying dividends as reducing the number of repeat calls results in higher customer satisfaction.



Launching the 'Golden Number'.



Carer's Emergency card – recognised nationally as good practice.



Tackling anti-social behaviour.

Housing Options service opens

The Housing Options service opened in June 2009 and offers a wide range of advice and support from its West Bromwich High Street location. The service helps people find accommodation through Sandwell Homes or other housing providers in the social housing or private rented sectors. Its specially trained advisors also support people in difficulty – financial or otherwise – to stay in their property, avoiding homelessness.

Given the ever-increasing demand for affordable social housing, better use of the stock of properties is being made by addressing under-occupation and over-crowding. Sandwell Homes was awarded national Pathfinder status and has achieved 61 additional allocations by applying an overcrowding priority.

The Sandwell Homes' Tenant Incentive Scheme, offers incentives and support to tenants who would like to move to more suitable sized accommodation but are unable to due to lack of family support or financial resources. An additional 81 family homes have become available for families on the waiting list through the under-occupation priority.

Helping through the credit crunch

Sandwell Homes contributes to the Government's Financial Inclusion Agenda by helping tenants access debt advice through a partnership with the Citizens Advice Bureau. Last year, the number of debt appointments delivered increased from 350 to 653 with the monetary value of potential benefits claimed by tenants seeking advice increasing from £325,000 to £542,000.

Working with Orbit Housing, and by using the Government's Mortgage Rescue scheme, a number of families have been prevented from becoming homeless. A 74% reduction in the number of families being re-housed due to mortgage repossession was achieved. And despite the current financial climate, 2009/10 saw the best ever performance for rent collection reaching 98.11%.

A new financial information and advice guide – Finding Financial Freedom – has also been published encouraging people to take control of their finances. The Financial Inclusion team at Sandwell Homes was recognised nationally, winning Finance Team of the

Given the ever-increasing demand for affordable social housing, better use of the stock of properties is being made by addressing under-occupation and over-crowding.

Year at the Chartered Institute of Housing's 'Housing Heroes' awards.

Community Alarms

The Community Alarms and Warden service ensures people feel safe in their own homes by linking them to a 24-hour-a-day control centre.

With 5,647 clients relying on the service and more than 200 calls made each day, it provides a valuable life-line to the elderly and/or disabled.

The service was inspected by its industry body, the Telecare Services Association in January 2010. It retained all accreditations: Part 1 operational services, Part 2 assessment and installation and Part 3 mobile response. One of only a handful of organisations in the country to do so.

Carer's Card

Sandwell Homes launched a Carer's Emergency Card with Sandwell Adult Services, Sandwell Primary Care Trust and Sandwell CARES, to ensure carers have 'peace of mind' if anything unexpected happens to them.

Carried by the carer, it has a unique reference number which when quoted to the control centre ensures that other family members or appropriate agencies are alerted as back-up. Some 300 carers have signed up to the scheme to date. The card was shortlisted in the Most Innovative project category at the 2009 National Federation of ALMOs (NFA) awards and was also showcased in the 'Good Practice Makes Perfect' guide.

Tenancy Support Service

Sandwell Homes Tenancy Support service has been providing support to vulnerable people in Sandwell through a Supporting People grant since September 2004. In July 2009, the service was awarded a three year Supporting People contract.

Customer feedback evidence strongly indicates that the value of the service offered by Sandwell Homes is recognised by the many vulnerable people who are supported to live independently in their own homes.

The service handled 794 referrals in 2009/10, compared to 699 in 2008/09. In September 2009, the service won the Best Social Care Team award at the Association of Public Service Excellence awards.



Offering financial help and support.



Looking ahead

So what's next for Sandwell Homes? Paul Field Interim Chief Executive summarises our plans for the year ahead....

We have established ourselves as a force for change in the local community and take pride in our role that transforms neighbourhoods as well as homes. A key feature in our success is our proactive partnership with Sandwell Council and we will continue to develop our relationship and work together to deliver tangible improvements for the people of Sandwell.

We make a difference through our approach to continuous improvement and involvement of customers. Our focus for the year ahead is to be more effective and efficient, consulting customers on a regular basis, ensuring we deliver services that add value and meet their diverse needs.

