



# Annual Report for Tenants

# 2010

# Welcome

Welcome to our first annual report for residents.

It is designed to allow you, our customers, to find out more about how we are performing, and how we are planning to improve the services we offer you.

The report was put together after talking to you at special meetings, called local area forums, speaking to you on the phone, in your homes and at the many events we run, and listening to the views of our Tenant Services Committee.

Staff were also involved in organising further meetings with residents following a short notice inspection carried out by the Audit Commission. This watchdog was set up by the government to see how organisations like Great Places spend their money and it said we are doing an excellent job.

But there are always things we can do better and after the inspection last December we arranged nearly 30 meetings with hundreds of residents to see how we can improve. What you told us at these meetings also played a valuable role in helping us put together this report.

The Tenant Services Authority (TSA), a national independent body that supervises our work, has also asked all housing associations to produce an annual report for its customers.

I believe we provide excellent services but we are always looking at ways to improve and with your help I know we can become the best housing association in the north.

## **Stephen Porter, Great Places chief executive**



I would like to thank everyone who has contributed to this report especially residents. This report looks at Great Places' work over five standards. Your overall view was that we meet the standards but there are areas where we can improve.

The first is resident involvement and this is about how we make sure residents have a say in our work. The next standard is about the quality of your home and the repairs service while the third covers tenancy, which includes rents.

The last two standards are about how we manage the area in which you live and making sure we provide value for money.

It is only by listening to your ideas and suggestions that Great Places can continue to improve the services we offer to you.

## **Christine Goulden, Great Places tenant board member and chair of Tenant Services Committee**



**Our vision is:**  
strong, bright and real

**Our values are:**  
to be fair, open and accountable

to know and value our  
customers and the communities  
in which they live

to recognise our talented,  
enthusiastic staff and all those  
who contribute to our success



# Ten facts about Great Places

- 1 Great Places was formed when Manchester Methodist Housing Association, Space New Living and Ashiana merged together last November.
- 2 The work of Great Places is overseen by a board of management and a Tenant Services Committee (TSC) with our work carried out by local staff.
- 3 The TSC is made up of residents and they make sure our work is up to scratch and take important decisions about how we operate.
- 4 We manage around 16,000 homes in 32 council areas and employ nearly 600 staff.
- 5 We also provide supported housing to around 1,500 people including teenage mums, people with mental health issues and men and women who are alcohol-dependent.
- 6 Twenty two per cent of our tenants come from black and minority ethnic communities, 16% are disabled and 49% are women.
- 7 We are a not-for profit organisation which means any money left over at the end of the year is put back into services.
- 8 We get the majority of our money through rents and the amount we can charge is limited by government rules. We also receive grants from the government and borrow money from banks and financial institutions.
- 9 We also have an affordable homes division called Plumlife, which helps people get onto the property ladder.
- 10 We carried out 36,000 repairs jobs on our homes last year.

# Performance against the standards

## 1 Tenant involvement and empowerment

This has three parts to it – (a) customer service, choice and complaints (b) involvement (c) understanding and responding to diverse needs.

### What we do to meet this standard:

- We offer a wide range of ways in which our tenants can get in touch with us, for example telephone calls, emails and text messaging.
- Newsletters and our website use plain English which makes them easy to read and understand.
- We've improved the way we deal with complaints and the time taken to close complaints since April has reduced from 58 days to 20 days.
- Our new customer involvement approach "Go For It" has been developed with tenants and offers a wide range of opportunities to get involved.
- We offer tailor-made opportunities for supported housing tenants to get involved.
- We offer a free training programme for tenants which includes sessions on how to run a residents' committee, fundraising for residents' groups and top 10 money saving tips.
- We have a specialist team that makes sure that the housing needs of minority ethnic and new migrant communities are met.
- We show a strong commitment to supporting vulnerable residents within our supported housing and general needs homes.
- Our annual "You Can Glow" campaign involves a pre-winter visit to more than 3000 elderly and vulnerable households to check they will be warm through the winter.
- 56% of the tenant services committee who monitor service delivery are residents, which is higher than any other similar landlord.

90%

of telephone calls are answered within 15 seconds



### How we will do even better:

- Continue to speed up and improve how we deal with complaints.
- Make sure we regularly monitor all service standards, for example staff voicemails.
- We are looking at extending our customer service hours longer than the current 8am to 6pm.
- Make sure we provide a consistent service when you contact us.
- Make sure residents get the chance to get involved in all the regions we work in.
- Let you know when we've acted upon your ideas and suggestions so you'll see more of "You said we did" in newsletters and posters in our offices.
- We have information about 88% of our residents but we aim to increase this so we can make sure our services match what people need.



**94%**  
of tenants moving  
into newly  
developed properties  
are satisfied with  
their home

## 2 Home

This has two parts (a) quality of accommodation  
(b) repairs and maintenance

What we do to meet this standard:

- We have good information about the condition of all our homes and we use this to decide when we do improvement work.
- We have a budget of £290,000 to spend on making improvements to homes with high heating bills to make them warmer so we can reduce bills for tenants.
- We are a top performer at providing a value for money service for repairs when compared to similar sized organisations.
- 93% of repairs are completed on time and 95% of appointments are kept.
- Resident inspectors ring tenants to check if they were happy with the work.
- We are a top performing organisation nationally for gas servicing.
- Three million pounds has been allocated over the past year to reduce the risk of fire in your homes.
- 94% of our properties meet the Decent Homes Standard and plans are in place to achieve 100%.

### How we will do even better:

- Have more of you become tenant inspectors.
- A new re-let standard, Great Homes, has been developed after talking with you so that new residents know exactly what they can expect when they move in to one of our homes.
- Our tenant inspectors visit ready to let homes to make sure that this standard is being met.
- We need to improve the way we use information about tenants to tailor the repairs service, for example offering evening and weekend appointments to tenants who are working.
- We make sure our three different contractors provide a consistently high standard of service.

**98%**  
of tenants are  
satisfied with their  
repairs

**85%**  
satisfaction with  
the quality of  
accommodation

# 3 Tenancy

This has three parts - (a) allocations (b) rents (c) tenure.

## What we do to meet this standard:

- We have good relationships with local councils and are able to have a say in the housing services they provide.
- Provide you with a choice by using a choice-based lettings service.
- We prioritise lettings to specific groups of tenants in some areas to ensure mixed and successful communities.
- We have developed a local allocations offer for Oldham which includes a single application form, better prospects advice and the aim is to roll it out to other areas.
- It currently takes on average 17 days to relet our general needs properties and 22 days for supported properties. This is in the top 25% of organisations nationally and much better than our target of 27 days.
- We always use government rules to set our rents.
- Our performance on collecting owed rent has improved and now only 5.3% remains uncollected.

- We were inspected by the Audit Commission, a government spending watchdog, and it praised our work around rent collection.
- Our financial inclusion advisors provide advice to help tenants avoid debt.
- Staff can take payments over the phone and set up direct debits which helps tenants to pay their rent.
- The tenancies we provide give you security.
- We visit new residents after one and nine months to make sure they are settled and to deal with any issues they have.
- We provide a cost effective tenancy management service when compared to other similar sized providers.
- The level of abandoned properties has reduced from 9.5% in 2007/08 to 3.9% in July 2010.
- We've reduced the number of evictions from 3.9% in 2008/09 to 2.6% in July 2010 by helping vulnerable tenants.

89%  
of tenants are  
satisfied with the  
customer access  
team

## How we will do even better:

- We need to use information on why some people refuse to move into our homes and why in some areas our properties are harder to rent than others.
- Although collecting owed rent has got better, we are still working to collect more of this.
- We will do more to understand why tenants are in arrears and help stop this happening.
- We will get more information on your views on how we collect rents.
- We need to use more information collected from residents when we ask them why they are leaving our homes.

# 4 Neighbourhood and community



This has three parts - (a) neighbourhood management (b) local area co-operation (c) anti-social behaviour (ASB).

## What we do to meet this standard:

- We've given our staff personal computers which means they can come to your homes so you can check things like your rent account.
- Regular scheme inspections, which residents are invited to attend, make sure the areas in which you live are clean, tidy and safe.
- Our grounds maintenance contract, which includes things like hedge cutting, is being looked at by residents to make sure it is value for money.
- We are working with our partners to clean up graffiti and stop fly-tipping.
- Our tenants are consulted on services where they pay a charge to make sure they provide good value.
- We provide a cost effective estate management service when compared with other similar sized providers.
- We are involved in meetings in all of the areas we work, covering allocating our homes, addressing crime, promoting wellbeing and tackling unemployment.
- We work to ask your views on important issues.
- We have helped to fund family intervention projects to help families deal with anti-social behaviour.
- Lots of good work is going on locally, for example, there are police drop-ins at Blackburn, Salford and Sheffield.



84%

satisfaction with the handling of anti-social behaviour cases



99%

of customers are satisfied with completed investment works

## How we will do even better:

- Regular scheme visits are carried out by our neighbourhood staff. We need to improve how these visits are publicised, so more of you can get involved, and how the results are monitored.
- Satisfaction information is not currently collected for all services.
- We want more residents to have their say about the services we provide.
- Our approach to gathering local customer satisfaction in neighbourhoods is being improved.
- We need to see if providing a general out of hours service is worth the money.

# 5 Value for money

What we do to meet this standard:

- We make sure that we spend our money carefully and don't waste it.
- We are always looking to save money while still making sure we provide great services, for example we saved £500,000 by renegotiating energy contracts, and £100,000 by using one company for hiring temporary staff.
- We employ a member of staff who's job it is to make sure we get value for money in our business contracts.
- We involve you in planning the way we spend our money.

84%

of tenants think rent represents good value for money.

91%

of tenants are satisfied that tenant involvement views are taken into account

## How we will do even better:

- We need to get better at measuring how each of our services offers value for money.
- We are looking for more of you to help us decide which companies to use to provide our services for.



## How we will develop local offers:

- At the Local Area Forums we asked you if you would like additional service standards, specific to your area or to a particular group of tenants.
- You told us you wanted to see the performance information on service standards broken down by regions so you could see how well your region was performing compared to others. We agree this is a good idea and will be providing this information for the next round of Local Area Forums in October.
- You also told us that you thought some services should be tailored for vulnerable tenants. We will be consulting further on this at our Tenants' Conference in October.

## And on performance and scrutiny:

### Monitoring performance

We will monitor performance against core service standards by telling you how we are doing in your region at all Local Area Forum meetings.

We want you to get involved and tell us where and when we need to improve.