The six company themes as follows:

1. Efficiency and viability:

We are clear about the savings and efficiencies we need to deliver and will challenge our current processes and our approach to service delivery to achieve this. We will prioritise the areas of service delivery most important to tenants.

2. Enhancing the customer experience:

We will provide more opportunities for customers to use our services interactively, such as through digital television and social networking sites. We will reduce the amount of repeat calls we receive and the number of complaints, and will increase customer satisfaction levels and response times.

3. Property management:

We recognise the increased demand for affordable housing as a challenge and will ensure we make the best use of the properties we manage. We will tackle the significant issues of under-occupation and over-crowding.

4. Creating decent neighbourhoods:

We will improve the physical condition of estates through the delivery of the environmental improvement programme and will continue our work with young people, our Community Chest Project, and our support for families affected by anti-social behaviour. We will make further progress in reducing the company's carbon footprint and that of the properties we manage.

5. Apprenticeships scheme:

We will tackle worklessness by continuing our apprenticeship scheme and work placement programme.

6. Ensuring motivated and committed employees:

We consider the health and wellbeing of our employees to be as important as the working conditions we provide and will continue to target the health issues affecting our employees.

We look forward to another year of improving the quality of life for people in Sandwell by providing quality housing and excellent services.

Making a difference

Improving Sandwell through partnership working

If you would like a copy of this booklet translated, or require a copy in Braille, large print or on audio tape please contact **0121 569 6030**.

Arabic

إذا كنت تود الحصول على نسخة مترجمة من هذا المستند، أو كنت بحاجة لنسخة مطبوعة بطريقة برايل للمكفوفين أو طباعة مكبرة أو على شريط تسجيل صوتي، يرجى الاتصال برقم 0121-569 6030

Bengali

আপনি যদি এই নথির অনূদান পেতে চান অথবা ব্রইল-এ, বড় অক্ষরের ছাপার অথবা অডিও টেপ-এ এটি চান, তাহলে অনুগ্রহ করে 0121-569 6030 নম্বরে যোগাযোগ করুন

Kurdish Kumanji

Eger hûn dixwazin kopiyekê wê dokumentê bê wergerandin yan jî dixwazin kopiyekê bi Tîpên Koran (Braille), bi Tîpên Mezin yan jî wekî Axaftina Qeydîkirî bidest bixin, jî kerema xwe têkildar bin bi hejmara telefonê 0121-569 6030.

Kurdish Sorani

"نەگەر تۆ دەستۆت نەم بە گەیه وەر بگرینەوه سەر زمانى خۆت، یان بە د ی برهیل، چاپی قهه یو یان له سەر شریتی کاسدت بۆ تۆ ناماده بکەین، تکایه په یوژندی بکه به ژماره تلهفۆنی 0121-569-6030.

Punjabi

ਜੇ ਤੁਸੀਂ ਇਸ ਦਸਤਾਵੇਜ਼ ਦੀ ਇਕ ਕਾਪੀ ਦਾ ਅਨੁਵਾਦ ਚਾਹੁੰਦੇ ਹੋ ਜਾਂ ਬ੍ਰੈਲ, ਵੱਡੇ ਅੱਖਰਾਂ ਜਾਂ ਅਡਿਓ ਟੇਪ ਦੀ ਕਾਪੀ ਦੀ ਜ਼ਰੂਰਤ ਹੈ, ਤਾਂ ਕਿਰਪਾ ਕਰਕੇ 0121-569 6030 'ਤੇ ਸੰਪਰਕ ਕਰੋ

Polish

Aby uzyskać tłumaczenie tego dokumentu, lub jego egzemplarz alfabetem Braille'a, dużym drukiem lub na kasecie audio, prosimy o kontakt telefoniczny pod numerem 0121-569 6030

Urdu

اگر آپ کو اس دستاویز کی ایک ترجمہ شدہ نقل چاہیے یا بریل، بڑے حروف یا آڈیو ٹیپ میں ایک نقل کی ضرورت ہو تو برائے مہربانی 0121-569 6030 پر رابطہ کریں



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